



Saved by Fate

As a statewide organization that focuses on educational workshops and seminars, NYSHA does not normally engage in rescuing cats, as other organizations take on that mission, but a situation was thrust upon us where we had to help. Since we do not have a shelter, we refer people who call for assistance with stray animals or surrenders to local shelters and rescue groups. However, this was a unique circumstance.

A disabled woman, who spent much of her time in a wheelchair, reached out to NYSHA. She had been feeding two friendly, stray male cats and wanted to give them a home, but first wanted them neutered. She needed help in finding a low-cost spay/neuter facility, as well as help in transporting the cats there – something she could not manage to do herself. A kind NYSHA volunteer agreed to make the appointment and to transport the cats to the spay/neuter van.

The day she arrived to transport the cats to their appointment, the NYSHA volunteer saw a third cat in the woman's driveway. The scruffy, long-haired cat was frightened and emaciated. The volunteer could not leave it there. She placed some wet food into an extra carrier and the hungry cat walked right in and began gulping down the food. The volunteer quickly shut the carrier door. After transporting the two males to the spay/neuter van, she took the third cat to her home and settled it in a room with food and water. Since she had to pick up and return the two males to the woman later, she decided to bring the scruffy cat to a local shelter the next day.

The volunteer was stunned the next morning when she opened the door to the room where she was keeping the cat -- she was greeted with soft meowing sounds. The cat was lying on her side with four kittens beside her. The volunteer stood there in shock; she had not yet checked the sex of the cat. Who would have thought that this poor emaciated cat was pregnant, let alone, ready to give birth? Yet, during the night, four seemingly normal kittens were born who were now happily nursing on their mother's small, thin body.



Kittens' mother, Sylvia, now enjoys the good life.



Three of the kittens pose for a picture, while the fourth shyly hides.

That changed the plan; the volunteer felt that the best place for this cat and her four kittens was right where they were. She knew that this frightened waif of a cat would be overwhelmed by moving her and her kittens to a shelter. She talked with NYSHA Board members and they agreed. NYSHA supported the upkeep and veterinary care of the mother and kittens. All were subsequently tested for any diseases and were found to be healthy. The veterinary exam indicated that the mother was emaciated from a simple lack of food, not an underlying condition. Weeks went by and the kittens grew big and soon were ready to be placed in forever homes.

At that point, NYSHA reached out to a trusted area humane agency which agreed to take the kittens and find them good homes. As the NYSHA volunteer had bonded with the petite, shy mother cat who had so surprised her, she decided to provide her with an inside forever home. And, of course, have her spayed.

We could not have hoped for a better outcome in what would have been a tragic ending for this stray cat and her kittens had she not appeared at the right time in the right place. It seems that fate had led her there.

President's Message

Our lead story reports on a stray, emaciated, pregnant cat who fortunately had a good outcome; most stray and feral cats are not so lucky and meet a sad and painful end.

Some of these unfortunate felines were once family pets who either were treated as inside/outside cats or were inside cats who slipped out of an open door. Nothing could be worse for these animals when outside than to be suddenly startled by something, such as a barking dog or another cat chasing them. They end up someplace unknown – totally lost. They hide in fear, not knowing how to survive, for they are used to being fed and having a warm bed and have no idea how to cope with the dangers the outside world presents.

PETA reports on the perils of cats who are lost and missing, and they are truly horrific. I will spare you the worst accounts, but even the lesser ones are tragic to all of us who love animals. The reports range from two stray cats who found food at a cat colony and were killed by raccoons who wanted the same food, to a cat whom the owner allowed to roam and was found with a paw caught in a steel-jaw leg hold trap, leading to an amputation. In yet another case, a boy and his grandmother out on a walk found a badly injured, declawed cat in the middle of a road. They brought the cat to a veterinarian who found a broken pelvis, a torn-up leg, and a concussion. Fortunately

for that cat, they decided to keep her after treatment.

In addition to the injuries that can occur to cats themselves, harm can also come to humans who try to help them. When cats get lost, they don't receive their rabies shots. There have been reports of cats biting their rescuers, and some of those cats were later found to have rabies. Another entire nightmare ensues.

The only responsible thing to do is: keep your cats inside. Even if you have adopted outside cats, they will ultimately adjust if you are vigilant in keeping them inside. And to be on the safe side, have your cats microchipped which will enhance the chances of their being returned should they slip out.

Personally, I have given a home to several cats we found when working on cruelty cases – cats who were living outside. After they were tested and brought into my home, none of them fought to go out, in fact none of them ever showed any interest in going out again. I am sure they were thinking, "Hey, I have plenty of food, warmth, a litter box... why would I go out?" Why indeed.

Always be kind to animals,
Patricia Valusek

The Vet Is In: A Perfect "Pocket Pet" – the Guinea Pig

My long relationship with guinea pigs goes back to my first pair of females when I was 8 (note: too young.) They are very responsive to kind handling and good care and may live 9 years. Unfortunately, pet store staff often give inaccurate information, and many who are purchased frequently are not placed in optimal homes. Please check your local shelters to find a guinea pig rather than support stores and breeders. Unfortunately, at the end of the academic year, many guinea pigs are given up, so check with your local school as well. It is important to have a veterinarian lined up who cares for "exotics" and schedule a checkup soon after adoption. If you are adding these cuties to your family, there are several considerations to be aware of.

Bedding/cages: To keep them healthier and happier, the cage should be at least 30" X 36" for one guinea pig, or 30" X 50" for two. If you have carnivores in the house, the cage should be able to be completely closed for protection from the "hunters" (dogs and cats.) Clean the cage twice weekly, more often if you find their urinary odor too pungent; urine is often in one area which can be easily scooped daily. Do not use cedar or pine shavings — too aromatic, irritating their sinuses -- but aspen shavings and "Carefresh" bedding are good. Guinea pigs crave a shelter to hide; pet stores sell "houses" that work well — just be sure that each guinea pig has a place to withdraw in the cage.

Diet: Never give legume (alfalfa) pellets or hay, but instead use grass hays and pellets (Timothy, Orchard Grass.) They love fresh veggies like lettuce (preferably dark greens, not iceberg) plus carrots, green peppers, apples, and bananas. Give more vegetables than fruits. Hay should be the biggest portion of their diet. Keep an eye out for regular fecal elimination.

Water: Guinea pigs enjoy playing with their water, so instead of a bowl, rather use a bottle with stainless steel tube that straps onto the cage from the outside, and keep it clean.

Males and females: Two males will fight, two females will not. They do prefer a companion. Please neuter the males if you have both sexes and wish to house them together, which they strongly prefer.

Nails: Unless you are expert at trimming nails in small wiggly friends, you may want to have your veterinary staff take care of long nails — do it often enough to prevent excessive length.

Dental health: Guinea pigs are rodents whose teeth will grow longer, unlike ours: if he/she is having trouble eating and is losing weight, have a veterinarian check. Teeth may need a trim, under medical supervision.

Exercise: Movement is very important, but should always be monitored to prevent your pet from being attacked by other domestic animals. While grazing outside (supervised, of course), your wee friend can be snatched by a hawk and flown away in a heartbeat.

Caregivers: Please assess whether small children have the manual dexterity and speed sufficient to prevent the guinea pig from falling or escaping outside. An adult should supervise all handling until a child has matured sufficiently.

Enjoy your new friend!

Holly Cheever, DVM



Guinea pigs enjoy the companionship of each other.

Our Voices in Albany

As bills are renumbered this session and new bills are introduced, we will be updating the Legislative Chart on NYSHA's website (nyshumane.org) to reflect this. Our energy will be focused on a limited number of bills, which we will highlight, but we'll list other bills to let you know our position.

Some important bills we are supporting:

A.510/S.3039 Relates to orders of protection with respect to companion animals; provides further protection for pets.

A.1633/S.197 "Kirby and Quigley's Law" expands the definition of aggravated cruelty to include harm to companion animals during the commission of a felony.

A.2152/S.960 Amends the Ag & Mkts law, in relation to aggravated cruelty to animals; eliminates the word "serious" as part of the definition.

A.4154/S.1442 Relates to the aftercare of retired race horses, prohibits their slaughter, requires that race horses be microchipped; provides for gifts for thoroughbred aftercare on tax returns. It passed the Senate last year and has again this year.

A.4283/S.1130 Prohibits the sale of dogs, cats, and rabbits by retail pet shops; authorizes collaboration with humane societies to provide space to showcase cats or dogs for the purpose of adoption.

There are many important animal protection bills that need legislative action. Support one above or find one on our chart that you feel strongly about and contact your own legislators' offices to let them know you support (or oppose) the bill. You can simply state that you support or oppose, or educate yourself on the issue and politely discuss your position with legislative staff. Find your Assembly person at nyassembly.gov/mem/search or Senator at nysenate.gov/find-my-senator.

The World Around Us – At the Birdfeeder

Sometimes looking at the birdfeeders, it's easy to wonder whether we have them for the birds, as entertainment for our cats, or just to provide some connection to nature for us.

An array of birds overwinter in the Northeast, and of course the cardinal, due to a unique molting habit, is the easiest to spot and the best one to photograph in a snowy landscape. He and his less colorful mate are among the only songbirds we have here in the winter. Chickadees are friendly birds -- when they know you, they will stay very close by and wait for their feeders to be replenished.

Besides birdseed geared toward the species you want to attract, it is also good to offer bananas, raisins, apples, pears, oranges, and crushed unsalted peanuts. Read the labels on the packaging and put different types in separate feeders so that the larger and/or more aggressive birds are not competing with the smaller or shyer ones. Make sure the ground feeders get their share, too.

A fun project for anyone is to roll pinecones or empty cardboard tubes in natural peanut butter and then again in birdseed. Attach a string first to hang them close to branches. The fat in the peanut butter is a good source of energy to help keep birds warm in the winter.

Feed them far away from windows so that they are not victims of debilitating or deadly crashes. If you hear a thump, observe the bird for a few minutes if he/she is on the ground and if need be, gently put the bird on a scrunched up small towel to keep him/her upright inside a box. Do not offer water

but some mashed up grape, apple or berries instead. If the weather is very cold, cover the box well and bring inside for a bit until he or she regains strength to fly away when you take the box outside. If not, contact a wildlife rehabilitator.

Feeders hanging from trees provide birds perches to rest on while waiting for their turn to eat as well as a spot to ingest their food. Keep a source of water out as well. Change the water frequently to keep it clean and from freezing, if possible in a sunny spot, or use an electric outside water dish.

A frequent visitor to the birdfeeder is the gray squirrel. These entertaining critters interact well with the birds despite the fact that they steal much of their food! Squirrel proof feeders can be purchased, or one can easily make a hole in a plastic or paper plate to secure on top of any that are not already designed to keep squirrels out. But why not put enough seed out for everyone? Squirrels are a great part of our ecosystem, and their forgetfulness about where they bury nuts for future meals is largely responsible for many trees which grow naturally. Remember, trees are good for birds, so even though we think of squirrels as little thieves, in the long run their antics should be forgiven!

The best time to feed these animals is early in the morning to give them nourishment and energy for their day, and late in the afternoon for extra calories to help them keep warm during the night. Feeding them all is a simple way to thank them for being there for us.



Cats inside, birds outside -- keeps everyone happy and safe. Drawing by the late Julie Tanner, dedicated animal advocate.

SPOTLIGHT: Mia Genovesi, Godspeed Horse Hostel - godspeedhorses.org

We met Mia a few years ago when her rescue, Godspeed Horse Hostel, took in many equines from a cruelty case NYSHA was helping with. Her incredible work deserves recognition, so we wanted to find out more. Her own words are truly inspiring.

NYSHA – Mia, can you tell us something about your background and Godspeed?

When I was little I wouldn't let my mom swat flies, and it escalated from there. Besides an assortment of inside animals, I remember George the crow who I fed daily and an increasing group of larger outside animals. I was dedicated to caring for them at an early age. Yet, I understood even then that if they were suffering, keeping them alive was not right.

I started as a horse crazy kid, which led to becoming a professional horse trainer and then dreaming of buying a farm. Having spent more time on the ground with horses than I ever spent riding or driving, I experienced a shift where I started looking at them in a different light; they were really emotional beings and I often witnessed a total disregard for this. I literally woke up one morning and said, "I'm starting a rescue." I had never visited a rescue and knew nothing about them, but I never looked back. I concluded that I was born to feed horses and the rescue was the perfect fit to do that and learn about the "internal horse." I bought the farm in 2000, and by 2004 Godspeed was a reality.

My goal has always been to keep the animals well cared for and content. Several people along the way were amazing role models to help hone my skill set. In addition, there were specific colleges I chose for my training because it was important to be able to operate a farm properly and efficiently.

On average, Godspeed houses 12-15 horses and occasionally farm animals. We have a separate program for livestock where we provide hay support in foster homes. We are an "adoption" rescue, often using foster homes when we take in large numbers at one time, such as in cruelty cases. Besides cruelty and neglect cases, our equines include owner surrendered, retirees, Premarin foals, or some purchased in the direst of situations to save them.

I do most of the farm chores, often going months without time off. We take in the very worst horses, usually injured and unrideable, so many would-be volunteers pass us over because they want to ride in addition to volunteering. We have a small and dedicated volunteer base who help out several times a week. They are a mix of horse people and non-horse people, and we would definitely welcome more. We are funded by private donations and grants.

There will always be horses who are etched in your mind. It is always the ones who didn't make it, or the ones you gave three good weeks to before they passed away, or the ones no one thinks will make it but do, or the ones who teach us lessons we remember for a lifetime. I do this work for all of them though. It really is a privilege, and I remember every one of them.

NYSHA - Obviously, this is a rewarding and excellent fit for you, but it must be challenging and frustrating, too. How do you keep up hope, and what are your future plans?

For me, the challenge is doing more and better work than the year before, with fewer resources. It's crafting every move to maximize the effect. My main frustration is that there is a disconnect between what is actually happening in the "field" and what granting foundations think.

It is crucial to know yourself well and what's possible within the framework you have built, and then stretching that notion just so far. Strategic "quitting" of ideas and practices no longer serving you or the rescue is also paramount.

Short term goals are easy. Our mission is fluid to some extent -- we go where we are needed the most "today." We field every animal problem that comes our way with either direct help or a contact in our network. My ongoing long-term goal is to do what we can today to help save more animals next year.

This lifestyle, in a sense, is living your hobby and interests; but I like to hike, fly my drone, and research the cutting edge of "everything horses." There is little time for outside activities, though, let alone a day off, but this is my choice. I don't think of it as a sacrifice.

I think I'm a pretty "serious" person, by definition "acting or speaking sincerely and in earnest." That helps in running a rescue. I don't romanticize it, or use it as an identity; it's just something that I do. Rescue facilities will always be necessary because the laws for animals are not doing them justice. Rescues like Godspeed are needed, but lobbying and legislation for more effective laws ultimately will help more animals. My request to all animal lovers is to support groups like NYSHA who lobby for better animal protection. Write your County and State Legislators -- let them know how bad it is out there for animals. Do your part not to support factory farms, and reduce your meat consumption. Know the animal laws and what is going on in support of their welfare and ACT ON IT! But above all, report animal cruelty, even if it's your neighbor. You are either for animals or you are not.

NYSHA - Certainly, your actions speak volumes and enrich and save lives. On behalf of the voiceless you serve, thank you.



Selfie of Mia with Duke, a 30-year-old retired police horse.

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