

A Blessing Named Rikko

by Frederick Wickert



Missy and friend Shaughn



Toby



Rikko, Felix, and Martha



Rikko

How strange it is that a string of circumstances can turn out to be great blessings. My home is experiencing one of those things right now.

In the past spring a feral cat had a litter of kittens in our garage. She had them in an overhead loft. There were three of the kittens but it was early summer before we ever saw them.

As the kittens grew, they came outside the garage and we watched them play from a distance. If we came close they vanished.

One day I was preparing to leave for a weekly supply trip and to take one of the developmentally disabled persons we take care of to a doctor appointment. We got in my pickup truck. I started the engine and put it in reverse.

I began to back up when I heard a noise and felt a slight jolt. I stopped, wondering what it could be. Hearing nothing more I took my foot off the brake and slowly began to back again. I went about ten feet and heard a squeal and felt a larger jolt.

I stopped the truck, put it in park and began getting out to look to see what was happening. It seemed to be coming from under the hood. Suddenly I spotted one of the kittens lying on the ground ten feet from the truck. It wasn't moving. As I walked around the front of the truck another kitten was laying under the front bumper, thrashing like an animal in the throes of death. The two kittens had been in the engine compartment of the truck.

Beside myself with grief, I picked up the two dead kittens and carried them into the garage. I laid their bodies on the sofa we have for the cats in the garage and went in search of a suitable container to bury them in.

When I returned with the container, to my great astonishment, the two kittens were looking at me with wide opened eyes. They were not moving, but they were alive. I scooped them up and put them in a carrier and put them in the truck. After checking to insure there were no more of them under the hood, I drove to the nearest vet and left them there.

The next day I learned they could come home in a few days. The female had a bump over one eye and required some antibiotic ointment in both eyes for a few days to prevent infection. The male had a deep gash that had cut into his pelvis bone. He had been sewed up and needed care, but should be okay. There was some antibiotics to give him for a couple of weeks and the wound to be swabbed with hydrogen peroxide two or three times a day for the prevention of maggots.

The two kittens had already begun eating solid food. We put them in a dog exercise pen with a soft bed, provided food and water and a litter box for them. My wife Tae took care of them diligently. The mother stood by the side of the pen and she and kittens cried to one another, but the vet had warned not to allow the mother to be with them for their own good. In a couple of days the mother forgot about them. It was about two weeks before they began moving around again in a normal way, and by that time they had been handled enough to become tame.

I began calling the male Tae's Boy and Tae named the female Martha. We eventually trapped the third kitten, named him Felix and put him in with the other two when their wounds were healed. When they became old enough I took them to the vet for spaying and neutering and for all their shots. After we got them home from the vet we put them all in the house.

Felix never became tame. He could see his mother out the window and cried pitifully whenever he saw her. A few days later, we discovered Felix was outside with his mother and a window screen in the master

bedroom was lying on the ground outside. Felix stayed close to his mother, ran from us and shied away from the trap when we attempted to recapture him. He was happier outside with the others.

Months went by and the kittens grew. They were sweet natured and were house broken. Tae decided she didn't like the male being called Tae Boy so she changed his name to Rikko. Not wanting to risk any trouble, we kept them separated from the two dogs. Missy died unexpectedly the end of December. Believing it unlikely Toby might object, and since Toby had no teeth we decided to let Martha and Rikko have the run of the house.

Martha was not comfortable being at large in the entire house and wanted to remain with the other cats, separated from the remainder of the house. Rikko on the other hand was enjoying being at large. Suddenly, ten days after Missy died, Toby also passed away.

Tae was devastated. She had lost her best friend in August. Two of our old cats had passed away in the early fall. Then our dog Missy, and finally her little Chihuahua Toby. Tae was heart broken and became terribly depressed. She began to feel she didn't want to continue living. She began having trouble sleeping at night. She slept for an hour or two, and then woke up and couldn't go back to sleep. I became worried about her health and well being.

Soon, Rikko was following Tae everywhere she went. As she went about her household activities, she found Rikko right behind her. When watching TV, he stayed beside her. Rikko is like someone with ants in his pants. He can't stay still for long. He has to be either playing or investigating. Frequently he disappeared and Tae called out, "Rikko. Rikko where are you?" In a minute or so, Rikko showed up and came right to Tae as if to say, "Here I am."

Little by little, Tae was too busy keeping up with Rikko to think about Toby. Little by little, Tae stopped mooning over Toby so much, and little by little Tae began sleeping better.

Now Tae has good cheer again and she no longer is depressed and once again is making plans for the future. The Lord took Toby, but he gave us Rikko. Rikko does not and never will take the place of Toby. Tae continues to miss Toby very much, but now she can live with it, thanks to a blessing the Lord gave us, named Rikko.

Rikko has the typical playfulness and curiosity of a half grown cat, but is highly intelligent, well behaved and sweet natured. He loves to be around people. He has brought Tae out of her doldrums after having lost Toby. Surely, he is among our greatest blessings.

A few years ago while browsing in a large furniture store, Tae fell in love with a real life looking statue of a cat. We purchased the cat statue and brought it home. In the house, it was often mistaken for a real cat. Tae finally removed it from areas where visitors could see it and placed it upon the dresser in the bedroom. Rikko, born only last year looks identical to that statue. I wonder - is it merely coincidence? Or a sign of something to come - like Rikko.