

Mr. Maya, The Boss

by Frederick Wickert



We lost our home on the banks of the Schoharie to a flood in January of 1996. We found a new home on higher ground and moved in. We had a large garage built in the fall of 1997, and the first of the feral cats took up residence in 1998 (See FLASH, Our echo ID#802). We had a deck on the second floor level giving access to the dining room via sliding glass door. A stairs went down from the deck to the ground.

A number of cats were coming daily for a free hand out on the deck. In late summer one day a new comer arrived. He was skittish but beautiful. He was white underneath and on his legs and throat. His back and sides were a very pretty shade of brown. His tail, nose, ears and forehead were black and he had the most beautiful blue eyes you ever saw. He also was missing one of his hind legs.

My wife, Tae gradually gained his trust. As he came every day, she was able to get close to him and finally to hold and pet him. She began to get attached to him. We were reasonably certain he belonged to someone on the other side of the woods and a ravine from our back yard. There was a large property there containing a saw mill, a fire wood processer and several mobile homes.

One day in late September Tae and I were on the deck and a few cats, including him were there eating. A van pulled up behind the house and three state inspectors got out and began coming up the stairs. The state inspection is an ongoing occurrence as we take care of developmentally disabled persons in our home for the state.

As the state personnel ascended the stairs, the cat became frightened and jumped off the deck. He ran towards the woods and vanished. We did not see him any more. Tae anguished for several days about that cat. She had begun to love that cat and wanted him to continue coming. Finally, I went to the first of the trailers and inquired if they knew where the cat of that description lived. Some children playing near bye told me the trailer in the back corner of the complex was where it stayed. I went home and told Tae.

The next day Tae went to the trailer and knocked on the door. A woman answered the door and Tae asked about the cat. The woman invited her in and told her about the cat. He belonged to the woman's daughter. The daughter had moved away from the trailer park to a town an hour away and had the cat with her.

The woman told Tae the cat had a terrible life. Her daughter loved the cat. Her husband was allergic to cats and did not want her to keep him. She also had a 175 pound thirteen year old son who was mean. He often grabbed the cat by the back of the neck and flung him out the door, or kicked the cat like a foot ball. His mother tried to stop him but the father refused to stop the boy. The woman and her husband had split up for a while, but she was going back with her husband.

During the time the cat came to our house, the daughter had brought him to her mother to take care of and protect him from the boy. The mother kept him for a while but did not want him to stay because she already had six cats of her own. She had a hole in the floor under the kitchen sink and left the cabinet door open so the cats could come in and out through the hole as they pleased. She told Tae her daughter was trying to find a good home for the cat, but no one wanted him because he only had three legs. Tae told her she wanted the cat very much.

Tae came home hoping the woman was going to communicate to her daughter, Tae's willingness, even desire, to give the cat a good home. By the end of February, Tae had given up hope she was ever going to see that cat again because it had been months with no word at all.

I was working outside. I looked up and saw a very young girl walking down the driveway, holding the cat in her arms. The girl walked up to me and said, "Umm, my Mom said somebody here wants this cat." I asked her to come over by the door. I opened the door and called Tae to come to the door that someone was there with something she wanted. When Tae saw the cat, she jumped with joy. Her prayers had been answered.

The girl came in the house and visited for two hours before returning home. She was a very talkative young girl. She was the younger sister of the woman who owned the cat from birth. She told us the cat lost his leg after being run over by a car. He had later been caught by a coyote and almost killed. He had been ripped open in the back of the shoulders and had his collar bone broken. The wound had become badly infected and her sisters vet bills had exceeded \$1,000, making her husband very angry with her.

We gave the cat a litter box in the bathroom and food and water bowls in the kitchen. For the first two months, we saw little of the cat. He was frightened and hid under chairs and under the sofa. We were told his name was Milo and that he was three years old. Tae changed the name to Maya. Little by little, we were able to pet him and then to hold him. We learned he usually does not like to be held very much. Gradually he overcame his fears and stopped hiding. Eventually, he took over the place and became "The Boss."

Maya became the loudest and most vocal cat I have ever encountered. He is quick to announce his displeasure. He also has the busiest and most expressive tail I have ever seen on a cat, and having taught us his body language together with his tail and vocal language, has trained us to yield almost always to his wishes at the moment. He has managed to indoctrinate all of the other animals and birds to understand his position in the household as well. He is in fact, "The Boss." He amazes us with his capabilities, regardless of his missing leg.

In recent months we have observed the signs of age creeping up on him, and we have discussed our sorrow at seeing this, each of us knowing the extreme pain we will suffer when he leaves us. It is not a new pain to us, as we have suffered it many times before. It never gets easier no matter how many times we suffer it.

For now, Maya is just fine. He has slowed down a little and he sleeps much more than before, but he is still "The Boss."