



TattleTails & Tidbits



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A New Year Begins

As we head into the heart of our winter months here at Spring Farm CARES, I always think things will get quieter and more contemplative. And every year I think, "What the heck were you thinking!" This issue marks the second year of this journal Tattle Tails and Tidbits. We hope you are enjoying the stories and helpful articles that we share. The journal is a bi-monthly, on-line publication only. If you'd like to sign up to receive it in your in-box the day it comes out, please just sign up for our email list at <https://www.springfarmcares.org/get-involved/mailling-list/>

Winter months bring a lot of hard work for the animal caretakers to be sure all of our animals are kept warm and cozy, while at the same time providing enrichment on the days when they cannot get out of the barn due to snow/ice conditions. Meanwhile, cats stay cuddled up in their warm beds and blankets, not caring as much what it is doing outside as long as their human friends feed them on time.

We thank you for your support and wish you all the best in this new year!

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How to Wreck Your Home and Love it

by Bonnie Reynolds



Part of my office staff at work. Handsome and Sunny warm the keyboard. Walker ensures my unobstructed view of the screen.

Last July I took a call regarding a mother cat with four newborns in need. We were jam-packed at our small animal facility - the Hall - not even a corner available in which to put them, with the 160+ cats that we already care for. So I did something I had never done before. In the old family homestead where I live, there is a small back room. The mother would tend them, they'd be no bother for me. It would be five or six weeks before they began to run around. We would then move them into a pen in the Hall where adopters could see them. As for the mother ... well, though I had fervently sworn never to add to the cats who I was already fostering, Walker and Camile. I would add her to my fosters. Simple. No problem.

Famous last words. First, I made the grave error of not handling the kittens much. Things were really busy round here and I basically left them, in their big box, to the excellent attentions of their mama, Brinker, a pitifully skinny black tiger who ate an enormous amount of food each day to rebuild her own body and feed her babies. At four weeks, the kittens began climbing out of the box. That was dispensed with and the kittens, three black tigers and a solid black, got the run of that little room.

At that point I discovered a strange thing, and an alarm bell went off in my head. The kittens wouldn't tolerate being petted, held, or picked up. They weren't afraid of me, they just avoided me. They had no use for me whatsoever. I never even heard a one of them purr. And if their attitudes continued ... well, they wouldn't "show" well to adopters and wouldn't get adopted. So they would live out their lives as oddball recluses in one of the rooms in the hall. My fault. I should have gotten them accustomed to being held and cuddled while they were tiny. My fault. And what was I to do with them? Was I doomed to keep them? (Hmmm. I wonder. Was there really Crafty Kitten Collusion at work here?)

I watched them - the boys, Sunny, Handsome and Inky, and the girl, Clementine, slowly destroy my home. At first, I enlarged their world to just the kitchen and my office. They were into everything, onto everything, racing over everything, playing with everything that they found then knocking it to the floor. Places so high that I was sure they could not reach, they reached - and knocked off whatever was there. I cleared off surfaces and left what was already on the floor on the floor. It looked as though a tornado had come through. They found their ways through the barriers and into the living room, dining room, library and a Kitten's Dream of things to knock to the floor - including lamps, which of course must be climbed. Again I just left things on the floor while desperately clearing off breakable things, irreplaceable family photos and mementos. Getting them into the library, I closed the door ... which the kittens vociferously resented. But things kept going into the library, as the kittens ingeniously found more and more stuff to knock about.

My home is transformed now. No knickknacks. No photos. Just empty surfaces. But another strange thing happened. One by one, the kittens found my desk. They must have then had a meeting and decided that I needed an Office Staff. Because now they spend much of their time curled there on the desk beside me. They seem to want to be beside me now. And even to be petted. While the girl, Clementine, has decided that my lap is the best place in the world to be. She curls up and gazes up at me with such love and adoration that my heart simply melts. And now suddenly Sunny, the largest male, has decided to contest her for that lap. While watching them all as they cuddle on the desk beside me is relaxing and peaceful beyond belief.

Yes, this is their home. The only place they have known. It would have been cruel to exile them to the Hall. They belong here. Beside me. As they mature, they will outgrow the need to send things crashing to the floor. Little by little I will be able to put my knickknacks back. And so now I have seven fosters instead of my fervently sworn "just two."

Sanctuary Spotlight: Felix and Leo

by Dawn Hayman



Leo (grey) and Felix (brown) at age 20 years.

Donkeys Felix and Leo have the distinction of being the equines that have been here at Spring Farm the longest. They arrived in 2003 from a horrific animal cruelty case. Leo was just 4 months old and barely weaned off a bottle (which he wasn't being given as needed). Felix was about 8 months old. The two of them had spent those early days of their lives in pure hell. They were so emaciated and starved that our employee, Jeff Eyre, picked Leo up and carried him in under his arms. Their eyes held no light. They had given up.

It was a cold afternoon in November when they arrived. That night, temps dove into the single digits. Veterinarians told us that they would not have survived the night where they were. We got them just in the nick of time. They spent their first months in Margot and Dawn's heated garage as they had literally no body fat to keep them warm. A stall was quickly built for them there and they were catered to night and day. We watched as they

went from total starvation to slowly eating and putting on much needed weight. It had to be a slow process to get their bodies reacquainted to food. Gradually, they began to put on weight and grow. They were still just babies! But the best part was seeing the light return in their eyes. That was priceless.

By spring, they were well enough to be integrated into the small barn attached to Margot and Dawn's house. The "little barn", as we call it, was perfect for them. They joined the herd of 3 horses and some goats and they began to thrive. This was their home. And while their physical health kept on improving by leaps and bounds, we also had to nurse their emotional and spiritual health. Felix in particular suffered from horrific nightmares. We'd wake up to his screaming at night and running in blind panic in circles in his stall. These flashbacks were regular at first. They subsided gradually and are now gone, but they lasted for years.

It is hard to believe that Felix and Leo are now 20 years old. They are such a part of this farm. Together, they went through so much. They stick with one another like glue. That is not to say that they always get along, however. Leo, the smaller of the two, is the undisputed boss, and he doesn't let Felix forget it. Felix, however, needs no reminder. Felix is super-sensitive, and tuned in to everything around him. Both love hugs but Felix will literally melt into a full body hug when we put our arms around his big neck.



*Leo and Margot (left) and Felix and Dawn (right) - Dec. 2003
Just 3 weeks after their arrival*

They are grateful for their forever home. These two donkeys saw and experienced things in their lives that no one should have to endure – animal or human. Yet, they still love deeply. They love humans and they love to let their human friends know that. They have been an inspiration on how to heal trauma and find peace.

Twenty years is a long time. Hopefully they will be here for over 20 more. Donkeys can live to be 40-50 years old. Our very first donkey Amber, who was still here when Felix and Leo arrived, and who helped raise them, lived to be 50! The boys used to call Amber "the wise grandmother donkey." And Amber used to call them "the wise guys." There is one thing we know for sure – love can overcome darkness and heal in very profound ways. Felix and Leo are living proof of that.

A Gift of Trust

by Dawn E. Hayman



Maya

In early August, Margot and I experienced the loss of two of our three family dogs. Grace, age 12, and Calee, age 15 had been declining. But we never expected to lose both of them just one week apart. That left our youngest dog Jessie, age 11, by himself. Jessie had never been an only dog. When we got him as a puppy, he went from a litter of 9 into our pack of 9 dogs. He and Grace were the youngest and were inseparable. He went into a depression with her loss. Margot and I knew he would need another dog companion, but finding the right one for him and for us was going to be key. Jessie has a lot of orthopedic problems and we realized a young puppy would be too much on him. We also knew we needed a smaller size dog.

A few weeks later, a situation presented itself where we met a very shy six-month-old female lab mix at a local rescue. We knew when we met her that she was the one. Margot and I have had a total of 15 dogs over the past 25 years, most of them with special needs and several of them had been painfully shy. We felt that this puppy would do well with us. Jessie met her and seemed to approve and we officially adopted her into our family. We named her Maya.

Although she was thought to be a lab/hound mix, genetic testing shows that Maya is actually chow/rottweiler/boxer/german shepherd/lab. Her painfully shy demeanor melted away in short order in our home, especially with Jessie. It was clear that Jessie quickly became her security blanket and she loved to snuggle and sleep with him. We were literally watching two hearts healing at the same time with one another.

But Maya was starting to become more of a handful. She proved to be very fearful of so many things. She was afraid of the dark. Afraid of deer behind our house. Terrified of the television the few times we put it on. And she was very apprehensive when meeting new people. That fear would translate into frantic barking. Maya also started to play way too rough for Jessie. We enrolled her in doggie daycare and training classes. She started to thrive and learn boundaries. But there was something always a bit aloof about her. Margot and I talked many times that we wondered if she fully understood that she was in her permanent home now. Her young life had been filled with moving from foster home to foster home as she made her way out of a shelter and eventually into the rescue from where we adopted her. They did plenty of dog socialization along the way so that she got to play with lots of other dogs. I suddenly realized, that life in our home was probably looking and feeling like the other foster homes. And she was not fully bonding because she “knew” she’d just be moved again. So, why bother?

I enjoy telling stories to our animals. Sometimes they are just silly stories to entertain them. In reality, I’m probably only entertaining myself and the other humans around at the time. But the animals always patiently humor me. Maya, however, would never sit still long enough for a story. And she’d never make eye contact for very long. She was always on the move. On Christmas Eve that changed.

Christmas eve, Maya came wandering over to where Margot and I were sitting. I said, “Maya, do you know what day this is? It’s Christmas eve. Do you know what happens at Christmas?” This was Maya’s first Christmas. I

didn't think she would care about what I was saying. But something was different. She began to actually listen.

I continued, "Christmas is when wishes come true and magic happens. It's a time for joy and gratitude."

At this point, Maya sat down with great purpose and looked me in the eye. She held eye contact with me for the entire rest of my story.

"What is it that you have always wanted in your life Maya? A permanent family right?" She maintained steady eye contact but at this point I saw something that hit me straight in the heart. Without moving her head, her eyes darted away and she looked incredibly sad. This was no longer a silly conversation. She was really taking every word in deeply. I energetically met her in that moment, understanding that this was a serious conversation now.



Jessie & Maya

I continued, "Maya, you have received your wish. You have found your forever home. Right here with us. You never have to leave. You are home."

Maya quickly glanced at Margot and then Jessie. She resumed eye contact with me and my heart could feel hers. It was filled with total disbelief. "Seriously?" she said. "For real?"

"For real!" I assured her. "It's a wish come true. You made it! You are home."

I will never forget the look in those eyes and the way she lit up. She jumped up in my lap and wrapped her paws around my arm and just hugged with all her might. Margot and I both hugged her. She was overjoyed and began running around the house in celebration.

We were deeply moved. Until then, she hadn't understood. She hadn't known that she could even hope for a forever home. Now at 11 months old, on her first Christmas Eve, she finally understood. She is home.

Frequently Asked

by Dawn Hayman

Question: Do animals understand us when we talk to them? And if so, why don't they do what we tell them to do?

Dawn: I am asked this question all the time. Yes, animals understand us when we talk to them. However, a lot depends on how clear our communication is to them and if what we are asking of them is realistic for them. I can answer this question with another question. Do your children understand what you are telling them? If so, why won't they do what you tell them to do? In fact, same holds true for other adults as well!

Remember, communication is a two-way street. We need to be sure we are clear with our communications in a way that makes sense to whomever we are communicating with. Animals understand us, but do we take the time to understand them? Do we look at things from their perspective? Are we open to hearing their answers?

A Very Lucky Dog

by Christine Schneider, DVM cVMA, CHPV



Tina at the shelter

One day in August, a shelter's Facebook post caught my eye. A 16-year old dog had been brought to the shelter that day as her family was moving and was unable to bring her with them. Her skin was horrendous, nails were overgrown and she looked so scared and timid in the pictures they posted. The shelter was looking for a foster home to provide hospice care due to the dog's old age. I immediately screen-shotted the post and sent it to my husband, who at this point was accustomed to my antics of bringing pets home from the clinic or cruelty investigations. I plead my case – who else could provide a better foster home than a veterinarian who had just become certified in hospice and palliative care?

A few days later, I drove down to the shelter to pick her up. The tiny, 13-pound old lady immediately leapt into the car and sat on my lap and stayed there the entire drive home. Upon entering my house, she cautiously walked up to my 80-pound pitbull, wagged her tail, licked her on the nose and then plopped herself on the couch and fell asleep. The various cats came up throughout the day, smelling their new friend. Everyone deemed her acceptable and Tina seamlessly became a part of our household as if she had always been there.

After many medicated baths, several kinds of pills to help control the skin infections and the itching, and a special hypoallergenic diet – her skin has returned to normal. Surprisingly, all the testing we did was incredibly normal for Tina's age. I made the cautious decision to spay her – it is much easier for a dog her age to undergo a surgery while she is healthy, rather than attempt it if she develops complications, such as pyometra or mammary tumors. She recovered from the surgery as if nothing ever happened. She currently spends the majority of the day sleeping on the couch wrapped up in her favorite blanket and the remaining time looking for food and snacks or snuggling with my husband.

My veterinary oath dictates that I use my knowledge to “prevent and relieve animal suffering,” which is applied 99% of the time to other people's pets. But the other 1% of the time is dedicated to the animals that live at my house whom my husband and I have taken in as our own. Tina and my family both benefited from her rescue that day back in August – she hit the medical jackpot by being adopted by a veterinarian and we get to enjoy the best golden years of her life.



Tina finds a whole new life

Release of the Bittern

by Matt Perry



American Bittern

There are two species of bittern that live in North America, the Raven-sized American Bittern, and the Robin-sized Least Bittern. Both are uncommon and elusive birds of the marshlands. Like their relatives, the herons and egrets, bitterns are long-legged, wading birds, equipped with spear-like bills. They are patient hunters, slow stalkers, and quick stabbers. They primarily prey on fish and amphibians, which they either lay in wait for at a marsh pool, or actively seek out by prowling through cattail beds. Unlike their more flamboyant relatives, bitterns are camouflaged to blend in with their surroundings. They don't just look like the reeds around them, they act like them too. They sometimes sway back and forth to mimic

their movement in the wind. When a perceived predator is nearby, a bittern will point its beak skyward, and become one with the veil of reeds. The tawny vertical streaks on the bird's light underside resemble brown cattail leaves and its upward pointing bill accentuates the effect. Interestingly, the bird can look forward with both eyes while holding its beak in this peculiar way.

A couple of years ago, we conducted a release of an American Bittern at the nature sanctuary. The bird had come to us from a local wildlife rehabilitator. Safely stowed in a pet carrier, we walked the odd bird about a half mile into the sanctuary and to one of our beaver ponds. Once reaching the pond, we kept the cage door closed for a half hour to allow the bittern to acclimate to the area's sights and sounds before releasing him. As it happened, there were lots of things to see and hear. Songbirds and waterfowl were all around and vocalizing. We then opened the carrier door, stood back, and waited for the bittern to disembark. After ten minutes the bird ventured out. His first steps to freedom were tenuous. His head was a super-sensor, set at the top of a long, snake-like neck. His sinuous neck bent and twisted about as he assessed his surroundings. He then surprised us by striding uphill into the field instead of downhill to the pond. Where did he think he was going? His impeccable camouflage, intended for providing concealment in marsh vegetation, worked just as effectively in November goldenrods. We quickly lost sight of him as he melted into the meadow. Fortunately, there were three of us doing the release. We got out ahead of him and managed to discourage him from pressing further into the field. Finally, nearly an hour post release, the Bittern reached the water. He wasted no time wading across the pond and then crossing into a Beaver-made canal that radiated out from the shore. While in the canal he stabbed at the water a couple of times with his stiletto bill but did not catch anything. His next move was to walk over the beaver dam and disappear into the brambles below. For the next several days we monitored the area closely but did not see him.



American Bittern just prior to release

Finally, on Thanksgiving Day, I saw the bittern again. He was close to the site where we released him more than two weeks earlier. Upon my arrival, he flushed into the air and made an excellent flight to one of the lower ponds. I was happy to see him fly since that meant he would be able to migrate south before the snow comes and the water freezes. Our hope was that come the spring he would return to one of the beaver ponds for a visit. As it happened, we didn't see him that spring, but perhaps he was there, expertly concealed and skulking silently among the cattails.



Question and Answer with Animal Communicator Dawn Hayman

Question: Do animals experience PTSD? And if so, what can we do to help them?

From Dawn: This is a huge topic so this answer will only scratch the surface. I have worked with many animals who have been through and survived all sorts of trauma. It is my experience that animals are no different than humans on the various forms of PTSD that they can experience. The problem is that we humans often fail to recognize when an animal has PTSD (and I can also make the case that we often don't understand our fellow humans who experience PTSD as well.)



Kernel in his pasture

Yes, animals experience PTSD. And just like humans, it expresses itself in various ways. I'll use one of our horses, Kernel, as an example. Kernel came to us from a very traumatic animal cruelty case. He is a big horse. And he was terrified of things and would often startle "for no apparent reason." Truth was, that there were reasons and they were usually very small things that were large triggers. For example, someone replaced a board on a fence near the entrance to the barn while Kernel was out to pasture. The board had a sales sticker still on it. As Kernel was led into the barn at his regular time with his regular handler, he suddenly stopped and reared up snorting. At first, no one could figure out why. Then one of his caretakers noticed the sticker on the board. None of the other horses even noticed the sticker or cared. Kernel experiences hypervigilance. It is a part of PTSD. Any little thing that is out of place instantly becomes a trigger.

Kernel could easily be written off as a "crazy horse" who spooks at everything. Horses like that are frequently so labeled. We knew never to push him past something that scared him but instead to work with him and help him to regain his confidence. Gradually, his hypervigilance has lessened. But it has taken years for him to settle, heal, and trust again. He may always have an issue with startling. But we humans need to understand that he is reacting to something we cannot see. Hypervigilance can cause/be caused by emotional flashbacks. In other words, there may not be anything physically in the here and now that causes the spooking behavior. But he can be responding to a trigger linked to something from the past that we cannot see or know.

Animals are actually very good at healing once they are safe and loved. But sometimes they need us humans to slow down and understand that when they have a fear that doesn't seem logical to us, they may be dealing with something bigger than we can know or understand.

We also need to let them heal. Often I hear people introduce their animals, years after they adopted them, by saying, "This is my rescue dog. He was really abused and in horrible condition." When we do this, we are keeping that trauma alive in the present for them. It is ok to acknowledge their past. But we also need to enable them to move forward and not label them by something that happened to them years ago. They are not that abused animal anymore. Now they are loved and safe with you. We need to allow them to heal.