



Dorothy with Forrest Gump

Fostering Love, Fostering Life

by Dorothy Cohen

I found myself sitting in my car at The Animal Rescue League one October morning, sobbing harder than I can remember doing in a long while. The kitten I had seen through her rough birth and struggling days had given up her fight, and I had to let her go.

I am a foster caregiver for the unwanted, abused and neglected cats and kittens taken in by The Animal Rescue League (ARL) of Brewster. Some may wonder, how can I keep doing it after what happened that day? I can answer easily. It's worth it.

That kitten knew love and warmth and caring, at least for a little while. She mattered. Someone cried for her. In my small corner of the world, I may not make a huge difference, but to her I did.

Fostering is a family endeavor. We've been doing it for about six years. As time passed, we became more enmeshed in the program. It's now a huge part of our lives. Fostering animals requires dedication, commitment, time, and a sense of humor. Trust me, if you didn't have one, waking up at three in the morning to stimulate a kitten's bowels would get old really, really fast!

Sometimes fostering can last a matter of days, sometimes weeks, and in rare cases months. Did I mention rare? Let me tell you my "rare" event. Hannu was a big lab/bloodhound who came to the ARL as a surrender. His hips were in bad shape and he needed surgery that proved too costly and he was scheduled to be euthanized.

Luckily for Hannu an anonymous patron paid for his surgery, but he still needed someone to take him to Boston for the two (separate) hip surgeries, the follow-up visits and all else required. So, I said "pick me, pick me!" Uh oh. They picked me.

Hannu came to stay with us on February 28, 2008 for a finite period of recovery. He resides with us to this day. I urge you to think hard before you decide to become a foster caregiver.

If you cannot leave the animal behind at the shelter and walk away when your time is over, it's probably not for you. That is why I've made ARL swear to never ever let me foster a dog again. They're too hard to give up.

Kittens, though, are another story.

Kittens are a joy to foster. They're fun, lots of work, and mostly when they leave you're happy to let them go on to their new lives. In my home, we've happily set the alarm for every-two-hour feedings, scratched our fingers in litter boxes to teach the orphaned kittens how to use one, picked up poop by the truckloads, crawled through placenta and gook to check on newborns to make sure they're still breathing, weighed struggling newborns every day, and every other thing you can think of from the tragic to the mundane.

In our days of fostering we've had many kittens pass through these doors, some memorable, some not so much. We had one kitten who got stuck under the stove! My husband had to remove the stove from its place to find the kitten while our two little girls cried their eyes out with worry. We had a kitten die in our arms, only to be resuscitated by the wonderful vet at CARE (did I mention he also still resides with us?) We've had kittens who hated us and hissed every time we walked into a room. There was the litter who all insisted on sleeping on our faces. One of my favorites was the tiny 4-week-old kitten who terrorized our big dogs!

Then, last fall, I got a call to foster a pregnant mother cat. Of course I jumped at the chance. This would turn out to be my greatest accomplishment as well as my most heartbreaking case.

Angelina, as we called her, gave birth on Sept 23rd under my daughter's bed. I'd like to say she gave birth to nine healthy kittens, but it was a difficult birth. All survived, but only barely.

I named one of the tiny newborn kittens Birdie, because she looked like a bird who'd fallen out of a tree while still encased in its egg. She proved to be my hardest challenge so far. Her mom tried, but with eight other seemingly healthy babies, she could not afford to give Birdie much of her mothering. Each day we pulled Birdie out from under the bed, weighed her, supplemented her with formula and Karo syrup and held her.

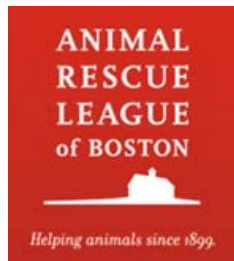
Three weeks later, after much effort and even more soul searching, I took Birdie back to Brewster on that lovely October morning. She was eased out of her suffering peacefully, surrounded by ARL's caring staff.

Which brings me back to the beginning.

As I sat in that parking lot crying, I realized that although I thought I gave Birdie a gift, it was really Birdie and every other forgotten, unwanted and abandoned creature I have had the privilege of caring for who have graced me with the gift of themselves.

They've taught me selflessness. My children have learned love and compassion for creatures small and weak. I hope at the very least the ARL gives me the chance to continue on for many more years.

Life would be a lot emptier if I couldn't give and receive these little gifts of love.



Adopting from the Animal Rescue League

9 CONSIDERATIONS PRIOR TO ADOPTING A PET

1. Consult your entire household Everyone who has to live with the pet should be in agreement about adopting it.
2. Consider your lifestyle Do you travel a lot or work most of the day? Do you have young children or other pets that may not interact well with a new pet?
3. Evaluate living accommodations Many rental places do not allow pets or restrict what type of pet you can have.
4. Not everyone can live with a pet Does anyone in your household have allergies or fears?
5. Time Management Do you have time to train, socialize, and offer companionship to an animal? Do you have the time to feed, clean up after, groom, exercise, and play with that pet?
6. Budget expenses for your pet Will your budget allow for food, toys, veterinarian visits, bowls, collars, cages, obedience lessons, kitty litter, and other such expenses?
7. Pets need room to exercise Do you have the appropriate space for the type of pet you are considering?
8. Troubleshooting 101 Are you prepared to deal with problems that may arise from pet ownership?
9. Prepare for a lifetime commitment Are you prepared to make a commitment to a pet for its entire lifetime? The average life span of many dogs and cats can be 10 - 20 years.

This list was taken from the Animal Recue website:
<http://www.arlboston.org>

Spring is Kitten Season!



Many cats are let loose to fend for themselves and kittens often result. The ARL is always looking for competent, caring foster families, never more so than now. If you're interested in helping, please contact:

The Animal Rescue League of Brewster
3981 Route 6A, East Brewster
Phone: 508-255-1030
Email: brewster@arlboston.org

Dorothy Cohen is a Cape Cod native who lives in Harwich with her family and ever-changing menagerie.

In 2009, she was recognized as one of the Animal Rescue League's Volunteers of the Year.