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In Loving Memory: Norm (1993-2008)

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Healing with a Rescue Pet

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In February 2008, my cat Norm was diagnosed with a terminal, fast-spreading cancer in his mouth. A panel of veterinarians estimated that he would remain comfortable for just six to eight more weeks. Devastated by this news, I committed myself to spending as much time as possible with my beloved cat. My one comfort was all of the

wonderful years we had together.

I adopted Norm as a ten-year-old from Animal Friends in June 2003. Prior to that, Norm had lived in a filthy household with 25 other cats and a dog. There were no litterboxes and many of the cats were caged in carriers with barely any access to food or water. When they finally saved Norm, he was a mere four pounds, and the majority of his teeth had to be extracted due to severe neglect.

While most people have reservations about adopting an older pet, I thankfully had none. I had watched both of my childhood cats live until 19 and 15 years old, and I was optimistic that even if Norm only had another year left in him, at least it would be a year where he would be loved and happy. He picked me out when I came to the shelter and we quickly developed a strong bond. Over our time together, Norm was the ultimate cuddle cat and always spent the night curled up at my side.

While my first reaction to his diagnosis was shock and grief, I soon realized that I should start considering taking in another rescue; not to fill Norm's place, as no cat ever could, but to offer another cat a chance at a loving home, and also give my younger cat, Daisy (another Animal Friends rescue), a new friend when Norm was gone.

While it wouldn't be fair to bring a cat home while Norm was battling cancer, I still couldn't help but wonder about a cat I had first learned about (when researching for a rescue column that I write, while now living in New Jersey) back in December. His name was Newton, a black-and-white tuxedo that a local NJ rescue had saved. Newton had been abused by a former owner (as just one example, the owner had left a stick of butter out on the kitchen counter, which Newton tried to nibble, so the owner senselessly beat him badly with a broom). Once a loving, cuddly cat, Newton was completely traumatized by this experience and was very shy with people as a result. Despite this, after seeing his photo and looking in his sad eyes, I knew this was the cat for me.

I was so confident that Newton and I would hit it off (mind you, we had never met to this point) that I went ahead and ordered him a collar and nametag before even seeing him in person. A few days later, I finally made it to the shelter and met Newton. Allowed to roam freely in a room with several other cats, Newton immediately raced away as we entered. He was incredibly observant, though, and carefully watched my every move. I got down on the floor and slowly followed Newton around, trying to get him to sniff me without appearing threatening. He eventually jumped into a cat tree, where he seemed most comfortable and relaxed, and later he sniffed my hand. At first, I thought this alone might have taken weeks to accomplish.

To my amazement, within just a half hour, Newton not only let me touch his coat, but he nuzzled my head back and let me pet his head and belly. I would've taken Newton home regardless (I knew he would just need time to come around), but his affectionate response to me instantly told me that I had made the right decision. The shelter was even kind enough to hold him in the free-roaming room for a few weeks while I tended to Norm's illness.

Sadly, despite some procedures which had improved Norm's quality of life and comfort, Norm was humanely euthanized on April 5, 2008. The tumor had spread and he had started to show signs of discomfort. He is truly missed. Today, Newton and his best friend, Flash, share the house with Daisy and have settled in incredibly well (Newton, by the way, is a total lap/cuddle cat).

So, how did Flash come into the picture? Rescued by the shelter as a kitten, Flash spent four years living at the rescue (in the free-roaming cat room with Newton), since minor allergies caused his nose and eyes to occasionally drip. While not at all a serious condition, many people are sadly reluctant to take a cat that doesn't have the perfect face (although with several holistic treatments, his face has now cleared up!). With or without allergies, Flash is an adorable and extremely loveable gray and white, and I couldn't bear to separate him and Newton as they are completely attached to each other.

There are so many unwanted animals that need homes. I hope you'll contact Animal Friends and rescue your own pet (or two!). Having had previously adopted two wonderful cats from Animal Friends, I can tell you that it will be the best decision you ever make.



Animal Friends

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