

Nature Girl Adopts New Pets

As we all know, Nature Girl and the Spousal Unit lost their last cat, Scootie, to old age on March 4. She was mourned, reawakening mourning for the others who had gone before: ToyBoy, Tabatha, and Nod.

NG and the SU looked at each other and said, "Well, we should do all those things we talked about doing when we don't have pets. We can remodel the house and add that home office. We can gut the bathroom and re-do it. We can take a long trip overseas."

Calmer heads prevailed. Once we started tallying the cost of said projects, we said, "Ah, heck. Let's just paint the interior walls. We haven't had them painted in 8 years. It's time."

Sticker shock. We got bids that ranged from ludicrously low to amazingly high. Okay. Compromise. Learn to live with the house as is. Put the remodeling on hold. And traveling not high on our list any more since we are both so occupied with other things for our meager free time (as in, my publishing career and the SU's aspiring career as a photographer).

So ... put ALL that stuff on hold. We drifted for a few months, not anxious to adopt again but knowing we would. Last Saturday, almost 3 months to the day of Scootie Loss, we went to the pound. There were surprisingly few animals available, only a dozen or two (it's all relative, I guess). I saw one that I was taken with right away. "Mia" her name was, a petite black cat with a small spot of white on the chest. She was affectionate but a bit skittish. The SU didn't really connect to her, but in another room we saw "Casey", a big, beefy blond guy who immediately flopped over for a belly rub.

Okay. Let's look at Casey. What's not to like? Affectionate, outgoing, happy. Put Casey with Mia. A bit of indifference, a bit of hiss, but no biggie. Huddled conference with the SU, and the papers were signed, the cats were put in carriers, and we were on our way home with 2 mewling passengers in the back seat.

At home, I let Casey out first, walking around with him in my arms to introduce him to the important sites: litter box and water bowl. Then I put him down in the downstairs family room and went upstairs to do the same with Mia.

No no no. Mia shot out of that box like devils were after her and vanished down the hall. Okay. Where can a small cat hide? I'd had cats for almost 20 years, and we had cat-proofed the house. I was confident I'd find her easily.

An hour later I was still looking for her AND Casey. Both had vanished. I immediately mentally renamed the cats "M.I.A." and "A.W.O.L." I trudged around the house with flashlight in hand, searching everywhere. And guess what -- our house isn't

as cat proof as we thought! We'd catproofed it against ELDERLY cats, not a 5-year-old (Awol) and a 1 year old (Mia).

I eventually found Mia tucked behind a chest in the closet. I could have SWORN that space wouldn't hold a cat. And Awol -- he was under the bed, balanced on a support board. All I could see was his tail hanging down.

Okay, fine. Hang out and relax, guys. No problem. Eventually Awol came out to explore every square inch of the house -- every window, every book, every nook, every cranny. Parts of my home were dusted by kitty whiskers that have never been dusted before. Mia was a bit more reticent, but did eventually come out to dance around, slipping under the couch now and again when life got a bit stressful (gee, I wish I could do that).

And so passed the first day of new cats.

I was greeted at 2:30 a.m. by the scratching noise of a cat running for her life as I swung my legs out of bed to go to the bathroom. Then I heard an ominous 'crash' as something hit the floor. The SU was snoring loudly (summer cold had him in its grips), so I got up and went to investigate. It was no problem: somebody (probably beefy and blond) had jumped up on the counter and knocked over some mugs. Our other cats had long left counter-jumping behind them, so I made a mental note to revisit Things In High Places.

Mia had vanished, probably to the downstairs under the SU's chair (a recliner and a new favorite cat spot). I went back to bed, but the snoring was too much for me, so I went back to the living room. I tried to doze on the couch, but Awol was too excited by the fact I was there and insisted on head butting me until I finally got up. I went to the gym, exercised, came home and settled down with the Sunday paper. Mia drifted upstairs to join me, relaxed and purring before going off on some kitty exploration of her own (she'd holed up most of the previous day in one hiding place or another, so I figured it was time to explore).

Oh happy day. A happy cat. I read the paper and realized I hadn't seen Awol for a while. Hmm. Better check. Grab flashlight, start to look.

And look.

And look.

And look.

Two hours later I had NO cats and no idea where cats could be. I had examined every conceivable spot, even those that I was sure a cat couldn't access. As I was standing in the laundry room, considering my options, I heard a soft 'mew'. I checked behind the washer (where Mia hid the day before), but I'd blocked that area off. No cat. I checked behind the dryer (where Awol had hid the day before), but again: I'd blocked it off. No cat. I picked up the dry cat food packets the pound had given us to move the items aside. Rattle rattle rattle.

Mew.

I looked up.

Yep. The drop ceiling.

How? you ask. I don't know, I reply. Unless, possibly: jump to counter, jump to top of cabinet, squirt up over the ductwork, and up onto the ceiling through the one square left undone in a spot no human without contortionist ability can access. Cursing softly, I grabbed my foldable ladder, climbed up, and pushed out a ceiling tile.

Remember my stories of the spider king? I had visions, but I squashed them. I was a woman with a mission, an owner missing a cat, a pet parent who'd fallen down on the job. I shone my flashlight around, and lo and behold, there he was, squished under a pipe, looking at me. I think he'd lost track of where he'd been, because as soon as he saw me, he made a beeline. I lured him nearer with food, tussled him out of the hole, and voila, cat was found. As a side note, a Spider King did drop into the sink but I was ruthless and flushed him downward. Then I put a bowl full of water over the drain, just in case.

Yea! One cat was found.

Oh. One cat.

Hmm.

Now I had my hands full, because Awol thought that adventure was so much fun he wanted to go back and do it again. He kept trying to jump back up onto the counter, scattering food, dishes, flashlights everywhere. Or maybe there was a mouse up there. I don't know. Regardless, I had to close the laundry room door (which has never been closed because that's where litter boxes live). Brute force, and finally, it closed. I stuffed the blond beast into a carrier, put him in the garage (he was yelling so loud I couldn't hear myself think), and I proceeded to look for Missing Cat #2.

Three hours later and still not found. I removed every ceiling tile I could find, tapped on walls and ceilings in the other rooms, did everything. I awakened the SU who helped look briefly, but he was sick and could barely stay on his feet. I resumed the search, shining my flashlight into every conceivable place. I finally admitted defeat and decided to take Casey/newly named "Houdini" back to the pound. Maybe if we was out of the house, Mia could be enticed out from whatever ceiling niche she occupied. I got out his paperwork and prepared to load him in the car.

I went to discuss all plans with the SU, who was dozing on the porch. I had phone book in hand, looking for 'Pet Extraction' services when Mia sauntered out to join me.

What? Where? How? SU looked at me and shrugged. "Cats."

Argh!!!! Tear out hair, gnash teeth, rend clothing! I'd just spent 5 a.m. to 11 a.m., looking for this (and the other) cat! Am I ready for pet ownership again?

Mia jumped up on my lap, purred, settled down and yawned.

Okay. I'm ready. I went upstairs to release Houdini/Casey from his prison. He sprang out, made a beeline for the laundry room and that enticing black hole, but I had closed the door. Mia saw him coming and went into an inconceivable hiding place: under the aquarium. She had figured out how to slip open the spring-lock door and slide inside among the pumps. She's black. The pumps are black. The whole area is enclosed and pitch black.

I never saw her in any of the many times I looked because it wasn't a conceivable hiding place.

Suffice it to say, we are settling in to our new routine. The SU finally FINISHED the ceiling in the basement which has been unfinished for about 3 years so now no one can get up among the Spider Kings. We blocked up the areas where a narrow, curious cat could get, and we plugged up the holes that might lead to danger. So now we FINALLY have a cat-proofed house ...

... I think.