



ABOVE: Four skittish feral kittens – dubbed Georgia O’Keeffe, Chili, Pepper, and Frida Kahlo – huddle together shortly after being rescued.

TOP: Pepper and Georgia feel comfortable enough to eat, while Frida keeps to herself. Food can be used to build trust with feral kittens.

The Taming of the Mew

How SPCA NOVA, King Street Cats Are Socializing Four Feral Kittens

BY *Katie McHenry
& Kathleen MacKinnon*

As SPCA NOVA has learned over the years, feral (or “wild”) kittens rescued after six weeks of age are harder to socialize, which is why it’s extremely important to start acclimating kittens to human contact early. Ideally, feral kittens should be rescued at 4-5 weeks of age when they can learn to eat on their own and bond more easily

with humans. After six weeks, it becomes more difficult to fully socialize feral kittens, depending on their innate temperament, age when rescued, and the techniques a foster parent uses to socialize them. Even if a kitten bonds well with their caregiver, they may remain shy toward strangers, making it harder to get them adopted.

Four Feral Kittens

In September, SPCA NOVA was called to the home of two women who had been feeding a feral mother cat and her four kittens in their backyard. The women had found conflicting information online about rescuing kittens and ended up using advice that led them to believe they should let the kittens stay with their mother for the first eight weeks, which is good advice for tame kittens already in a home, but not for feral kittens outdoors. Because of this, SPCA NOVA wasn’t contacted until the kittens were already eight weeks old, which

has made it a little more challenging to fully socialize all of the kittens.

Thankfully, we (Katie and Kathleen, coauthors of this article) managed to rescue all four kittens in the same afternoon. They were initially assessed and cared for in Kathleen’s home. To help with socialization (more on this later), the kittens were split into pairs. Kathleen kept Chili and Pepper, but wasn’t able to secure a second foster home in our network, so Katie reached out to a friend (Julie), an experienced foster mom from King Street Cats, who agreed to take in Georgia O’Keeffe and Frida Kahlo. All four will be ready for adoption soon as pairs. Below are some techniques we used to rescue and socialize them.

Use Cat Carrier, Food to Rescue

First, in preparation of rescuing the feral kittens, we asked the women who were feeding them to not feed them that morning so that they would be hungry. Second, we placed an open carrier in the same spot they were used to getting their food and put “breadcrumbs” of smelly salmon wet food in the front and back of the carrier. We recommend trying a cat carrier, rather than a trap, in a first attempt to rescue feral kittens. Kittens will already be skittish, and the slamming of a trap door will just frighten them more. Third, we sat just behind the carrier out of the immediate view of the kittens.

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President's Letter

Pandemic's Impact on Adoptions

BY *Dana Meeker*

This year, 2020, will be forever known as the year of the pandemic.

Like so many animal rescues and shelters, SPCA NOVA had to halt its adoption events for several weeks in the spring under the stay-at-home order. With many volunteers in the most susceptible groups, we were extra nervous about being around other people. It was strange to hunker down wondering when we would ever be able to hold adoptions again.

Almost immediately, we saw an outpouring of offers to foster our animals. We also saw a huge increase in adoption interest, so much so that people lamented that they were having a hard time finding an available pet anywhere.

We all recognized what the consequences of not holding adoptions were – many, many lost lives. We heard from shelter partners that they were desperately hanging on to animals as long as possible until animal transports could happen again. Fortunately, after a few weeks, animal adoptions and transports recommenced, but the way things used to be done no longer worked.

We needed to take into consideration the safety of our foster parents, volunteers, staff, and adopters. We figured it out, though. Masks and social distancing became the new normal. Foster parents spent more time up front on the phone with potential adopters, gushing about their cats' or kittens' personalities. Counselors went over more questions on the phone rather than in person. Then, after the adopters finally met their cat/kittens, cuddles were brief and formalities were completed quickly.

Dog adoption events became meet-and-greets by appointment. (Our wonderful volunteers stepped up to manage these meetings while I was laid up for a couple months with an injury.) We had to limit the number of people allowed to meet each dog. This was so hard; we got so many great applicants. We used Zillow to see the layouts of our applicants' homes and video visits instead of home visits so that we could talk about how to introduce and acclimate their new dog.

Despite the pause and changes, we are on track to meet or exceed the number of dog and cat

adoptions we had last year.

Spay/neuter surgeries were initially deemed non-essential in Virginia (we know different!). After a huge drop-off in requests to our Spay Inc. program in March and April, the number of client requests rebounded, increasing 20-30% over the prior year.

This pandemic has wreaked so much havoc on our lives, our livelihoods, and our communities. But we are hopeful that it will soon be over, as we get news of vaccine successes. I, for one, am really looking forward to seeing our volunteers at adoption events again, surrounded by hopeful families looking for their new pets. I want to hug them all. When it's all over, I hope that the families who adopted dogs during the pandemic will come back to visit so that I can hug them too and take adoption photos without the masks!!!

Thank you to everyone for helping us get through this. Your efforts and understanding are so appreciated.

More fervently than in any other year, I wish you a safe, healthy holiday season!

Keep Your Pet Happy, Safe during Holidays*

Please remember that the changes and activity over the holidays can cause an animal stress and anxiety. By taking proper precautions, you can help your pet enjoy the holiday season.

Holiday Decorations

- Poinsettias, mistletoe, ivy, and holly berries can be poisonous – even fatal.
- Exposed wiring can electrocute a curious animal who chews on it.
- Make sure your Christmas tree is secure. You might even want to anchor it with fishing line tied to drapery rods or a wall.
- Tree decorations and candles can cause choking or severe intestinal problems if swallowed.
- Tinsel and popcorn strands can be deadly, and glass balls can shatter in an animal's mouth.
- Dogs and cats can be allowed to romp through discarded wrapping paper and empty boxes, but

dispose of all bows, yarn and curling ribbons.

Food

- Pets are not garbage disposals for holiday leftovers.
- Poultry bones can splinter and cause blockages.
- Chocolate is poisonous.
- Any sudden change of diet, even for just one meal, can give your dog or cat stomach pain and diarrhea, especially for older animals whose digestive systems are often more delicate.

- Aluminum foil and plastic wrap, if ingested, may cause vomiting, intestinal blockage or even more serious problems.

Change Is Stressful

- If you're having people over, the change in company and holiday festivities can frighten animals. Make sure they have a "safe haven" to which they can retreat.
- Rearrangement of furniture may cause your cat to stop using the litter box.

**A version of this story originally appeared in our Winter 2000 newsletter and contains information from the ASPCA.*

'Smile' Even More when You Shop

BY **Angel D. Fischer**

AmazonSmile is a program run by the AmazonSmile Foundation that donates 0.5% of your eligible Amazon purchases to the charitable organization of your choice. Shopping through AmazonSmile is no different than shopping directly on Amazon – the products and prices are all the same. The only difference is that using the program gives you an easy way to help SPCA NOVA.

Until recently, AmazonSmile was available only when shopping

at Smile.Amazon.com. Now you can shop AmazonSmile through the Amazon Shopping app on iOS and Android mobile phones. As of this writing, this feature was not yet available on the tablet Amazon Shopping app, but you can still shop through AmazonSmile using your tablet's web browser.

How do I sign up?

Website: Go to **Smile.Amazon.com** and search for "Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals of Northern VA." You can also go to www.spcanova.org/shop

and click on the Amazon link to automatically be directed to SPCA NOVA on AmazonSmile.

Mobile App: To use AmazonSmile on the app, you must first sign up using a web browser. Once you've done this, you can follow these steps on your phone:

1. Open the app on your phone.
2. Go to the main menu and select "Settings."
3. Select "AmazonSmile" and follow the instructions to activate the program.

The mobile app requires reactivation twice a year (shopping

via a web browser does not). To find out when your next renewal is, go to "AmazonSmile" in the app's Settings. If it says "On," your donations are active. You can select "On" to see the date of your next renewal.

How Does SPCA NOVA Benefit?

While 0.5% may not seem like much, it starts to add up when more people use AmazonSmile. As of August 2020, SPCA NOVA has earned more than \$2,600 just from people shopping for the things they already need or want or gift to others.

Celebrating a Golden Jubilee

BY Margaret Wiegenstein

Admittedly, I'm neither a queen nor a nun (though I live like one – a nun, that is), nor am I celebrating 50 years of a beneficent reign or religious life. No, I'm here to tell the story of how I came to celebrate my golden Jubilee.

It was a rainy, blustery March weekend, and I was anticipating the arrival of an Airbnb guest. This gentleman was going to be here for about a month, and he was hoping I would have a dog boarder or two, as he would be missing his dogs (and wife, presumably) back in Florida. Unfortunately, with the coronavirus pandemic discouraging client dog owners' travels, my house featured no quadrupeds and was quiet as an abbey.

Suddenly, a light bulb exploded in my head: I could foster a dog, just like the old days! I immediately visited my favorite rescue group's website. I was very involved with the SPCA of Northern Virginia in the 1990s, fostered 20 dogs, and adopted #2, a beagle I named Winston, and #20, a pit bull I named Rudi. Winston died in 2006 of cancer, and Rudi in 2009 of complications from Lyme's nephritis. I had been doing only dog boarding in my home since then – 11 years and counting.

I was concerned that there would be no dogs needing a foster home, and, in fact, there was only one. As soon as I saw the picture of Britney Ears, as she had been dubbed, that was all she wrote, as they say. I really love the hound breeds, and those beautiful ears just wrapped themselves around my heart. I immediately made



Jubilee, who was originally only going to be a temporary guest, has found her forever home.

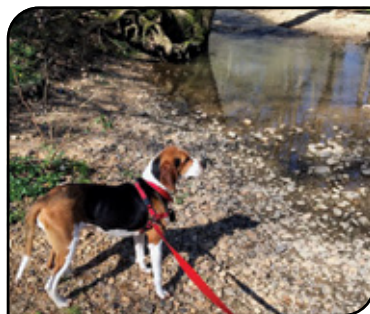
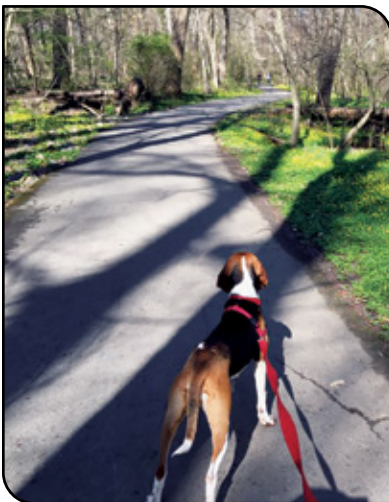
an appointment with SPCA NOVA President Dana Meeker to meet Britney Ears the following Saturday, March 28th, at Weber's Pet Supermarket in Fairfax. This tricolor hound was very thin, with hipbones and ribs showing prominently – apparently she was having trouble keeping any weight on. She was also rather distracted and stubborn when asked to

move. It took the handler patience – and not a few treats – to get her into my Prius!

So, home we went, with the recommended dog foods from Weber's. And it has been such a joy ever since that

day. Within just a few weeks, I was quite certain that I would adopt her. With no offense to the singer-dancer, I quickly opted to change her name from Britney Ears to Jubilee, which means a special anniversary, or “celebration” to me. The word jubilation describes happy, thrilling emotion – and that's what this sweet hound girl brings to me.

We embarked on a regimen of exercise that has probably benefited me as much as her. We've discovered many sections of the Cross County Connector Trail in Northern Virginia and visit county parks on a rotating basis – we mix it up to keep it interesting for us both. No one stays in the Wiegen-



Jubilee and Margaret walk the trails for exercise and adventure. Jubilee's health has improved from her diet and exercise program.

stein household without eating well, and Jubilee has benefited from her diet and exercise program by gaining weight to her now perfect, muscular body. (If only I could claim similar success!)

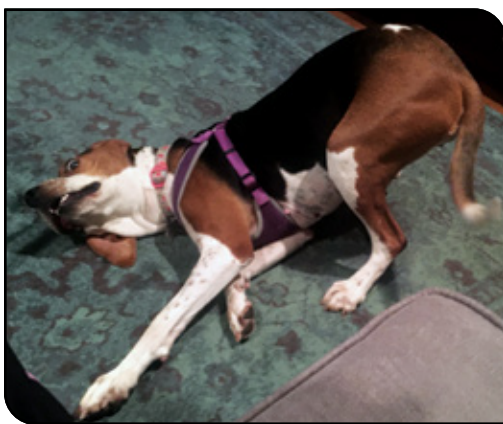
Jubilee came to SPCA NOVA in Spring 2019, flea-bitten, emaciated, and heartworm positive. I knew that she had completed heartworm treatment, with two follow-up negative tests, and that she still faced spay surgery. She also was diagnosed with valvular pulmonic stenosis (PS), in which the tissues forming the heart valve leaflets become stiffer, narrowing the valve opening and reducing the amount

of blood that can flow through it. She will need to be on medication for the rest of her days, with annual visits to her heart specialist. At her recent recheck appointment, her cardiologist saw some improvement in her PS level after taking various heart measurements.

Overall, she's doing well, takes her twice-daily pill like a champ, and we're feeding the cardio fund for future tests and checkups. Even if her life is fore-shortened by this disease, I guarantee it will be a loving life for both of us!

Jubilee is comfortable with other dogs, and with a few of my boarding clients coming to stay now, she has revealed

her playful nature when the dog personality is right. She has several play positions, one of which is a favorite: she gets down on



Jubilee presents her "Come play with me" pose.



Britney Ears (now Jubilee) is thin and sickly upon being rescued by SPCA NOVA.

one shoulder, keeps her butt up in the air, and looks at you sideways with this wild-eyed invitation to play.

She does have some behaviors which need to be addressed. She has never learned to sit and doesn't always come when I call her name. Jubilee can be an obsessive licker – I'm like a human salt lick! – yummy for her, unpleasant for me. She also pulls occasionally when walking but is actually very good on the leash. Except for those moments when she refuses to budge and becomes immovable – 48 pounds transmutes into two tons of granite! All said, some behavioral work is definitely on the near horizon.

It was probably in April that I knew I would adopt this honey of a hound. But we needed to do the cardio re-check and the spay surgery, which carries more risk with a cardiac condition. The spay surgery happened in September, Jubilee recovered well, and I signed the paperwork to adopt her on October 2. I am just so grateful that the day I looked on the website, there she was. She is blessed with a very sweet temperament with people and dogs alike, and is gorgeous to boot, with the most fabulous velvety ears. I welcome the challenge of helping her grow into a happy, well-behaved dog whom I celebrate every day – my golden Jubilee!



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Taming *from page 1*

Our strategy paid off. After some initial hesitation, Chili, Georgia, and Frida all went right into the carrier, one right after the other. Katie was able to quickly shut the door behind them.

We had to use a trap for Pepper because he was left alone with his mother, and we needed to act quickly before she could move him. We draped a towel over the trap, leaving the door uncovered. We placed smelly salmon wet food in the back of the trap and added little “bread-crumbs” of salmon in front of it and right inside to lure Pepper in. It only took about two minutes before he was inside, door closed, meaning we now had all four kittens! Poor Pepper was of course frightened when the door slammed shut, so we covered the entire trap with the towel.



Pepper comforts Chili, who is more timid. Because feral kittens need extra attention, but still also need companionship, it is good to socialize them in pairs.

This served to calm him down by helping him realize he couldn’t get out by banging against the wires of the trap.

We are still trying to trap the elusive mother cat to get her spayed and returned to the kind women who will continue to feed her. But this will take more time because she has been showing up less often for food, and the humane trap can be set *only* when it can be monitored.

Assess Age, Temperament

After getting the kittens into our care, we were able to confirm their age was eight weeks. This was based on their weights – all around 2 pounds (see sidebar at right). While this is older than ideal for starting socialization, these kittens actually had a head start over many other feral kittens. They had had some regular social interactions with the women feeding them, and one or two of them once let a maintenance worker pet them.

While this might have helped the kittens start to feel comfortable with people, we generally don’t recommend handling



Chili watches over her “cat room” from the top of a cat tree. If possible, establish a separate room to care for feral kittens and give them an even smaller contained “safe place,” like a pet tent.

or interacting with feral kittens because the mother cat will often move them, believing they’re in danger, which makes it harder to rescue them.

Pair Up Kittens

After seeing how utterly frightened three of the four kittens were, it was clear they would do better in pairs. It’s important to acclimate feral kittens to as much human interaction as possible, which is much easier to do in smaller numbers.

Use Pet Tent in Larger ‘Cat Room’

The smaller the space, the safer the kittens will feel when starting out in a new home with people. However, it’s also important that they aren’t too isolated. For example, putting kittens in a bathroom might work for a few days to help them feel safe, but staying there too long won’t help them to socialize.

How to Tell Kitten’s Age

7-10 Days: Eyes start to open up. They mostly sleep and nurse until 3 weeks old.

3 Weeks: They flop around a lot and try to walk. Their ears will stand straight up.

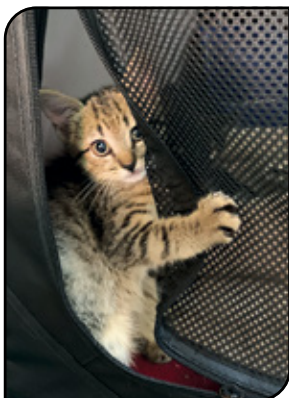
4 Weeks: They walk around and play, just a tiny bit wobbly. They can be coaxed to learn how to lap up wet food.

5 Weeks: They are steady on their feet. They can easily eat food on their own. Their personalities really start to become apparent.

6 Weeks: They start to venture farther away from their mother to play and explore.

General Rule of Thumb: Kittens gain a pound a month. At 4 weeks, they should weigh around 1 pound, and at 8 weeks around 2 pounds. This can vary among kittens – males are usually bigger, but even same gender kittens’ weights can vary by a few ounces.

Source: SPCA NOVA observations



ABOVE: Chili starts to get curious about the world outside her tent. Kittens

will often let you know when they're ready to expand their territory.

ABOVE LEFT: Frida and Georgia hide behind a pillow and blanket inside their tent where they feel safe.

LEFT: Georgia goes exploring. Kittens are naturally curious, and it's good to let them go on supervised adventures when they are comfortable.



Both Kathleen and Julie started the kittens out in pet tents in a larger "cat room." With a pet tent, the kittens could observe things and people around them, which helped them acclimate to their surroundings.

Kathleen and Julie filled the tents with things to make the kittens feel comfortable: a nice cozy bed or blanket they could hide and snuggle in, toys, food, and a litter box. Julie also used a smart toy that comes with a warming pad and simulated heart-beat to remind the kittens of the safety of being with their mother.

Both Kathleen and Julie spent many hours

in their cat rooms near the kittens in their tents doing normal activities, like reading, watching TV, talking on the phone, responding to emails, etc. Once each pair of kittens started feeling safer with their foster moms and their surroundings, Kathleen and Julie would carefully pet the kittens. They eventually opened the pet tent to let the kittens wander out on their own. This way, the kittens learned they could safely venture out, but easily dart back into the tent for safety when they felt scared. The kittens slowly started to feel safer and gradually forgot their fear.

The cat room also needs to be kitten-proofed before letting the kittens outside of the

tent to make sure they can't hurt themselves while exploring. You can read more about kitten proofing on our website at www.spcanova.org/kitten-proofing, but even the most experienced cat handler can be surprised by how much trouble kittens can get into. Read about Kathleen's experience with Pepper getting into trouble on page 10.

Use Food, Grooming as Incentives

Kathleen and Julie both used food to get the kittens to trust them. They would coax the kittens physically closer by moving the food dish gradually toward themselves with each successive feeding. Eventually, they would gently pet the kittens from behind while they're eating. This emphasized positive reinforcement that humans are associated with good things – like food!

They also used a brush or flea comb to gently stroke the kittens while they ate or slept, which mimicked their mother grooming them. This helped transfer their love

and trust for their mother to their foster moms.

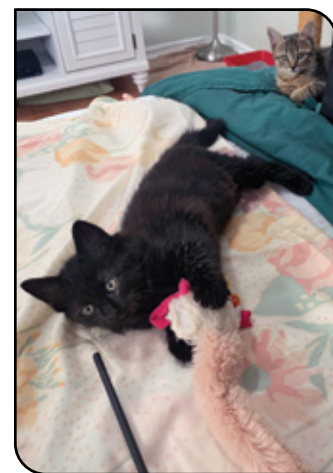
Introduce Toys

Once the kittens started to feel more secure, Kathleen and Julie introduced play time. Kittens naturally show an interest in "hunting" (chasing and attacking toys).

Julie found that using interactive toys with Georgia and Frida helped build their trust in her, giving them a chance to let their guard down while interacting with her amid a fun activity. Kathleen used toys attached to a stick or wand to carefully draw Chili and Pepper toward her, as their focus on playing made them forget to be scared of her.

Leave on TV, Radio

Kathleen kept the TV on in her cat room during the day (off at night) so that Chili and Pepper could get used to different human voices and sounds, which is very important to social-



Pepper responds well to playing with Kathleen, while Chili is still a little too scared to play but observes from afar.



ABOVE: Georgia and Frida snuggle with “Uncle” Macho. Spending time with older, tame cats can help teach feral kittens how to be a domesticated cat.

LEFT: Pepper and Chili cuddle in Kathleen’s lap. By stretching out her legs, Kathleen lets the kittens decide how close they want to get to her.

ization. Julie preferred to play music or watch movies or shows only while she was in the cat room. Doing these things mimicked households where people are active during the day and asleep at night. The volume can be loud enough for you to enjoy but should be low enough to not bombard the kittens with too much sound.

Snuggle

As the kittens became more comfortable with Kathleen and Julie, snuggle time became an important ritual, generally every morning before or after breakfast and again at bedtime. Both kitten pairs began this tradition by crawling into their foster moms’ laps while they had their legs extended. After awhile, the kittens began to seek out their snuggle time after playing or when sleepy, feeling safe and

secure in the crook of their foster moms’ legs or in their laps.

Introduce Friendly Adult Cats

It can be helpful for kittens who have been separated from their mother to be introduced to a healthy and friendly adult resident cat (or two) to help the kittens “learn to be a cat.” This includes adopting proper feline manners, being taught what level of roughhousing is acceptable, displaying appropriate body language, etc. Julie used two of her friendly and nurturing resident cats to help the kittens learn to be cats, and Frida and Georgia learned to enjoy playing and snuggling with their “uncles.”

This was more difficult for Kathleen because her two older cats don’t do well with kittens. However, she did introduce them to

her three-legged foster cat, Fluffy, but only for brief interactions because Fluffy gets overwhelmed with kittens jumping on him. Interestingly, Chili is very intrigued by Fluffy, following him everywhere!

Introduce Family, Friends

Kittens need to get used to people other than their primary caretaker, which is especially important for kittens that were rescued at eight weeks of age like these four. Otherwise, the kittens learn to bond with only one person, making it harder for them to transfer that trust to other people. While it may be important to wait before exposing very fearful kittens to lots of people from the start, it’s a good idea to introduce at least one other experienced person to the kittens as soon as possible.

Julie’s husband visited with Georgia and Frida

at least once a day so that they got to know another human besides her. Kathleen asked friends and a fellow SPCA NOVA volunteer to stop by to visit the kittens whenever possible, although this was more challenging due to the pandemic. The more the kittens have exposure to other experienced or calm and understanding people during their socialization process, the better.

In Conclusion

Regardless of how old you might suspect a litter of feral kittens is, it’s never too soon to ask for advice on how to handle the situation, either from SPCA NOVA or our friends at King Street Cats.

The SPCA NOVA website has articles covering these topics:

- “Rescuing Homeless Kittens” (www.spcanova.org/rescuing-kittens)
- “Taming Feral Kittens” (www.spcanova.org/feral-kittens)

For rescue groups, it’s critical to start socializing kittens by six weeks of age – earlier is even better, such as four to five weeks old, when kittens can be easily taught to eat on their own and usually learn to trust humans quickly.

If you are rescuing kittens and plan to keep them, you should still try to rescue them by the time they are six weeks old. However, if you

aren't able to do that, you can likely socialize feral kittens older than six weeks, since you will be their caretaker whom they learn to

trust – and they won't need to transfer their trust to others. However, depending on their age when rescued, temperament, and how you

socialize them, they may shy away from people they don't know such as guests to your home.

Don't forget to check our website – or King

Street Cats' at www.kingstreetcats.org – to see when Chili and Pepper or Georgia and Frida are ready to be adopted as pairs.

Progress Report: Two Months after Rescue

Chili & Pepper

These kittens are complete opposites in size and temperament, which has affected their socialization. Pepper is ready for anything; Chili has made amazing progress but still needs different experiences to gain confidence.

Pepper has a naturally trusting, bold and easygoing personality. He was the last rescued and the only kitten that required a humane trap to capture. Despite this, Pepper was like pudding in Kathleen's hands within 24 hours, which is unusual for a feral kitten rescued at eight weeks of age.

Pepper lets Kathleen pick him up and do anything with him, runs to greet her, and never stops purring. He loves to be held and cuddled, and he enjoys lounging in laps when he's sleepy. He

greet new people with ease and now explores outside the cat room to expand his universe.

Chili is typical of what you would expect from a feral kitten rescued at eight weeks of age. She was initially very scared and not trusting of Kathleen at all but has now made tremendous progress. Perhaps due

to her small size, Chili has a naturally "hissy" temperament: fearful when exploring new things

and hissing at anything that scares her. When rescued, Chili weighed only 1 pound 13 ounces, whereas her two sisters were 2 pounds, and Pepper was 2 pounds 3

ounces. Even now, Chili is much smaller than Pepper (3.5 pounds

versus 5). It has taken a while, but Chili now greets Kathleen at the

door and enjoys petting and purring, although she doesn't like as much touching as Pepper. Chili is a spicy girl who wants things her own way! She has also learned the joy of laying in the crook of Kathleen's legs and is now cautiously exploring beyond the cat room.

Frida & Georgia

These girls are essentially equal in size and have similar temperaments. Like Chili, they were terrified of people when rescued. They have made terrific progress but still need some additional socialization to expand their experiences. They are friendly and confident in their cat room with their foster parents but would benefit from interacting with new people and expanding their territory, which Julie is working on.

Frida was initially the most scared kitten in the litter, hiding and running away from things that frightened her. But rather than

hissing like Chili, she was a hider. Over the last few weeks, Frida has become a lot bolder. She's now always the first to climb in Julie's lap and to welcome her into the cat room.

Georgia was also initially scared like Frida and Chili, but she was a bit more confident than her sisters. She now likes to observe everything and even

climbs on top of furniture to get the best view of what's going on in the room. If Julie turns her back on Georgia, and Georgia wants to see what she's doing, Georgia creeps up behind her and meeps to ask what's going on.



Kitten Gets into Hole Lot of Trouble

BY *Kathleen MacKinnon*

Just when you think you have mastered the art of kitten proofing – think again!

I have been fostering cats and kittens for SPCA NOVA for nearly 20 years. I also oversee the Cat Program and have seen a lot of potential issues and mistakes made in other foster homes over the years. We learn through every experience. Well, here's one for the record books!

I had been fostering Chili and Pepper for about three weeks. These kittens were rescued along with their two sisters, Georgia and Frida. (Read about their rescue in the cover story.)

I have a large bedroom in my finished basement that I call my “cat room.” It has a platform bed so cats and kittens can't hide under it and

just one other piece of furniture - a cabinet that holds the TV. Other than that, there are cat trees, small windows to look outside and cat toys. There is a screen door on the ‘cat room’ where cats and kittens can look out to the larger part of the basement with a futon, various cabinets and, of course, more cat trees. The screen door is opened or closed depending on the age of the kittens and their stage of socialization, or a cat's comfort with a bigger or smaller space. It's sort of a cat or kitten's temporary paradise.

I was sitting in the cat room watching TV with both Chili and Pepper running around, chasing each other, tumbling and exploring. All of a sudden, I heard a kitten screaming. I looked at Pepper who was right in front of me on one of the

shelves in the TV cabinet. I could see his body but couldn't see his head. He had pushed his head through a hole between sections

of the cabinet (designed to enable you to run electrical cords from one section to the other in the cabinet).

I was aware of the holes but hadn't blocked them off with these particular kittens, because they weren't tiny, and I knew they couldn't crawl through the holes into a closed space. In the past, with younger kittens in this room, I had blocked

off the holes, but Pepper was close to 3 pounds at 10 weeks – a big boy!

I quickly came to Pepper's side to see that he had pushed his head through the hole but couldn't easily pull his head back out. His body was in one section of the cabinet while his head was in another. I had to open a door of the cabinet to see his head. Poor little guy



This TV cabinet looks harmless enough, but Pepper managed to slip his head into the hole to the right of the cable box (circled in pink).



ABOVE: Pepper is unable to pull his head out of the hole.

LEFT: Chili keeps Pepper company while everyone waits for help to arrive.

was crying and flopping around trying to get his head out. When I held his body or pet his head, he calmed down. I tried to gently push his head back through the hole, but there was no way to do that without hurting him. It was a tight fit.

I knew what needed to be done. There was a plastic ring around the hole. I knew that if I could get the plastic ring loose by prying it off with a screw driver or another tool that the hole would become bigger and Pepper would be able to get his head out. However, every time I stopped holding him he panicked. I was also afraid to try to pry off the plastic ring by myself, possibly slipping and hurting Pepper.

I immediately knew that I should call my handyman, Tim, a good friend who knows every nook and cranny of my house. He had even assembled this cabinet, so he would know what to expect. I was sure that Tim could pry the plastic ring off without hurting the kitten, while I held Pepper to keep him calm.

I knew that if I could reach Tim he would be there ASAP – he happens to be a huge cat lover and has six cats of his own, along with his wife, Mary. Luckily, Tim was only about 30 minutes away. He dropped everything to race to my house. I snapped a few photos so he knew what the

situation was and could arrive with the right tool.

But those were 30 very long minutes. Poor Pepper... after about 10 minutes of crying and struggling, he actually fell asleep with me propping his head up so his neck wasn't pressing against the hole, while his body was in one section of the cabinet and his head in the other.

Once Tim arrived, it took only about two minutes for him to pry loose the plastic ring with a small crow bar. Then Pepper was able to pull his head out of the hole. But now the plastic ring was around his neck! By this time, Pepper was calm, having been asleep. I think he forgot about the ordeal. He just stood there looking at us with the ring around his neck.

Luckily, Pepper is such a sweet, confident, friendly kitten that the ordeal didn't phase him. He waited patiently for Tim to get a pair of wire cutters to cut the plastic ring off his neck. He jumped down to the floor and without any prompting, Pepper went right up to Tim as he was re-assembling the cable



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Pepper is free from the hole but now has the plastic ring that framed the hole stuck on his neck.

Pepper lays down next to his rescuer for some petting.

What remains from the plastic ring after handyman Tim snipped it off of Pepper.

box that I had unplugged and moved out of the way when Pepper's head was stuck in the hole. Pepper just laid down next to him and let Tim pet him. I had been taking photos all along thinking no one would believe me unless I got photos!

So... even accidents can happen to experienced foster and cat parents. It's important to constantly scan any room a kitten is in for potential dangers. If there are dangers, trust me... kittens will find them!

For more information about kitten proofing or for more stories about kittens

getting into difficult situations, read the following articles on our website:

- "Kitten-Proofing Your Home" (www.spcanova.org/kitten-proofing)
- "Holiday Safety for Your Cat and Kitten" (www.spcanova.org/holiday-safety-cat)
- "Kitten Antics and Near Misses" (www.spcanova.org/kitten-antics)



Pepper returns to the scene of the crime, but this time the holes have been blocked.



Gifts in Remembrance

SPCA NOVA welcomes donations made in memory or honor of someone special in your life. Please include the name and address of the person you would like notified of your donation, along with the name of the person or pet being remembered or honored.

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- ♥ **"Aprila"**
~ Shelley Friedman
~ Petra & Douglas
Raymond, our sweet little girl!
- ♥ **"Bailey," dear sweet & gentle**
~ Diana Artemis
- ♥ **"Beauty," "Coby," & "Lola"**
~ Tim & Polly Terriberry
- ♥ **"Biscuit" Lippman**
~ Dawn Archambault-Perry
- ♥ **"Bismarck," our first rottie who was sweet little girl**
~ Jeffrey & Rachel Heisman
- ♥ **"Blossom," who is now chasing squirrels with Bennie**
~ Joe & Lynn Field
- ♥ **"Casey"**
~ Alyssa Harry
- ♥ **"Casey"**
~ Jay Kloosterboer & Barbara Zicari
- ♥ **"Casey," who was a very good cat**
~ Nicole Billman
- ♥ **"Cecil"**
~ Dana Meeker
- ♥ **"Ciao," "Le Roy," & "Flip"**
~ Anonymous
- ♥ **"Daisy" & "Sabrina" Berry**
~ Kathleen MacKinnon
- ♥ **"Dakota," an adorable (& very good) cocker spaniel**
~ Charlotte Whitenight
- ♥ **"Davin" Terriberry**
~ Kathleen MacKinnon
- ♥ **"Ducat" Grossell**
~ Jacqueline Currie
- ♥ **"Duchess" Chase**
~ Tish Robel
- ♥ **"Emmy" & "Grammy," SPCA-rescued cats**
~ Elizabeth Gaver
- ♥ **"Frasier"**
~ Helena Hutton
- ♥ **"Fresco," truly a great dog; so grateful to have adopted from you guys**
~ Melissa & Roger Roehr
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~ Tracy Crump
- ♥ **"Ginger" & "Sugar" Soto**
~ Kathleen MacKinnon
- ♥ **"Harper"**
~ Nancy Law
- ♥ **"Heidi" & "Toby," we miss you**
~ Stephen Chan
- ♥ **"Holly" & "Christopher," who I adopted from SPCA**
~ Gloria & Rick Whitehead
- ♥ **"Kelly," SPCA alumnus**
~ Margaret Regan
- ♥ **"Malloy" Meeker**
~ Kathleen MacKinnon
~ Dana Meeker, my crazy boy
- ♥ **"Max," "Mootza," & "Doozer"**
~ Dana Meeker
- ♥ **"Max," the wonder dog**
~ William Hall
- ♥ **"Midnight," a true blessing to our family**
~ James & Karen Kinder
- ♥ **"Molly" Moran**
~ James Overdahl & Janis Johnson
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- ♥ **"Padre" & "Joey"**
~ Thomas Berg
- ♥ **"Peanut"**
~ Laura Bolstad
- ♥ **"Pippin"**
~ Steve & Raquel Hecker
- ♥ **"Pippin"**
~ Amy Verner
- ♥ **"Pouncers" Dalby**
~ Lyndsay Hanna
- ♥ **"Princess," light of my life**
~ Lene Jensen
- ♥ **"Puppy"**
~ Nancy Law
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~ Theodore Macaluso
- ♥ **"Rosie"**
~ Kenneth Black
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In Honor of

- ♥ "Angie" & "Bonnie,"
Tucson, AZ
~ Janice Seeger
- ♥ "Cindi" (Cinnamon),
adopted from SPCA
NOVA in 2010
~ Kitty & Tad McCall
- ♥ "Fluffy" & "Prince," my
foster cats
~ Kathleen MacKinnon
- ♥ "Kelsey," adopted in 2010
~ Paula Slan
- ♥ "Lily," "Zena," "Cleo,"
"Gabby," & "Mozart"
~ Willard & Nancy Calvert
- ♥ "London," a beloved
member of the Hermes
family
~ Matthew Hermes
- ♥ "Luna"
~ Debra Berry
- ♥ "Lyn," formerly Jamie
Sue, for 1-year adoption
anniversary!
~ Kevin & Ryan Starr
- ♥ "Max"
~ Arman Ravery & Suzanne
Rotherell
- ♥ "Molly" & "Twix"
~ Heather & Stephen
Walrath
- ♥ "Mosby" & "Penny"
~ Jacqueline Hargest &
Bradley P Edwards
- ♥ "Murphy"
~ Clinton M Stauffer
- ♥ "Orio" & "SJ" Grange
~ Lori Grange
- ♥ "Padre"
~ Thomas Berg
- ♥ "Sierra," who wouldn't
have been my kitty had it
not been for SPCA
~ Manuela Moeller

- ♥ "Sundance"
~ Janet Spore
- ♥ "Walter," formerly Ryker,
SPCA alum
~ Mary Minette & Steve
Griffith
- ♥ "Woody," my sweet SPCA
hound
~ Jill Welsh
- ♥ All my girls
~ Suzanne Pastura
- ♥ All the great SPCA fosters
and volunteers
~ Deborah Miles
- ♥ Anna Marie Delaney
~ Maria Retan
- ♥ Bock, Parkinson, &
Woodrow
~ Chris Prochaska
- ♥ Calvin Haynes' 2nd
birthday
~ Lisa Etheredge
- ♥ Charles L. Gholz
~ Eugene Gholz
- ♥ Chester McKnight &
"Tupelo" McKnight
~ Jennifer McKnight
- ♥ Cindy Kroger for her
birthday
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~ Katie Gaver
- ♥ Ellen Kamilakis
~ PRSA, Richmond Chapter
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Beyderman
~ Jessie Beyderman

- ♥ Ingrid King
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- ♥ Joan Hughes, who brought
Ginger & Buffy into my life
~ Toni Burger
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Long's marriage
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~ Sally Silberman
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Mother's Day to a great cat
lady!
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~ Shelley Friedman
- ♥ Renee Potter's birthday
~ Bernadette Bishop Pirollo
- ♥ Robert Harnesberger
~ Deborah Harnesberger
- ♥ Sandy Soto
~ Margaret Fisher
~ Erin Sweeney, for her
service to the SPCA

- ♥ Sheryl Asen's birthday
~ Kenneth Black
- ♥ Stephen, my dad, who
always looks out for little
guys - teaching patience
& kindness
~ Patrick Barna
- ♥ Susan Cappitelli
~ Christopher Neumann
- ♥ Tara (aka Rosa) Fye
~ James & Renee Fye
- ♥ The people who took care
of Ino & Dumpling (Daisy
& Violet)
~ Maureen & Vincent La
Piana
- ♥ Those who rescued &
fostered our wonderful
cats, Gomez & Pedro
~ Russ & Vicki Topping
- ♥ Valentine Mills
~ Olivia Lawton



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Dogs Rescued from Hoarding

BY **Katie McHenry**

In August, a hoarding situation in southwest Virginia prompted an animal control investigation, and nearby Ceres-based Lost Fantasy Rescue stepped in to rescue several dogs. The dogs were living in cages stacked one upon the other in a camper trailer. None of the dogs were housebroken, nor had most been socialized. Most were fearful of people, and one had a neurological disorder.

Due to limited resources, Lost Fantasy contacted SPCA NOVA for assistance. We agreed to take in two of the dogs, Poppy and Dax. They were taken to Ragged Mountain Dogs, where we board most of our dogs. Lisa Reid, who owns the rescue and boarding facility, agreed to take another two dogs, Daisy and Lilly. None of these dogs had ever had any vetting so they received their first-ever exams, vaccinations, heartworm testing, and, of course, spaying/neutering. Thankfully, all four turned out to be healthy.

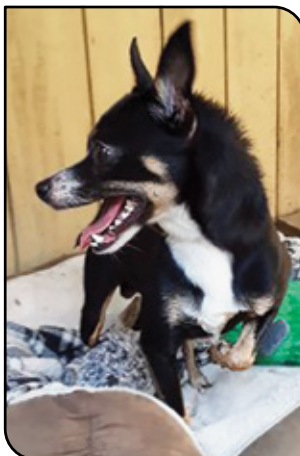
While Poppy and Dax seemed to have had some degree of socialization, it was clear that they had never received house training or learned basic commands. They were also fearful of walking

on certain surfaces because they had spent most of their lives in cages. While at Ragged Mountain Dogs, they were put on a regular schedule for feeding, walks, and play time. Lisa worked to teach them basic commands and get them more comfortable with people.

Poppy did so well that she has already been adopted, and, as of this writing, Dax's adoption is pending. Poppy and Dax's adoptive families understand that they're basically adopting adult puppies who need to learn everything from scratch.

What Is Hoarding?

According to the ASPCA, a quarter of a million animals are victims of hoarding every year, which is an issue that straddles animal welfare, mental health, and public safety. Best Friends Animal Society (BFAS) classifies hoarding as "when individuals accumulate animals in numbers that exceed their ability to provide for the animals' basic needs, resulting in a situation that causes harm to the animals," noting that hoarding exists on a spectrum. In most cases, hoarding is the result of mental illness, when the



LEFT: Dax is a sweetheart whose adoption is pending. RIGHT: Poppy is doing well with her new adoptive parents.

hoarder doesn't recognize the suffering they are inflicting on the animals in their care.

In many cases, dozens or even hundreds of animals are confined to a small space, sometimes in cages but often roaming freely. There can be animal waste on the floor, sometimes so much that it produces enough ammonia to harm the animals' eyes and lungs. Animals might have to compete for food. Many have never been properly socialized. Their physical health is often neglected, and it's not unusual for animal control officers to find multiple dead animals.

Health, Behavior

Most dogs rescued from hoarding situations have both physical and mental/emotional health issues. Physical issues can include hair and skin issues, parasites, eye and ear infections,

dental disease, injuries and malnutrition. Mental health issues can include fear (to humans, other dogs, sudden movements, loud noises), aversion to human touch, attention-seeking behaviors and compulsions.

In many cases, dogs rescued from hoarding situations routinely used an entire home as their bathroom, which means that training them to use the bathroom only outdoors and at certain times can be a challenge. They might also exhibit repetitive or compulsive behaviors, such as licking, chewing, pacing, or spinning in circles in order to cope with boredom or anxiety. Training them can be more difficult, as their fear clouds their cognitive abilities, including concentration.

Rehabilitation

According to a BFAS study, the most important

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tool in rehabilitating dogs rescued from hoarders is *patience*. A lifetime, often years, of emotional trauma won't disappear overnight. Other tools include introducing them to a friendly, confident dog to show them the ropes; showing them love and affection; sending them to obedience classes; and having a consistent routine. But every dog will learn to trust and feel safe in their own time.

More Information

BFAS worked with the University of Pennsylvania to produce a manual on this topic: www.bit.ly/bfas-hoarding.

Special Thanks

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TWELVE-YEAR OLD LIA G., an amateur photographer, made notecards of her photographs and sold them to raise funds for the SPCA of Northern Virginia. She says "I have always wanted to find ways to help the planet and animals. When I started taking pictures, I thought that I could create things that I could sell to raise money to help animals, especially because of what is going on with COVID-19. I hope to continue to use my photography to help make the planet a better place. I am grateful to everyone who bought my notecards so that we can all help animals in need."

WE ARE GRATEFUL for the following bequests:

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Taming Feral Kittens

**Learn how to socialize
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page 1



Seizing a Golden Opportunity

**How fostering a dog turned
into a perfect match**

page 4



Too Many Dogs Can Be a Bad Thing

**Dogs rescued from an
overcrowded residence**

page 14