

Henrietta



Hello ARL!

On May 2, 2009, my then 6 year-old granddaughter, Amelia, and I planned our trip to the ARL with the sole purpose of finding a cat companion to bring home. We'd checked out the website and decided that a senior kitty would be best suited to my small apartment. We thought it couldn't be a coincidence that there was a handsome big marmalade male named Poppy (Amelia's nickname for her grandfather) and a gorgeous female named. . . Amelia! So off we went to the Westbrook shelter with list in hand, assured that one of these cats would be our new forever friend.

Amelia and I were rather disappointed to learn that Amelia had been adopted only a couple of hours before our arrival. And right that minute Poppy was being visited by a potential new family. And yes, Poppy was chosen, too. What were we to do? The other senior cats in residence had physical ailments that would probably prove too costly for my budget and a couple of them didn't take to children well.

The ARL volunteer finally led us to a cage on the bottom row with two cats enclosed and she explained that both kitties were FIV positive and couldn't be housed with uninfected animals. Okie, a black female who'd been found as a stray in Buxton, was crouched back as far as she could go in a protected nook. She was between one and two years-old they told us. Her coat was dull, she was quite thin, and she was rather distrustful and afraid. When I reached in to pat her, she gave me a good whack with her paw, but when we visited with her in a small room nearby, she was willing to accept a few caresses - grudgingly - and readily ate up some treats we offered her. However tentative and inauspicious our first encounter, somehow we knew that she was the one that needed to come home with us.



After a week of trying out various possible names, Henrietta was the one that seemed to fit best. Henrietta's normal mode was standoffish for the first few weeks in her new forever home; she was always detached and aloof. She sat back and watched us, ate what we offered her, and never showed an interest in toys and games. The one thing she seemed to like was a good brushing, so we brushed her lots! Her dull black coat soon grew shiny and gorgeous and showed off the thin row of white hairs that circle her throat like a pearl necklace. And she gained some weight - perhaps a little TOO much at first!.

One day when she'd been with us for a few months, I laid next to her on the bed talking to her and wondered out loud if she'd ever really had a chance to play? Other than the fact that she was already familiar with good indoor cat etiquette and knew immediately that couches and beds were ideal for catnaps, we knew nothing about her history beyond the fact that she'd been found as a stray. So I began rolling a little plastic ball with a bell in it back and forth in front of on the blanket. I must have done that for nearly 5 minutes with no response, but suddenly Henrietta reached out a paw and caught the bell in mid-roll. We had a little game that day for the very first time!

The next few months saw our beautiful kitty begin to blossom in several ways. She decided that her favorite toy was a simple length of ribbon and we experimented with various ways to play with it. The ribbon is now long-gone and she favors a length of jute which she scratched off an old cane chair all by herself! And when she wants to play, she now issues a clear invitation by staring at me until she gets my attention, then folding her ears back and dashing as fast as she can go into the bedroom. I'm an obedient companion and usually comply!

The next big step came the day she tentatively crawled on my lap when I was sitting on the couch with my feet out reading. From that day forward, she began jumping on my lap almost every time I sat down. I barely have a chance to sit down all the way before Henrietta jumps up. And my afternoon nap is incomplete without her warm body curled on top of me on the couch!

The attached photo shows off her gorgeous coat and alert, friendly demeanor. It's been a slow process for Henrietta to learn that she is wanted here. She's not the fearful, distrusting girl we first brought home almost a year and a half ago. Our bond has grown slowly and steadily until I can no longer imagine my life without her in it - and I think that feeling is mutual!. Henrietta has learned to trust, learned how to play, and I think, finally, she's learned that she really has a forever home where she's loved and safe.

Thank you, ARL, for saving our fur-girl so that she could find her way to our home and hearts!

With gratitude and warm regards,
Sue G. (and Amelia)
Portland, ME