

Newsletter

SUMMER 2018



HOUNSLOW
ANIMAL WELFARE
SOCIETY



Boundary House, Boston Road, London W7 2QE.
(admin only) • Web: www.haws-animals.org.uk

Piccolo's story

It was a Tuesday afternoon in August last year when I had a call from Hounslow Animal Welfare Society asking me to go and investigate a colony of cats around the back of some shops off the Great West Road in Hounslow. There was reportedly a very poorly kitten on its own, lying on the roof of the entrance to the flats above the shops.

I arranged to meet the lady who had been feeding the colony. When I arrived she put some food out for this poorly kitten but the tiny little mite decided he didn't want to go in the cat carrier and gave me the 'run around' which was surprising as he looked so unwell.

At one point on the roof above the shop to the flat I thought he was going to fall down an open downpipe. I was concerned about my own safety too as there was a lot of clutter on the roofs, but I managed to get my footing on a piece of wood with a nail in it. After stepping from one flat roof to another trying to capture him, and following some more 'cat and mouse' games, we managed to eventually entice the little kitten safely into the cat carrier.



I took him straight to our vet. We could see that he had gooey eyes, but after a quick examination I learned that he was a little boy of about 8-10 weeks old, was very anaemic, dehydrated and was covered in fleas. He was put into isolation and given fluids, and they closely monitored him overnight – it really was touch and go for this little fella. The next morning, we had good news from the vets that he had made it through the night and was now feeding on Cimicat (a substitute milk formula for kittens). We got the OK to place him with one of our more experienced foster carers who looked after him until he was stronger, had recovered from his anaemia and his eyes had cleared.

I really wanted to name him, and chose the name Piccolo (small in Italian) as he was so tiny. After a few weeks he was well enough to be placed with a new foster carer where he continued to be socialised for another couple of months. He did extremely well there but with his new found and boundless energy he also became very cheeky – chasing and jumping out on the foster carer's other cats that were a lot older than him. They didn't have time to play with Piccolo as they were too content lazing about.

When the time came for Piccolo's vaccinations, the charity asked me if I could transport him and his foster carer to the vets and I jumped at the chance to see him again. I was amazed how much he had grown and how well he looked. He finally went to his forever home where he continues to be a cheeky little chappy.

Just look how two months of love and care by the right people have turned around the life of this beautiful little kitten. The first picture was taken on the day I rescued him, and the second picture was taken just 2 months later. What a transformation!

This is what makes being a volunteer all about – knowing and seeing that you have



Bizarre rabbit double act

Some of you may remember the bunny on the left – a little male found as a stray in Perivale in January? So three months later the rabbit on the right, a little female, is found as a stray in the gutter on the same road.

In both cases no one seems to know anything about them and posts on local boards and websites have come up with nothing. Now named Percy and Perdy, we can only presume they are a brother and sister from the same home who got out three months apart and both managed to be found in time.

Percy has the broader nose stripe and Perdy has some brown fur at the base of her ears but otherwise they are almost identical.

They appear to be well looked after and were always friendly. Domestic rabbits don't do well as strays so both of these must have got out a few hours before they were found.

These two very lucky bunnies are a very classy pair now settled together and so we are looking for an amazing new home for them from which they will never be allowed to stray again.

Lucius Covell

made such a difference and improved a cat or kitten's life. This is where all the funds we raise, and all your generous donations go – helping to pay our vet bills.

Sarah Sutton

Welcome to our Summer 2018 Newsletter

The time has flown by since our last newsletter! Needless to say the charity has been busy as always and we have some heart-warming rescue stories to share with you in this issue.

This will be my last message to you as Chair of Trustees as I am standing down, although I will be continuing as a volunteer - and of course as a member!

I extend heartfelt thanks for everything

our terrific band of volunteers have done and do for the charity. We couldn't do without your help and really do appreciate it. Keep up the good work!

With regards to you all. *Heather Walton*

5 minutes with Joanna Ismail

1. *What do you do on a typical day as a volunteer?*

There's no typical day as a volunteer for me, I am involved in a few different activities for HAWS. Spring and Summer are very busy times for me as I am preparing for and attending local Fairs and Fetes. There is a lot of collecting and organising all the donated items given to the charity and getting them ready for the fairs. I also organise our annual HAWS Curry night, normally held in the Autumn.

2. *Have you any pets?*

I have three little Pomeranian dogs – Nooshka, Lilly and Oliver. I live on a main road so sadly it's not safe enough to adopt a cat.

3. *Which of your HAWS foster cats has been your favourite?*

That's a tough one, but I had the pleasure of fostering the most adorable young female cat called Daisy. She was a beautiful tabby that looked like she

had splash of Bengal in her. She had the sweetest nature and was so friendly and loving. Daisy was not fazed by the dogs at all and loved to curl up on the sofa with me. She was adopted by a lovely family and I was lucky enough to do the home check to give it the seal of approval.

4. *What made you want to volunteer for HAWS?*

I've loved animals since I was a child and have always owned cats and dogs when growing up. I even had ducks, geese and a chicken when I lived in America. About 10 years ago I felt I wanted to be more involved in an animal charity and to have direct experience of helping animals in need.

I was looking for a local charity to support and came across HAWS. I attended a Volunteers meeting and found HAWS volunteers and trustees really friendly. It was great to see their shared passion to help animals.

My first event was a fair organised at a local school and I really enjoyed the day. I then started to home check for my local area and occasionally foster. As I had

experience is organising events I naturally got more involved with the fairs and fundraising events.

5. *What do you love most about volunteering?*

What I enjoy the most about volunteering is that I have a mixture of activities. It's great being involved with the cats through fostering, meeting prospective adopters and meeting the public at the local fairs.

We often get previous or current adopters visiting us at our stands to tell us they adopted from us and how their cat/s are getting on. The volunteers for the charity are like minded and are a great team of people, I've formed some life-long friendships through HAWS.

What's important to me about volunteering is knowing that I am helping directly and indirectly all the wonderful cats and small animals that find their way to HAWS and then on to their new homes.

Joanna Ismail, Trustee

My experiences with adopting an older cat

My wife and I first met Bo on the 25th February 2017 (which is why we arbitrarily count that as his birthday). I call him Bo; she calls him Beau; it doesn't matter much because he can't read and doesn't answer to his name anyway.

He'd been flagged up to us by a friend involved in animal charities, so all we knew of him was a few photos on a website and a bit of back story. With that in mind, on that Saturday, we set out from our place just outside West London, to his fosterer's place, to check him out. Although as I said to my wife at the time, "We should be honest that there is zero chance that we're going to meet this cat and say, 'Hmmm, he's not for us, actually.'" In going to see the cat, we were essentially committing to him. In that sense, he was our cat before we even met him.

We were met at the front door by Bo and one dog. Bo still routinely comes to the front door to check out visitors. Having taken the measure of us, Bo headed back

to the kitchen counter, where I did that thing of scratching under the counter. Bo immediately came over to investigate, being a typically nosy feline. We knew we were going to take him with us by then.

We had an awful, lengthy journey home and once back in the house, he predictably buried himself behind the sofa. Cats are always cautious about changes in their terrain.

The next day, Bo emerged, much more confident and started nosing around his new home. My wife and I were prepared for some of the stuff that comes with taking a rescue cat. We'd missed out on the first five years of his life, so there were experiences that would have shaped him, about which we knew nothing. Some of

his behaviours were mystifying. Probably the worst for me was that he remained physically stand-offish with me long after he had become physically comfortable with my wife.

If I tried to touch him, to stroke or otherwise, he would bat me away. He kept his claws sheathed, so I understood it was defensive...but still a bit hard, as it felt like rejection.

We knew he'd suffered some abuse, and my conclusion was that it had been mostly at the hands of a male, hence his reacting differently to me than to my wife.

But we'd known we would have to give him time. When his fosterer had him (a year before he came to us) she said, he'd wanted little to do with people, at

Things don't always go as you expect them to – Stan's story

I had a call at the end of April from a concerned member of the public about a stray cat she had seen in her area for some time, and who had clearly been fighting. She thought he was aggressive with other cats and possibly feral as her search to find his owner had come to no avail.



We agreed to pick him up and take him to one of our vets for any treatment required, and for neutering as he was almost certainly an un-neutered Tom. The plan was to get him as well as we could, with some vaccinations to set him on the right course, and then release him where he was trapped.

Sure enough he had no microchip and wasn't neutered. The vet trimmed his fur and cleaned his wounds. Thankfully he tested negative for both FIV and FeLV, but was found to be dangerously anaemic and with a massively enlarged spleen.

There was no way we could release him to fend for himself, he was simply too sick, and his poor health was reflected in

his dull and flaky fur. He had lots of old scars including one around his tail which seemed to indicate that somebody may have tied something very tight around it in the past. We found him to be very affectionate so he probably once had a home.

All our foster homes were full but I made a number of phone calls and Joanna said she would have him, but as she had building work ongoing at home it couldn't be for long.

Stan started to get better with the help of antibiotics, steroids, anti-inflammatory tablets, regular good food, some brushing of his poor bedraggled coat and some TLC. Joanna and I both liked him very much – a big teddy bear of a cat with a large head but an underweight body.

Amazingly he was fine with Joanna's dogs, loved to be brushed and would take

his tablets without any trouble.

With no longer-term foster homes becoming available we put a post on our Facebook page. A past fosterer saw this, and remembered that a few months earlier somebody she knew had been looking to adopt a mature black cat, but at the time we had no cats that fitted the bill. I got in contact with this lady - who had literally just returned from holiday a few hours earlier – and she said she would take him with a view to adoption.

Once recovered from his injuries Stan was given the usual course of vaccinations and has now settled well in his new home. He has reached his target weight, his fur has grown back and it is much shinier. A much deserved happy ending for this lovely boy.

Heather Walton

Summer fundraising with Pets at Home

This summer we were lucky enough to be invited by both Brentford and Richmond branches of Pets at Home to participate in their charity fundraising activity.

For our part we had to have volunteers in each store for 3 days to support the staff in selling their charity scratch cards. I was delighted to pick up cheques

from both branches and they reached a wonderful total of just under £2,000!

Our thanks go to Steve and Charlotte the two branch managers and all their wonderful staff and customers for this magnificent sum and also for enabling us to have pet food donation bins in their stores all year round. *Heather Walton*



all. We knew that his first owners had had children and had allowed those children to torment and stress him (he's still not keen on children as a result).

I suspect after a while he stuck up for himself against those kids and was punished for it, by the very people he probably thought of as his 'human parents.' I think to some extent he got his little furry heart broken.

He'd come a certain way towards healing from those experiences with his fosterer and we hoped he'd come some more with us. And that's pretty much what happened. We got two more felines last summer, for company for him – a rescue Bengal cross kitten and a Maine Coon cross kitten. Bo immediately took on big brother status and is still groomer-in-chief for the Cat Pack.

But more than that, the example of the kittens and seeing us handle them reminded him that human petting could actually be quite nice, and he started

being more receptive to stroking and keeping company with the humans, especially me.

In the last few months, he has taken to sitting next to me on the sofa. Every so often, I will stroke him and once in a while, he will throw a half-hearted reflexive bite at me, but without any force. When he does, I muss his head up a bit and he looks vaguely confused about why he tried to throw a bite at me. He's lying next to me right now, curled up and twitching intermittently.

I think he's probably near the end of his recovery now, maybe almost back to being the cat he once was. Certainly, he is no longer disinterested in people - one of our nicknames for him is 'Party Animal Cat', because whenever we have a party or a dinner party, he will be down amongst the guests, checking out what's going on. He's very sociable.

Very early on in our relationship, I told him how happy he was going to be

with us (which was stupid really because as mentioned above he doesn't speak English). But he is happy now, and we're really glad we could make that happen.

Anyway, I offered to write this piece just because I can understand why some might have reservations about adopting an adult rescue cat. I hope I've convinced any of you in that position that it can be a complete success and a great move!

Todd Feely



Cosmo & Tilly

Cosmo & Tilly were born outdoors last August to a friendly Mum, who was more than happy to be picked up by HAWS by the time the weather turned colder in November. Her 3 month old little feral kittens however were not so impressed! They spent the next six weeks in foster care and when I went to visit them, they only made a brief appearance.

They came to live with us in January, only ever really having known their fosterer. We didn't really see them for the first couple of weeks as they hid under the bed in the spare bedroom. Every day we spent all our available time (mostly my husband Neil), just sitting in the room with them, and eventually we were rewarded when they allowed us to tickle



them under the chin.

From then on we made slow, but steady progress. Three months on and we were able to handle them enough to take them to the vets for their first vaccination, repeated 3 weeks later for their second one (although poor Cosmo pooped in the basket both times!).

They are such a delight, both now showing their quirky character. Every morning we have the same ritual for cuddles and in the evenings Cosmo snuggles right up against your hip, when we sit on the couch. If I lie down on the couch, he will nestle into the crook of my neck, purring his head off.

Tilly has made a game of racing up the stairs in front of us, then stopping on one of the steps, almost doing a handstand whilst asking for cuddles!

We live in a 3 storey town house, backing onto a river. My husband has built a floor to ceiling cat tree, which is basically a large scratching post with platforms, overlooking the river, where

they love to spend time watching the local wildlife.

I think back on how shy they were when we got them and how far we have come. When I watched the snow falling outside last winter and saw the kittens sitting warm and snug on the Cat Tree, I remember thinking how grateful we were to the person who contacted HAWS before the winter set in, and how different their lives would have been if they had lived a feral life.

They are giving us so much joy and I hope that future adopters will consider shy cats, as it is highly rewarding to see them blossom into such affectionate characters.

And also consider giving a home to black cats, as they have turned into beautiful sleek gorgeous cats.

Thank you HAWS and thank you Karen for fostering them, and to all the fosterers out there, making such a difference to cats' lives everywhere.

Neil and Judith

Patience rewarded

Sophie and Blair adopted two timid kittens from us at the beginning of this year and they accepted that it would take time for the kittens to be comfortable and bond with their family. As you can see from their email below their patience has been rewarded.

"I wanted to give you an update on the progress of Danny and Sandy (who we renamed Daisy) who we adopted at the end of January.

As you will probably remember they were extremely timid at first and did not want to be touched at all. On their first evening Daisy gave us a fright by managing to squeeze under the bottom of some desk drawers and for a few moments we couldn't find her anywhere! For the first couple of weeks she was happiest under her drawers but within about 3/4 weeks of arriving she started being willing to be stroked and quickly turned into a very cuddly kitten, particularly enjoying cuddling up with Blair on the sofa.

Danny was much slower to progress but about 3 months to the day of him arriving he started indicating that he might be willing to be stroked! At first he would accept stroking while distracted by eating and then he quickly progressed and is

now almost as cuddly as Daisy although he hasn't quite mastered lying down and relaxing with us. He prefers to be stroked



constantly which I think is because he's making up for lost time!

They are spending increasing amounts of time looking longingly out of the window so the next step is to start letting them outside. We feel a bit anxious about this but are hoping that they love us enough (and know where their dinner comes from!) to come home.

We absolutely love having them in our lives so wanted to thank you very much for accepting us as adoptive parents and looking after them so well until they came to us."

It's very sad when adopters say they understand it will take time for timid kittens to become confident and then ask us to take them back after just a few weeks as they haven't 'settled'. It really is very rewarding to watch them grow and flourish and become happy and affectionate cats.

Carol Atkinson

Roo & Tigger's Tale

It was to be routine trapping, or so I thought. Off to Greenford to trap a feral mum and take her and her five 2-day old kittens into HAWS care.



So - put the trap out: put the food in: and wait... and wait. After 3 hours, mum was still not co-operating even though she must have been really hungry, having not been fed since the previous lunch-time. I approached the little cat house in the garden and saw mum inside. To my dismay I could also see 3 dead kittens that she had pushed out of the cat house entrance. Peering in, I couldn't see the other two kittens so encouraged mum to leave. Squashed underneath her were two tiny scraps of kittens. They were not moving and were very floppy.

Consulting Roz we decided to remove the kittens from the mum - apparently she had produced 2 litters previously and had only managed to raise 1 kitten to maturity. Knowing this we decided that to give them a chance, they'd need to be hand-reared.

Straight off to the vets where we were told that they were very weak but they still had a chance of surviving - it was likely that mum hadn't fed them at all in the 2 days since their birth. Unfortunately there were no foster mums with hand-rearing experience available so, armed with syringes, cimicat etc, off home I went for my first hand-feeding experience!

As they didn't have a mum, they cuddled up to a Pooh Bear cuddly toy -

hence they were named Tigger (a boy) and Roo (a girl). As someone who needs their sleep, it took a while to get used to feeding every 2 hours in their first 2 weeks, but it was really rewarding although I probably looked like the living dead at the time! They started their social life early, as 2 days later, we all went off to my nephew's engagement party - there were plenty of willing helpers and onlookers for the 2 hourly feeds.

Tigger always had problems with toileting - backwards and forwards to the vet, with lactulose and liquid paraffin added to feeds, but still not pooing - sometimes for days. This was the first indication that he wasn't all that well. At about 2 weeks, he didn't seem to be developing as well as his sister. His head was wobbly and his movements were jerky. Again a visit with the vet - unfortunately he was diagnosed with Cerebellar Hypoplasia (CH).

CH is caused by lack of development in the brain during gestation or shortly after birth. This can be for a number of reasons but is most often caused by a virus passed from the mum to the foetus - probably panleukopenia (FLV). Kittens with this condition have tremor, head bobbing, are unsteady, wobbly and have trouble walking and eating, often falling over. It ranges from mild to major, where the kitten cannot walk at all. Strangely, it does not get worse with age, and the kittens can have a normal life-span with special care and adaptations.

Knowing this, it would explain why the mum had not raised the majority of her kittens previously.

At 3 weeks, Tigger was still not progressing, was not toileting easily, not

feeding and was generally losing ground despite the best of care. Sadly because of his multiple problems we decided that he was really too ill to carry on and he was put to sleep. His ashes are now with our other cats as he was a short-lived but much-loved pet.

Roo has continued to flourish, although she was definitely behind in development compared with kittens raised by their mum. It was possible that she had CH but very very mildly. She loved her milk feeds and once cleaned after feeding loved to be wrapped in a fleece and lay in your arms. So much so that she was reluctant to start to wean or use a litter tray. She also now had a piglet soft toy to cuddle up to, continuing the Pooh theme.

It was at about 4 - 5 weeks that I had to pass her care to another of our hand-rearing fosterers, Lorraine, who had the unenviable task of trying to wean and toilet-train her! This took some time as she would be greedy for her milk, but eventually she started to use her litter tray and eat solid food, although this was later than would be normal in mum-reared kittens. There were more visits to the vet for various problems but Roo thrived.

Roo was adopted, but unfortunately this did not work out and Lorraine became foster mum again. At the time of writing, Roo remains up for adoption - she will need a special forever home who understand her background and needs - she is an absolute sweetie and will give her forever family nothing but love and affection.

CH is a fairly rare condition, and many vets do not have experience of dealing with affected cats. Sadly Tigger's condition was extreme but generally cats with CH can live a happy life as indoor cats with owners who understand the condition and make adjustments to help them.

Carol Willingham

Ann Curtis

We were saddened to be informed recently that Ann Curtis, one of our long-term members died earlier this year. Apart from her support and generosity to HAWS over the years, she had been writing regularly to myself and my predecessors. Her letters were always a joy to receive, and quite often contained a welcome cheque for the charity.

Looking back over many such letters, I came across this excerpt:

"Honestly HAWS are magnificent. The untiring devotion to the welfare of helpless animals is deeply touching. There are no higher virtues on earth or in heaven

than loving, dedicated compassion and total unselfishness, no matter how difficult it is to carry them out... If you ever need any paintings of whatever, don't hesitate to let me know. The answer will always be 'yes, of course'."

We did take her up on her offer and at the age of 93 she painted us a scene for our Christmas cards that year.

Ann spent her life painting, having worked for many years in London Zoo. Passionate about animal welfare, she leaves her beloved Teddy (cat) with her son.

A lovely lady who will be missed by us all.
Gill Sermon (Membership Secretary)



Poppet, Spindle and cat flu

Kitten fostering is often a rollercoaster. It can be hard work, messy, confusing, heart-breaking and you may also need to be 'mean' to kittens in order to save them. Judgement calls need to be made and at times you just have to follow your instincts. Happily it can also be so rewarding and so inspiring. Snuggling with kittens, teaching them how to climb up, and playing with them is the best feeling in the world.

Cat flu guarantees tough times ahead. It's a nasty combination of diseases – not just one infection but at least two out of four:

- **Feline herpes virus** – Common cold in a cat (not the same as human herpes);
- **Feline calicivirus** – Viral upper respiratory infection;
- **Chlamydomphila felis** – Bacterial stomach infection;
- **Bordetella bronchiseptica** – Bacterial upper respiratory disease.

A cat can have any of the above on its own and it will be unpleasant but not usually fatal. Cat flu means a combination of one of the viral infections plus one or two of the bacterial ones and this can be devastating for a kitten or an old or immune compromised cat.

We had a call from someone to say that they had fallen in love with a very friendly stray and she had walked into their house and given birth to 5 kittens. They called her Ammi and they wished to keep her, but they did not have a clue how to help her raise her litter.

Our first rollercoaster started at the vets whilst they were boarding there. Ammi and all her kittens all came down with cat flu, and then transmitted it to another mum and litter, also boarding and waiting for an available foster home. Thankfully this other family all pulled through, but sadly Ammi's litter was devastated by it.

Despite our vet's exemplary hard work and care, one kitten died, then a second and then a third was diagnosed with an intussusception which is where the bowel had concertinized in on itself whilst developing in the womb. There was nothing that could be done for such a young, weak kitten and sadly she died too. Ammi and her two surviving kittens made it through, and we cannot stress enough just how much care and medical attention they needed to survive.

When Ammi and her surviving kittens came off their antibiotics and were due to be fostered with Miss Skimbleshanks (Miss S.), one of the kittens started to get a sore eye, so they arrived with anti-biotic and anti-inflammatory eye drops to be administered 6 times a day. Not an uncommon symptom of cat flu, this showed that the underlying virus was the herpes virus which can cause eye ulcers.



Miss S's roller coaster started that weekend when the kitten's eye became much worse – painful with puss seeping out of it and virtually sealed shut. She became expert at making kitten Purritos - wrapping the kitten (now named Poppet) in a fleece to enable drops to be administered. Although unwell, she was not going to let anyone fuss with her!

Back at our vets, where we were told that they were unlikely to be able to save her eye and that she was far too young and tiny to have it removed. So lots more eye drops and more pain for her until she would be large enough to operate on.

Miss S. searched and found an veterinary ophthalmology specialist nearby who agreed to see Poppet. By the time she was seen, she had started opening her main eyelids again, the pus had stopped pouring, and occasionally she was able to open her 3rd eyelids and her eyeball underneath finally reappeared. Miss S. was convinced it had perforated as she couldn't feel it or see it for several days but it was swollen and Poppet was trying to keep her eye closed.

The specialist's verdict was that her eye would not have to be removed. Feline herpes causes tiny ulcers and Poppet's had combined into one large ulcer over her iris and pupil. This ulcer had nearly healed, but her iris and cornea seemed to have fused together and her eye was cloudy.

Herpes stays in the body and remains

dormant most of the time, but can reappear in the form of new eye ulcers, particularly at times of stress. If these ulcers become too frequent and painful, removing they eye can be an option.

The specialist said that Poppet was unlikely to ever have full vision but after a course of new lubricating eye drops her eye cleared considerably and she regained some of her sight. A small blind spot may remain as she trips over things occasionally but it doesn't seem to worry her. Anything new is sniffed thoroughly, whilst her sister does much more looking at new things. She does tend to cry as if she is lost but that could just be manipulating Miss S. into coming running!

So, rollercoaster over? Nope!... When Poppet was at her worst, Miss S. was worried that Ammi was rejecting her. She would not allow Poppet to feed unless her sister, Spindle was also feeding. Endless worry about that meant careful monitoring was required. However once Poppet got better and she and her sister were then in the 'out of the pen and exploring and playing' stage, Ammi also started to use these 'funny little furry things' for her own 'entertainment'.

Spindle seemed to bear the brunt of Ammi being too rough with them and on one occasion Miss S. caught Ammi carrying Spindle by her throat instead of her scruff. This was the last straw. After another sleepless night of worry she took Ammi to be spayed so that she could be returned early (later in the week) to her lovely adoptive family. Spindle was also taken to the vet as lumps (probably teeth marks) on her head were threatening to become abscesses. Thankfully, they healed up.

With the kittens at 7 weeks old, Miss S. had to admit she was looking forward to not having to jump every time she heard a 'not normal' kitten squeak. She allowed the kittens to discover the safe zone 'under the sofa' until Ammi had gone.

A week later and with lots of extra kitten milk, cuddles and love

Poppet and Spindle are now thriving. They need affection, and both nuzzle into Miss S's elbow as if they are looking for something to suckle. These lovely, happy, healthy little kittens will come running when anyone comes home.



Sid's story

He'd been hanging around my garden for a while, always on the fringes, a forlorn grubby white ghost of a tom cat who always sat with his ginger tail tucked safely under a front paw. He was scruffy and his face was covered in scars and scratches. When it rained and our resident cats scampered for the dry kitchen the white tom stayed where he was and got wet. When the sun shone he stretched out gratefully.

By February the weather was brutal and he was on my mind so I posted a photo on the *NextDoor* website to ask if anyone knew him, phrasing my post carefully aware that he could simply be old and sick but have a loving home. A picture started to emerge. He was well-known as a long-term stray who'd been around for at least two years. His territory was pretty much all of Teddington and Hampton Wick, with a busy railway line running across the middle. Local charity *Here for Cats* knew of him, but previous attempts to trap him and get him help had failed – nobody was able to get near enough.

Knowing that he didn't have anyone looking out for him I started to feed him, always at the same place and time, and most days he would appear and wait patiently to be noticed. He ate as though his life depended on it, which may not be far from the truth. He let me stroke him while he was eating, though, and over the weeks even the odd belly rub was allowed. He'd disappear for a day or two but then he'd be back, I'd hear his tomcat yowl as he came past the side of the house. I started asking around if anyone had a trap I could borrow – by this time I was well and truly involved. I'd stopped referring to him as 'the elderly white gent' and was calling him Sid, and I knew I'd crossed a line.

My other rescue cats have been from Hounslow Animal Welfare who were able to lend me a trap for a few days. I had the weekend to get him used to it and Monday and Tuesday (when the vet was open and able to take a scruffy guest) to trap him. Unfazed by the trap he ate food from inside it. I was starting to feel confident. But on Monday and Tuesday he simply disappeared. The trap was primed, there was food at the ready, but no sign of Sid. It got to 5pm on Tuesday. The vet closed at 6 and my deadline for getting him trapped was 5.30. The trap was needed back that evening. At 5.15 I went on one last frustrating walk around the garden, calling fruitlessly. I turned to return to the house and the sad white ghost was sitting silently on the patio. I started to shake with anticipation, managed to calmly put a bowl of food in position and sat quietly to see if he would take it. A minute later he was trapped leaving me with the 'simple' task of transferring him

into a cat basket. He went meekly. I'd expected a hissing bundle of furious claws and teeth (not that he had many of those), but he was just submissive and scared, and completely silent on the journey to the vet. I lifted the towel covering the basket a few times to check he hadn't died of shock.

The following day he was to be tested for FIV and FELV. If positive for the latter (feline leukemia) it would likely be the end of the road. If not he'd then be neutered, health-assessed, and treated for all his afflictions (if FIV positive he could have a future in an indoor home). I wasn't hopeful – he'd been on the streets for years.

The following morning the news was better than I could possibly have hoped. No serious health issues, but they were shocked by the number of cuts, scratches and infected sores on his head and neck. He'd had to have most of his teeth removed. Several were infected and must have been terribly painful. Even more surprisingly, the 'elderly white gent' was only about 6. 'Can I come in to see him?' 'He's very subdued lying at the back of the pen and he's been through a lot this morning, but of course you can, just don't expect much reaction.'

I walked through to the convalescent pens at the back of the vet's. Sid's head and torso had been shaved so they could treat his wounds and he was clearly groggy but he still leapt to his feet to greet me. A rasping rumbling started up. 'Oh my goodness, he's so pleased to see you, listen to that purr!' 'Are you sure it's not fluid on his lungs?' I replied? They laughed at me while Sid continued to head butt my hand and I cried.

I was away for a week after that, but managed to persuade my husband Alan that Sid should come to live with us. The next time I saw him it was to collect him to bring him 'home', which for a while was going to be his own room, kitted out with litter tray, scratch post, boxes to hide in, tiles to lie on in hot weather, blankets for cold, toys and his own bowls. Sid



wasn't impressed with captivity though the plentiful food definitely compensated. He ate an extraordinary amount. It's a messy old business when you have no teeth, but he can empty a full bowl in 10 seconds flat. He was bored. He had no idea what toys or scratch posts were for and ignored the (comfy human) bed in favour of the floor or the secure depths of a large box. From here he hissed, spat, and lashed out, the first time I'd seen him aggressive. Although he proved spotlessly clean in the litter tray, an acrid smell of tomcat pervaded the house for the first couple of days.

His coat (the half he still had) was filthy and I'd never seen him groom, so I decided he needed a bit of help and started gently brushing him. To my surprise he loved it, and for minutes at a time would lie quietly while I removed dirt and loose hair, even letting me brush his tummy. Then he'd suddenly snap and lash out. For the first few weeks I was covered in scratches, mostly delivered in frustration, some because he just couldn't help himself. Sometimes he remembered just in time to sheath his claws as they whipped out, mostly he didn't. But his coat steadily improved, especially when his self esteem got to the point when he started grooming for himself.

Slowly his infected teeth, gums and scratches healed. Every time we went to the vet different members of the team popped up to say 'How's Sid?' and were excited to see the rather handsome young white chap emerging steadily from the unpromising vagrant he had been. He received female visitors at home with equanimity but the sight of Alan always made him dash for his box. He bonded strongly with me, enjoyed cuddles, and

Sid's story continues overleaf

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purred while I sponged his mucky eyes every day. Fitting a collar on him was a breeze; all of our other cats react to this as if I'm trying to murder them. He is, however, every bit adept as they are at eating an entire bowl of food whilst isolating two halves of a worming tablet.

After about 10 weeks of being confined to the house he finally completed his vaccinations and was ready to be reintroduced to the garden. I was acutely conscious that he might resume his roving ways and posted a new photo of my newly made-over gleaming white cat on the *NextDoor* website, wearing a brand new red collar, encouraging people to look out for him but reassuring them that he now had a secure home. He was programmed in to our electronic cat flap, the final ritual that confirmed this was now his home for life.

Sid walked around the garden by my side, then when I stopped he flopped over onto his back and basked in the sunshine, waving his snowy white paws in the air. He's a bit of a sun-workshopper, so he now owns some feline sun-cream for his bald pink nose which he invariably licks off without appreciating that it costs more than most human cosmetics. Mostly

he enjoys lying on the grass, in the undergrowth, or on the patio, preferably with me within sight. He follows

me everywhere, talks enthusiastically (presumably about food), loves cuddles and still adores being groomed. He will fall asleep, legs akimbo in my arms, and be completely floppy.

Will he go AWOL from time to time? I think he's bound to, especially on the occasions when I'm away. Will he disappear? Absolutely not. He radiates contentment and security in his new life, his eyes have opened up and his demeanour is entirely different from the Sid I first met. He's such a survivor that in a funny way I worry less about him going missing than one of our other cats.

We'll never know his story. He's not feral, so at some point he had a home where he was used to human interaction, though that clearly didn't include toys. We think he survived not through hunting (so far he shows no inclination for this, long may it continue) but through very efficient begging. Ours wasn't the only garden in which he sat patiently and sadly waiting



for people to worry about him and feed him. We're hoping that he drops this little act now, but he's alarmingly good at doing 'old Sid' which has worked very well at magicking food up in the past.

Sid's story won the hearts of the wonderful staff at *Sherwood Veterinary Centre* in Hampton, and the locals posting on *NextDoor* were delighted at his happy ending. If you haven't met Sid yet, look out for him, in Teddington sporting his red collar. He'll talk to you and may even let you stroke him, but trust me, he now knows exactly where his next meal is coming from, so don't be fooled by the hangdog expression – it's the skillful act of a true survivor.

Rachel Maund

With grateful thanks from Sid and me to Michelle from *Here for Cats*, Roz from HAWS, Laura who supported me from that first post on *NextDoor*, and everyone at *Sherwood Veterinary Centre* in Hampton.

Rabbit news



Mint and Tarragon

Mint and Tarragon have settled in really quickly and they have been met with the love of all our family and friends. Their characters have developed into hooligans and absolutely adore having cuddles! Mint and Tarragon have already enjoyed the time they have spent with us, and we can't wait for the years to come.

We all love having them as part of our family and they have already enjoyed winding up the dog! They have been chasing each other in the sun and love going out in their run.

George Cox

Bunnies for adoption

So we are full with bunnies again and being asked to take more all the time. We really need a push of rehoming now that we are in the deathly quiet adoption time of the summer holidays.

Take a look at Rosemary and Chive, a lovely pair of bunnies we have looking for a home. Pairs are often the hardest to rehome as most people don't look at rescues as a starting point but come to us for a single animal to pair with their bereaved bunny. Rabbits can make good pets for older children and adults but do need large hutches and runs, annual immunisations and do live as long as many dog breeds.

Could everyone please ask all their friends and families thinking of getting rabbits in West London and Surrey to try to encourage [#adoptdontshop](#). We are always happy to give advice to people considering rabbits as pets. Please email us: otheranimals@haws-animals.org.uk.

Lucius Covell



Rosemary and Chive came to us from an uncontrolled breeding group. They are likely aunt and niece. They are such good bunnies – so placid, never squabble and absolutely love each other. They are easy to catch and handle, and never bite or scratch anyone. They are used to being handled by school-age children. They will make fantastic pets.