Love in the Time of Pandemic

To put it mildly, 2020’s novel coronavirus pandemic has been a game-changer for all of us humans, but what about our pets? How are they feeling these days? To get a sense of how our shelter graduates are faring in this scary new reality, we consulted their humans — and learned that for the most part, they’re adapting surprisingly well. Let’s take a closer look.

**Artyom** — Make no mistake, 7-year-old tabby Artyom is the kind of cat who owns the room. That’s exactly what Mia Rivera and her husband, Ian, liked about him when they met him at our shelter in December 2019. It’s also the reason they changed his original name, Milo—“Artyom” is the stalwart protagonist of the dystopian, action-packed Russia-centered novels/video games *Metro 2033, Metro: Last Light* and *Metro Exodus.*

He may seem like a tough guy, but Artyom’s been a complete sucker for his mom, especially when she began working from their West Haven home after the pandemic hit in March. He followed her everywhere, cuddled up next to her at night—and a few months later, made a seamless transition when Mia decided to bring him to live with her at her family’s home in Puerto Rico. (Dad Ian had begun military training in Texas.)

Artyom nestled happily in a carrier atop Mia’s lap the entire plane ride and has adapted beautifully to the tropical life, watching birds from a sunny windowed porch (though he refuses to wear his special UV-protective hat) while providing continuous vocal commentary. “I like the way he chirps before he meows,” Mia says. Though he hasn’t yet discovered any of PR’s many varieties of rum, she notes that he retains one trait from his shelter days: “He’s still a fool for cat treats.”

**Wally** — It’s Wally’s world; we just live in it. Adopted in 2013 by Kim Malara and her partner Betsy Bergeron, this 10-year-old chihuahua-dachshund mix has never forgotten his roots, becoming one of the FNHAS’s most generous and consistent donors of toys, treats, supplies and, of course, medical funds. COVID-19 has pretty much rolled off his paws, even though Kim admits his moms’ increased time at home has sometimes interfered “with the peace and quiet he needs for his afternoon nap.”

Otherwise, he’s made the most of their continual presence, enjoying countless walks and visits to the park. Earlier this year when Malara and Bergeron, both Fairfield County schoolteachers, were required to lead online classes from home, Wally proved to be an enthusiastic assistant. “The kids loved seeing him and often asked where he was if he wasn’t on screen,” Malara says. “He definitely provided comfort to us and everyone he saw on Zoom calls.”

**Kowalski** — For Kowalski, a 6-year-old bicolor brown-and-white shorthair feline adopted in 2017 by Deborah and Robert Oehrle of Madison, this has been a “good news-bittersweet news” kind of year. The good news is that, having tragically lost two adopted cat sisters over the last few years, last spring he welcomed a new sibling, a medium-haired dilute calico named Francie, to the family pack.

“…”I think she’s really a dog in a cat suit—she loves everyone, and to her the world is gumdrops and lollipops and unicorns,” says Deb. “She and K-Man get along just fine.” On the downside, however, Kowalski’s other BFF (best family friend), Deb and Robert’s daughter Olivia, just left for college this fall. “With this change, he has been a little quieter than normal,” Deb says. “So we give him extra love and attention.”

**Summer** — “Summer really is the perfect dog. Adopting her was the best thing I ever did!” So says Andrea Torre regarding the 10-year-old pitbull mix she adopted on “a really hot July day” in 2012. Knocked out by her beautiful eyes when they first spotted her on the Internet, Andrea and her 10-year-old stepson Joe arrived at the shelter determined to take her home. “We walked by all the runs, and everyone was barking,” she recalls. “We hoped Summer would be on the quieter side. Sure enough, when we reached her, she was just sitting there with a look on her face that said, ‘Please pick me.’”

Since joining her forever family, Summer has enjoyed a life full of trips to Cape Cod (“She loves car rides,” Andrea says), chasing rabbits and squirrels in her yard and, above all, playing fetch—which she will do ‘til she drops. “Now that she’s older, we’re mindful that she doesn’t play too hard,” says her mom. “But we do have Chuckits! in all different sizes, and when she goes outside, those are the first things she goes to. She’s all about balls—that’s her gig.”

During the first few months of the COVID epidemic, Andrea was home from her job as a salon owner so she and

Continued on pg. 2
Summer happily took all their daily walks together, including off-season jaunts to Hammonasset Beach State Park where Summer could stroll sans leash. “But she’s never far from my side,” Andrea says. “When she gets a little more ahead of me she’s always looking back like, ‘Are you there, Mommy?’ She’s just such a sweet soul.”

Nyles — To hear Tim McNamara tell it, 9-year-old Nyles is a singular personality. His turn-ons include visiting the next-door neighbors (“usually when they’re outside, or when he wants to go into their house”), hanging out in his back yard (“sometimes he just sits there and looks at the trees”), chewing any ball or bone that’s handy—including the antler bone he likes to gnaw on Tim’s lap (“getting me all slimy”) and teasing Tim’s girlfriend’s cat, Rosie (“it’s actually funny, because he’ll prance around and start to play with her, and sometimes she’ll go along; other times she just swats his tail”).

Living with this 70-pound pitbull has been smooth sailing ever since Tim adopted him in 2013, except for a health scare a year ago, when Nyles’ vet found a precancerous tumor on his hind leg. While the growth was successfully removed, Tim says that the healing process was the hardest part, requiring veterinary office visits every other week for a few months—compounded by the fact that this meant long commutes to their home in Manchester to see the oncologist at the College of Veterinary Medicine in Storrs.

Kenneth set some ground rules. “He was intent that we adopt a male, and that the cat be at least 3 years old,” says Stacey. Alas, they didn’t plan on meeting Meow, a seductive 1-year-old tabby with her own agenda.

When they visited our cat room in October 2019 and began scanning the cages for 3-year-old males, Kenneth found himself persistently tapped by a little paw stretched to the max outside her cage. “We were in awe of her spunk,” Stacey says. Her husband’s adoption parameters evaporated in a heartbeat. “He kept saying, ‘This one seems nice,’” says Stacey. “That kitten made him smitten. We fell in love immediately.”

One year later, the rechristened Tiddles Agatha—her first name is in homage to a cat featured on the British TV motoring program Top Gear, the second in honor of one of Stacey’s favorite authors, Agatha Christie—is the queen of her household. At first, because Kenneth has always worked from home, she was daddy’s girl. When the coronavirus hit, Stacey—the principal of Cooperative Educational Services, a special education school in Trumbull—suddenly found herself trying to change the world without a game plan. It must have been a curve ball for Tiddles to have me in the house all the time, stressed and on the phone and causing a ruckus.

Tiddles’ solution? “She totally saved my life,” Stacey says. “She was like, ‘Oh, OK, Mommy’s here now, and I’m going to split my love.’ When it was just too much, when I was on the computer for 20 hours straight and couldn’t stop, she would come and sit on my lap and fall asleep on my hands as I was typing.”

Stacey and Kenneth have discovered that their little feline is actually more doglike than they expected. Tiddles comes when called and plays “fetch” with her favorite toy mice. She delights in remotely tracking the chipmunks in the yard and the bugs that come to the door at night. “She’s so sweet and funny, and just such a character,” Stacey says. “She is everything to us. We absolutely could never live without her.”

Dewey — There may be no more musical dog in the world than Dewey Dudley Dittmeier. Adopted in 2012 by Mineola, N.Y., professional musicians Sonia and Eugene Dittmeier—and formerly known as Jagger—this 9-year-old Yorkie-poodle mix has been a mascot for every band in which his parents have played, or so says his mom: “He has a uniform for each one” (including two German bands, Pilsner and Foehrer Musik Freunde). He’s a steady presence at certain rehearsals, often napping in a bed that’s packed in his parents’ equipment duffel bag. The musicians often say ‘hi’ to him before they talk to us,” says Sonia.

“One of our bandmates, Bob, who has a small dog, brings him treats,” says Sonia. “One time he forgot, and Dewey sat and waited in front of him until we finished practicing the first song. Then Bob said, ‘Sorry, I don’t have any treats,’ and Dewey slunk away with his head down, like Eeyore in Winnie the Pooh. I felt so bad. But Bob learned his lesson: Never forget those treats!”

Continued on pg. 3
Because of the coronavirus, Dewey’s rehearsals are currently limited to his parents’ sessions in their living room. This year, he’s also had to forgo the family’s annual trip to North Carolina to visit his paternal grandparents, who love to spoil him rotten.

“My mother-in-law makes bacon for him every morning when we’re there, and she makes sure no one else eats it,” Sonia says. “Every visit, he brings a suitcase full of toys, and within a half-hour, they’re scattered all over the house.” Grandma also sends him classy gifts from L.L. Bean, like a traveling bed and food/water dish. “They come addressed to ‘Mr. Dewey Dittmeier,’” Sonia says, laughing.

Social distancing also means more time spent at home with his feline sisters, Dixie May and Dusty Rose. Generally, they get along fine, exchanging the occasional sibling kiss. “But he was here first,” Sonia says, “and he knows this is his house. So, like any big brother, he has to chase them now and then. And he’s very jealous. If they’re sitting on your lap, he has to jump on, too.”

Natasha — Not all shelter tales are happy ones. Divinity — a beautiful 8-year-old long-haired feline with thick black fur — had a hard time reaching out and accepting love from either volunteers and visitors in her seven months at the shelter. She mostly sat curled up in her cage, oblivious to the activity around her. This only made Delight Worthyn determined to adopt her in January of 2019: “She needed me.”

Delight renamed her Natasha and set about establishing trust. The initial bonding task was getting some serious mats out of her fur. “I wanted to get her used to being brushed,” she says. Natasha had other issues as well. “When she first came to live with me, I noticed that she walked a rear end raised off the ground. She was afraid of people’s feet, afraid of people stepping over her.” She also took little pleasure in typical cat play. “I tried blowing bubbles for her and scared her to death.” Ultimately, Natasha’s vet determined that she probably had suffered neurological damage, perhaps from physical abuse.

Her eccentricities eased as her bond with Delight grew, but by the end of last year, her physical problems became critical. After months of trying to combat ever-worsening bouts of constipation and incontinence—“it was like she had lost feeling and control in the lower half of her body,” Delight says—by September, it was clear that no more could be done for Natasha. “We decided it was time to let her go.”

The COVID pandemic only contributed to her mom’s heartbreak. Current veterinary rules mandate that pet owners leave their pets at the doctors’ doors, and only pick them up when an exam is over. “The one thing you want to be able to do for your pet is to be in the examination room for whatever is happening and be able to hold her,” says Delight. “Before COVID, Natasha used to sit in my arms at the vet and bury her head in the crook of my elbow.” When the time came to say goodbye, she was allowed to be with her cat. “But I had to come in the back door and be gowned, gloved and masked.”

Delight has managed to move on and adopt again. “Shortly before I got Tasha, I had another cat who died suddenly from an aneurysm,” she says. “Because I live alone, it’s like you have that little presence, then you don’t. The house seems so empty and quiet. I just feel like there’s always someone out there who needs a home, and I have one to offer.”

Pippa — Sweet-natured senior pitbull Ivy, age 10, should have been a popular dog with adopters. She became a shelter celebrity, appearing on Animal Planet’s The Puppy Bowl XVI Presents: Dog Bowl III at the beginning of 2020 and traveling to no fewer than 11 adoption events. Despite her low-key, down-to-earth charms, she didn’t win a home for 15 months. Finally, last March, she and Glastonbury’s Allison Bailey found each other.

Allison learned about Ivy—now named Pippa—through a persistent friend who is well aware of her special love for older dogs. “I worked in an animal hospital when I was younger and love all animals, but I always told this friend I would only ever adopt an older shelter dog,” she says.

Said friend sent Allison online photos of Ivy more than once with the message, “You need to get this one,” but she still hesitated. “My reply was always, ‘I work long hours; I’m not home a lot. I really can’t do this.’ ”

Then, after a particularly bad day at work—Allison is a perfusionist at Hartford’s Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center—she gave in. “I thought, ‘Let me play with her and at least she’ll have a friend for the day, and then I’ll be able to reaffirm that she’s too high energy for me and it’s not gonna work.’ ” When she arrived at the shelter, however, she found a quiet and gentle dog she couldn’t resist. “The staff told me I could take her home that day,” Allison says. So she did.

Though Pippa had her share of problems upon adoption—severe hearing loss and yeast infections—these have largely cleared up with medication. And Allison need not have worried about leaving her alone during her 9-hour work shifts. “Within three or four days I had her loose in the house and she was fine,” she says. Pippa has adapted her mealtimes and sleep periods (with nine beds to choose from) to her mom’s schedule.

They’re often on the go when Allison is home. “Pippa gets me off the couch,” she says. “Without her, I wasn’t doing much with my downtime.” The two are constant companions on hikes, for car rides, while shopping and even during barn visits when Allison goes horseback riding in Durham. As a result of all this socialization, Pippa communes as easily with the chickens in her back yard as she does her neighbors’ preschool-age children. “She loves everybody,” Allison says. “And she has lots of friends. Even the mailman loves her.”
Updates from the FNHAS

Hello friends, we hope that you are doing well and staying safe and healthy. As a result of these unprecedented times, we have had an interesting year, but we are, as always, dedicated to helping the shelter animals and making sure we are supporting them and the shelter.

Because we have suspended our regular in-person fundraisers during this crisis, we decided to try a fundraiser that was completely online, our first Poorly Drawn Pets Fundraiser! People who donated a minimum of $10 to our organization sent in a photo of their pet, and a group of our volunteers and supporters of varying artistic talents stepped up to the plate to draw portraits of those pet photos. It was a wildly successful fundraiser with all of our available drawing slots being filled in a matter of days. Two of our shelter alumni, Ghost and Bonnie, had their portraits done and are shown here. The rest of the photos and portraits can be found in the Photos Section of our website. Everyone had a blast seeing the finished drawings, and we hope we brought some joy to the public.

The District Athletic Club recently held their 2nd Power for Paws fundraiser, where cycling teams competed for the best time and donated funds and supplies for our organization. Thank you to all who participated — we hope to attend in person next time!

In August, we usually participate in the Clear the Shelters day, which is a nationwide event where shelters are highlighted on NBC and Telemundo stations. This year, it became a month-long virtual fundraiser and adoption event. Along with other Connecticut animal shelters and rescues, we participated in a virtual adoption event, which featured some of our adoptable animals.

Thanks to your support, our volunteer funds were used to help provide care for some of the dogs and cats who entered our shelter in need of medical attention, such as recently adopted Huey, who has lung issues, and still-adoptable Rhino, who has skin problems. We appreciate your kindness and generosity in giving us much needed funds that help us care for the shelter animals.

In Honor Of

Joan and William Aquilino in honor of C.C. and Zoe, “thank you for our furry, loyal companions; they’re both great.”
John and Eileen Brannigan in honor of Chaz, “AKA Gizmo, NHAS grad.”
Karin and Mark Dillon in honor of Whitney Doel’s birthday.
Ana Hontanilla in honor of Donna Marie Jarlenski and Bruce Larkin “for helping us with our newly adopted dog.”
Stephen Kearney “in support of what you do.”
Jean Koepke in honor of Pugsly, “a shelter dog.”
John Levis in honor of Jamaica the pitbull, “Best Girl!”
Olivia and Sven Mardson in honor of Blinky and Bibby, “from the NHAS—we love them.”
Laura Margolin in honor of Kali and Oreo.
Patrick McCarthy in honor and memory of Karen.
Mary Molitor in honor of Boo, Buddy, and Benji.
Melanie Montagnon “For Sam Gontarz’s fundraiser.”
Susan Papa in honor of Robert Beech’s birthday and in memory of Ollie.
Marsha Rabe in honor of the FNHAS volunteers.
Hollis Redding In honor of Emily and Penny Redding, “Mama loves her girls.”

David and Priscilla Sepulveda in honor of Kara Sepulveda on her 26th birthday—a passionate animal lover!”
“Wild Bill” Taylor in honor of Midnight, “a wonderful best friend.”
Russell Tilden and Dominique Bourassa in honor of I.Q.
Gayle Van Huysen in honor of “all of you who take care of animals.”
Cynthia Walker and Patrick Edwards, “Thank you to all the health care workers.”
Maureen and Stuart Williams in honor of Clara and Nellie.
Susan and Tim Yolen in honor of Ramona.
WE THANK YOU - IN MEMORIAM

Anonymous “in remembrance of Ceecee.”
Frank Avallone and Frances Reitman in memory of Jazmine and Mercy.
Anne Bailey in memory of Crystal.
Linda Baron in memory of Joan McCarthy Papeth.
Kathryn Barringham in memory of Ben, Max, and Emma.
Brian Blakeley and Teresa Freeman in memory of Kate, Nell-Bob, and Buddy.
Carol Brown in memory of Leroix Pelliccio, “cherished member of the Pelliccio family.”
Robin Corvino in memory of Lexi, “my sweet angel.”
Rachel Daniels in memory of “sweet Leroix.”
Joe Dowling in memory of Tex.
Mary Drury in memory of Edgar.
April Feathers and Fred Jungeblut in memory of “our cats Casper, Soughie, Molly, Trouble, Wolfie, and Shorty. Forever in our hearts” and “in memory of our friend and fellow animal lover, Neil Collins.”
Marta Geha in memory of Ceecee.
Vanessa Galligan in memory of Fritz, “after 58 years, you’re still in my heart” and “in memory of Bill and Alice Galligan’s wonderful Lucy.”
Carol Grandjean in memory of Mary Jane Champagne.
Patricia Grandjean in memory of “Deb Wan’s Zoë, Holly Brown’s Maddie and Elaine Spinato’s Charlie.”
Robert Henninger in memory of Boo Boo, Missy, and Moose.
Dolores Iuteri in memory of Coco and Lucia, “and my years of happiness.”
Beverly Johnson and Richard Fitol (RIP) in memory of Pixie Doodle, “the last of our 16 rescue cats; all gone and greatly loved.”
Teresa Jones in memory of Michael Mulhall.

Barbara Kagan in memory of Breesia, “who loved and was loved by Mara Lavitt and Hayne Bayless.”
Jean Koepke in memory of “all my guys,” and “in loving memory of Nanabanana and Sandor, the loving bully, Miss you!”
Jennifer Lee in memory of Lanikai, “sharing the love that she gave us.”
Mara Lavitt and Hayne Bayless in memory of “our dog Breesia.”
Susan and Michael Keeney in memory of Patricia Kulcharyk.
Colleen Marsh in memory of Arthur “Mickey” Graham.
Patty Merola in memory of Cady and Spanky.
William and Eileen Moss in memory of Brandy, Shadow, Mopsey, Dusty, Dolly, and Buddy.
Marisa Kalt and Padrick Nugent in memory of Ollie, “beloved pet of Anne Olcott and Bob Beech.”
Bonnie Nuzzo in memory of “my furry loves, Alex, Toby, Peaches, and Fuzzy.”
Allison Pelliccio in memory of Leroix, “a cherished member of our family for 14 years.”
Laurie Prizzi in memory of Beverly Cecarelli, “who loved her kitties.”
Marsha Rabe in memory of Seabiscuit.
Russ Reynolds in memory of Skipper, Kasper, Colonel, White Socks, and Oscar.
Margaret Rowland in memory of Ceecee.
Edward Saccu in memory of Ms. Lois Sills.
Anna Simeone in memory of “all my beautiful dogs who are in heaven.”
Elaine Spinato in memory of “Deb Wan’s Zoë and Holly Brown’s Maddie,” and in memory of “Charlie Spinato, one feisty, little terrier.”
Tina Spose in memory of “my dad.”
Veronica Stankowski in memory of Archie.
Pete and Laura Sutton in memory of Pepe, “a rescued toy poodle.”

Margaret Targove in memory of Jack Kramer.
“Wild Bill” Taylor in memory of Juno, Pepper, and Max, “wonderful best friends.”
Bertha Tian in memory of “all my beautiful pets.”
Julia Treseder in memory of Cordelia.
Linda Turski in “loving memory of Oakley.”
Mary Weideman in memory of Lola Delise, “loving dog of the Delise family, who recently died at age 15 after a long decline. She is sorely missed.”
Sara Welch in memory of Pokey, “beloved cat of WTNH-TV meteorologist Gil Simmons and his wife, Liz Simmons.”
Nancy and William White in memory of Louie Foldy.
Rob and Stephanie Zwillich in memory of Layla.

In memory of Charles W. Beaudoin
Jean and John Blaze
Jenny Hansen
Arthur and Susan Kabakoff
Patricia O’Brien
Kathleen and Scott O’Conner

In memory of Thomas Keveney
Kate Keveney
William Keveney
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