A Tail of Two Kitties

Consider this a fairy tale: Once upon a time two kittens, born to the same mother on Christmas Day 2020 but adopted by two different families, remained bound to each other forever by powerful, loving ties. We’re not sure we can write “and they all lived happily ever after” yet—but we can say the story has gotten off to a robust start.

“Lucky to be born” is a very understated way to describe Rudolph and Clarice. Their mom, Noelle, was rescued last fall by a good Samaritan who found her bleeding from the mouth and brought the cat inside her home before contacting the Robin I. Kroogman New Haven Animal Shelter. Mitch Gibbs, the assistant animal control officer who answered the call, says that Noelle was dangerously malnourished and dehydrated and unable to eat. Shortly after arriving at the shelter, she was diagnosed by a vet as suffering from severe mouth ulcers. Her discomfort was so great that, according to Mitch, “she eventually rubbed the skin off her jaw down to the bone.” The vet also noted that she was pregnant. At first, everyone feared that the lesions in her mouth might be cancerous, but she responded well to treatment with antibiotics, greeting Christmas with two perfect babies.

A few months later, Laura Maiocco and her 9-year-old twin sons Ronin and Phoenix came to the shelter on a mission. “My sons had wanted a kitten for years—since they were 5,” says Laura, “but we decided to wait until they were old enough to take care of one.” (The family also includes dad Kevin - owner of Land of Paws, a pet-grooming business in Hamden - and a 3-year-old golden retriever, Rita.) By this time, Rudolph and Clarice had grown to be beautiful and rambunctious.

Clarice, a mostly white calico with tan and black accents on her head, back and tail became the image of her mother, while Rudolph, a black-and-white shorthair, took after his dad (or so one likes to imagine). Both are polydactyl, with extra toes giving their front feet a mitten-like look.

Ronin Maiocco and Rudolph fell in love at first sight. “Rudolph came right up to Ronin, sat in his lap and played with him,” says Laura. Deal done. Now, this kitten (renamed Mando in honor of the hero of the Disney + TV series “The Mandalorian”) is an essential part of his new household. “We love him,” says Laura. “He follows us everywhere, sleeps with the boys”—his family has built him a bridge between Ronin’s and Phoenix’s loft beds so he can travel easily between them—and cuddles all the time, which is a big thing in our family; we’re always on top of each other. Rita and he play very nicely. They’ll chase each other a bit, then he’ll bat her nose.”

In short, Mando is busy most of the time. “He loves to sit in our windowsills and look out at the yard,” says Ronin. “He also loves chasing his tail. And he likes computer games. When I’m playing Minecraft, he jumps on my lap and bats at the screen.” Adds Laura, “He does like to climb on computers, which makes online learning a little difficult!” When it’s time to crash, he’s staked out one particular chair that’s now called the “Mando throne.”

But what of Clarice? Ah, thereby hangs a tale. Finalizing Mando’s adoption meant that members of the Maiocco family visited him at the shelter more than once, and on one occasion, they brought Ronin’s and Phoenix’s nanny, Mary Prescott, along. Mary and her husband, Mike, are hardly pet-owning neophytes. At the time, they presided over a fur family of three cats—Mia, Eliza, and Fiona—and two dogs, Tessa (a golden retriever/Australian shepherd mix) and Emmett (a German shepherd/Labrador retriever mix). All are rescues:
Two Kitties  cont’d

Tessa and Emmett from an organization in Tennessee, Mia and Eliza from a North Haven parking lot where they were abandoned at 3 weeks of age (who Mary bottle-nursed), and Fiona from a tree in the family’s backyard in the middle of the night one year ago. Though the Prescotts made strenuous attempts to find this stray kitten’s owner, no one ever claimed her.

Fiona’s well-being was still top of mind when Mary came to the shelter. “She kind of needed a young, energetic friend in the family, because Mia and Eliza are 9 years old now and not into playing with her,” Mary says. “I had been looking online for kittens when Laura Maiocco mentioned that she had seen two siblings at the shelter and didn’t think she could take both. When I went with them to look at Mando I fell for Clarice. She was very dainty, yet was really engaged in playing with her brother. I thought, ‘Fiona will love her.’” Mary was also taken with the kittens’ mom Noelle, who by that time was healthy enough to be adoptable herself. “She’s just stunningly beautiful, and I realized that she was what Clarice was growing up to look like. If I didn’t have my other cats, I would have adopted her, too.”

In her new digs, Clarice became Olivia. “I spend a long time thinking about the names my pets are going to have, because I’m going to be calling them by that name for a very long time,” Mary says. “Right now, all my female animals have names ending in the letter ‘a,’ though that’s not on purpose.”

Mary’s something of a pop culture buff, with a special fondness for all things Disney. “I travel to Walt Disney World a lot, and the hotel where I stay”—Disney’s Old Key West Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.—“has a restaurant named Olivia’s Café. So her name reminds me of my home away from home.” There’s another, more secret connection that Olivia shares with the House of Mouse. “She has markings on her left side that sort of morph into what’s referred to as a ‘hidden Mickey,’ meaning that the pattern looks like Mickey Mouse’s head.

Not always, but when she turns or lies down a certain way. The first time I saw that, I thought it was hysterical.”

Few cats have made themselves at home as quickly as Olivia. She and Fiona are inseparable, whether hanging out in the catio built by their human dad Mike or playing all over the house. “Sometimes they play so hard that I’ll scoop Olivia up and say, ‘Hey, take a break,’” says Mary. “But she’s got the best personality—sweet and adventurous. She doesn’t even faze the older cats: They don’t engage with her, but they’re not grumpy about her.” However, “fazed” is the word for her attitude toward her canine sibs, so far. “Tessa tried to engage her recently and Olivia was like, ‘I’m not sure how to deal with you.’ She just looked at Tessa like, ‘Now, what?’ It was the cutest thing.”

At the Prescott home, no pet need rely on other animals to have fun. The entire space, to hear Mary tell it, is a wonderland of cat climbers, hanging toys and new passageways to explore. Olivia’s favorites include fishing poles, ball towers and a feather that stays on the floor. “We call it her ‘bird,’” Mary says. “She’ll grab it and pop it up in the air, then run through the house with it in her mouth, play with it a bit, then run through the house again. I’ve said to my husband, ‘It’s a good thing she’s an indoor cat, otherwise the real birds would be in trouble!’”

Peoplewise, Olivia is a daddy’s girl. “She loves to cuddle with Mike; I’m a bit jealous,” Mary says. “I was so happy when she jumped in my lap the other day, but then she just walked over to him.” However, Mary doesn’t need to rely on her own animals to have fun. As the full-time nanny for Ronin and Phoenix Maiocco (a post she’s held since they were 4 months old), she gets to be a daily caretaker and buddy for Mando, too. “I’ve got the best of both worlds,” she says. A recent reunion of Mando and Olivia at the Maiocco household was a bit awkward—not surprising for youngsters embarked on separate lives. “They interacted a little, but mostly were checking each other out from afar,” Mary says. “Olivia played with Mando’s toys; Mando watched her. We’ll try it again another time.”

And now, here’s the cherry on top of this sundae of a story. Just as the newsletter went to press, we learned that Mando and Olivia’s mom Noelle has also been adopted into a forever home. We can only hope that ultimately, she will inherit as great and glorious a future as theirs promises to be.
Happy spring to all of our friends! During these challenging times, we hope that you are doing well and staying healthy.

Because we have not yet returned to hosting in-person, community adoption events with the North Shore Animal League America adoption van, we’ve held live virtual adoption events where people can meet our adoptable animals over the Internet. We have found these online events to be very useful as live viewers who watch the live event can ask questions about our animals and get answers almost immediately. People can also watch the videos after the events have taken place. Our virtual events have had thousands of views and have showcased our wonderful dogs and cats.

Your ever-generous support of our volunteer group helps us provide care for some of the dogs and cats who entered our shelter in need of medical attention. One such dog is Layla, who came to us with a heart murmur. We are pleased to announce that she is in now well and in her forever home. We appreciate your kindness in giving us much-needed funds that help us offer our shelter animals a better life.

Please check our social media sites to learn about our adoptable animals and other important information concerning the FNHAS. Right now we are hosting meetings with our adoptable pets by appointment only, but the shelter is open if you would like to stop by to fill out an application. Stay well and thank you again for your support.
Janice Abele in memory of Cashmere and Ozzie.
Anne Bailey in memory of Misha.
Kathryn Barringham in memory of Will, “I will miss you forever.”
Catherin Benedetti in memory of Casey and Teddy.
Betsy Bergeron, Kim Maiara and Wally in memory of Buddy, “a gentle giant who will be missed by his mom and dad Mary and Jim, and all his neighbors.”
Brain Blakeley and Teresa Freeman in memory of Kate, Nell-Bob, and Betty.
Sharon Bornholz in memory of “Shorty Long, beloved pet.”
Laurel Casey in memory of Fred the chihuahua.
Moira Cassell in memory of Finley Kelleher.
Monica CoFrancesco in memory of Harley D., “always in my heart.”
Nicholas CoFrancesco in memory of Holly and Rocky.
Florencio Cotto in memory of Lynn Ackerman.
Robin Covino in memory of Desmond. “Never forget.”
Edward Danaher in memory of Seamus.
Gina D’Errico in memory of Eddie.
Marie Devlin in memory of “kitties.”
Tracey Ford in memory of Angelo and Dorie Nido.
Dominic Francese in memory of Wendy.
Michael and Noelle Frawley in memory of Michael Mulhall.
Barbara and Fiona Fren in memory of Rosie Spinato, “a good dog and loving companion.”
Judy Goveia in memory of Belle.
Carol and Pat Grandjean in memory of Nancy Robinson, “lifelong friend and animal lover.”
Jacob Herbert in memory of Sinky, “beloved dog of Jon Ozaksut and Becki Schneider.”
Kate and Peter Hvizdak in memory of Pat Hogan.
Peggy Iannillo in memory of Emma.
Jennifer Iszkiewicz in memory of Magnolia.
Janice Izzo in memory of Anthony Izzo and “all our cats and dogs.”
Bill Judd in memory of Forrest.

Barbara Kagan in memory of “my beloved Woody.”
Patrick Kearney in memory of CeCe “from the Rock Creek neighbors.”
Susan and Michael Keeney in memory of “my cousin Nancy.”
Elaine Kittler in memory of Chunky, Sam, Jessica, Trump, and Jordan.
Cindy Koepeke In memory of Ethel May and Freddy Kruger, “we will always love and miss you so much.”
Jean Koepeke in memory of “All my guys.”
Allison Kravitz in memory of “our beloved Toby, the best dog in the world.”
Elise Kressley in memory of Sutter, Carlie, Misty, barley, Hallie, Billy, and Justin.
Marlene La Fata in memory of “our beloved Charlie and Bucky.”
Mara Lavitt and Hayne Bayless in memory of “our dog, Breesia.”
Nancy Lyon in memory of Mary Dillman, “a good and gentle soul who loved her cats.”
Frankie Maciejak in memory of Ms. Chanel.
Laura Margolin in memory of Charcoal, Sammy Short Ears, Elsie, Boots, Chevy Nova, Zulu, Shadow “and all the others.”
Patrick McCarthy in memory of Karen McCarthy.
The Millen, Cairns and Schwab families in memory of Candace Constantino.
Mary Molitor in memory of Boo.
John H. Morgan in memory of Leighton B. Carlson.
Liz Myers in memory of Templeton the cat.
Mary and Peter Nasse in memory of One-Eyed Jack, beloved dog of Jenn Ferri.
The Oehrle Family in memory of Mae Barnes.
Laurie Prizzi in memory of Dusty, “my special boy.”
Donna Pursley in memory of Noel.
Russ Reynolds in memory of Skipper, Kasper, Colonel, Oscar, and Roscoe.
Charlene Rohloff in memory of Ric Rohloff.
Linda Schultz and Howard Gralia in memory of Princess, “beloved companion of Sara Mag.”
Dolores Sensale in memory of “all my late pets.”

Sheri Shields in memory of Rhoda Silberman.
Anna Simeone in memory of “my husband, Dominic Simeone.”
Susan Spetrini in memory of Leo.
Elaine Spinato in memory of Rosie Spinato, “FNHAS graduate and 16 years young.”
Tina Spose in memory of “my mother, Merete.”
Stephanie Stanley in memory of Anna Gambardella, Betty and Mary Nappi, and Phyllis Cahill, “my beloved aunts and animal lovers.”
Bonnie Taylor in memory of “our best girl, Misty.”
Kristina Turcio in memory of Caine Turcio, “our protector and Mr. Personality Spawn.”
Linda Turski in memory of Oakley.
Beverly Vail in memory of Leighton B. Carlson.
John and Dinny Wakerley in memory of Winston, “the loveliest dog ever.”
Samuel and Chun Wan in memory of Zoey, “beloved dog of Deb Wan.”
Nancy White in memory of Dax Coleman, “beloved pup of Adrienne Coleman.”
Susan Wilber in memory of Sarah Wilber, DVM.
Stephen Young in memory of Leighton Carlson.
Cheryl Zuzick in memory of Yomo.

In memory of Margaret “Peggy” D’Angelo
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Peter and Claudia Ciullo
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In memory of Paul Steven Keeler “in our hearts forever.”

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In Honor Of

Carol Brown in honor of Nola and Leroix Pelliccio.
Nicholas CoFrancesco in honor of Zasu and Kaiser.
Raymond Dudley in honor of Ruby and Drew Way.
Morgen and John Gaetano in honor of Patricia Grandjean, FNHAS volunteer.
Eileen Hackett in honor of “my cat Misha, adopted from you 14 years ago!”
Bob Henninger in honor of Boo Boo, Missy, and Moose, “to my most loyal friends.”
Bill Judd in honor of Bubba.
Jean Koeppke in honor of Pugsly.
John Levis in honor of “all the pets and their people looking forward to 2021.”
Margaret B. Mann in honor of Lizzy, “adopted from the shelter in August 2018.”
Rosalie McKenzie in honor of Tiddles Agatha Cronk, “a most fortunate cat who became the owner of the amazing Stacy and Ken Cronk.”
Tim McNamara in honor of Nyles, “FNHAS graduate, still a silly dog.”
Barbara Melotto in honor of Elaine Spinato, FNHAS volunteer.
Martha Parvis in honor of Carol Asprelli’s birthday.
Anthony and Allison Rosselli in honor of Roman Tilden Russell in honor of I.Q.
Sheri Shields in honor of “my grandson, Jordan.”
Anna Simeone in honor of “all my 7 dogs, now in heaven, forever in my heart.”
Logan Soulsby in honor of Weasley.
Cynthia Walker and Patrick Edwards in honor of “our wonderful healthcare workers: Thank you.”
Melissa Whitson and Alex McBurney in honor of Fenway, “2008 shelter graduate.”
Dana Walker in honor of Maizie, formerly Lizzie.
Maureen Williams in honor of Clara and Nellie, “our pets of the week!”
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The Torre family and Summer, a shelter graduate
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AmongFRIENDS contributors: Patricia Grandjean, Elaine Spinato, Deb Wan

...and many anonymous donors!