

Second-Chance CATS

True Stories *of the Cats*
We Rescue *and the*
Cats Who Rescue Us



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Bear

Katherine Kern

The day my life changed started just like any other during the ten-year-long stretch I'd been fighting anorexia. I'd stayed up most of the night before, not wanting my meager encounter with food to end. At that time, to me, food was love. The time it took me to eat was sacred. A sandwich easily took six or more hours for me to eat. When I finished, I was filled with despairing sadness and loneliness. I'd been in treatment for anorexia twice before that day. Years of my life were devoted to anorexia, but I seemed unable to walk away from it, even when I came near death. The all-consuming nature of anorexia doesn't leave room for relationships.

And then I met Bear Cat. I came home from grocery shopping to find a small, four-pound silver tabby kitten hiding under the deck by my front door. He seemed so tiny—so scared—so overwhelmed by his surroundings. I could understand—most of my

life has been lived in fear of one thing or another. That day, it was as if we were terrified of but curious about the other.

We sized each other up. There was some connection, though I couldn't make sense of it and wasn't entirely sure I wanted to. But the cat and I saw something in each other. He seemed just as starved for love as I was. He demanded I stop and pet him, and he simply refused to be turned away.

I named him Bear because he wrapped his paws around my wrist and moved my hand to his belly to be rubbed—just like a bear hug. Here was this tiny, homeless, hungry, and scared kitten and all he wanted from me was ear and belly rubs? He seemed to decide that he loved me and that was that. I trusted my heart for the first time. From that day on, I began to recover from anorexia. Recovery wasn't a straight line—it required treatment three more times. But with Bear's steady love and the peaceful, safe environment of living with him—the exact opposite of my life up to then—I eventually got better. The tiny, once-homeless kitten led me there.

Day in and day out Bear made me smile—usually exactly when I needed it most. His ridiculous antics made me laugh and admire the little guy with the ginormous attitude. Bear was confident, lived with his whole heart. Some of his greatest hits included chewing my textbooks and my homework, putting a fang mark in just about everything I owned, getting his back paw stuck in a jar of peanut butter, sticking his paw in the toaster to get my attention, climbing the clothes in my closet, stealing every little thing that wasn't bolted down and that he could carry (even a teddy bear ten times his size), knocking the contents of my bathroom shelf into the toilet, getting a plastic bag handle caught around his body, enjoying sitting in the pantry, being the bug-master—but always, and I mean *always*, he was at my side or lying against me.

These things were often about getting my attention—even my love. And my admiration grew as I hoped that one day maybe I'd

be that bold. The thing is, he was only that bold around me. When anyone else was in my home, he'd mostly hide. But when it was just me and Bear, he acted a bit too big for his britches. He could be a handful, and I admired him for it.

Bear always raised his tail as he walked toward me—or even when he heard my voice. Instead of hiding when he didn't feel well, he found me for reassurance. I haven't been the poster girl for healthy relationships, but the way he interacted with me—checking in and then doing his thing, only to check back a little later—he was the epitome of a securely attached being. Not only that, but I could wrap my arms all the way around him. He wouldn't feel trapped or get scared—he settled in and savored the time with his momma. He even slept with me in bed. While this stressed me out in the beginning, I came to need that closeness and connectedness to sleep well.

Bear changed everything for me. He taught me to accept love (which came in handy in relation to loving myself and letting my now-fiancé love me). With Bear in my life, I could be happy. I could feel safe. I could finally determine who I was and what I wanted in my life without interference or judgment. Other than expecting my love, Bear had no expectations, didn't judge, and didn't hurt or betray me. When I cried, he never complained about my tears wetting his fur. When I had nightmares, he sat on my back until I became grounded in reality. When I felt unsettled in my body, he acted no differently toward me. He loved me no matter if I weighed seventy pounds or a hundred and seventy pounds. Bear increased my self-esteem enough that I decided to give up my eating disorder—and while it took several years in practice, this was the seed that launched my recovery and I never looked back.

My life didn't change in a moment—or even a year. It was an every-day decision to do the hard thing—motivated by Bear to do better for us both and step outside my comfort zone. I healed by

persevering when things got difficult, giving it my all, and remembering who I was on the day Bear and I met and what he meant to me over the years. Loving Bear made me a better person—a more loving person, a more understanding person, someone I am proud to be.

Bear taught me that love has the power to truly change everything. And our love did change everything—not only for a tiny homeless kitten but also for the human who opened her heart to him. Life is funny in that we often get exactly what we need when we need it. Our greatest obstacle is always ourselves. We find what we seek, but only if our hearts are open to it.

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Avery Loves Reilly

Sandra Murphy

When Avery first met Reilly, she wasn't overly impressed. After all, Avery was a Cairn/Yorkie mix, a diva, and insisted on being the center of attention. Yet here was a stray cat, barely out of kittenhood, and he wanted to be friends.

Due to circumstances beyond her control, Avery had found herself at St. Louis Animal Control's high kill-facility (now closed). It was a fluke that I was there on the right day. One look at Avery's smiling face, and I was in love.

At home, potty breaks were on leash until she was familiar with the yard and had a good recall. As we walked from the front of the house to the backyard, a little cat fell in step with us. Mostly white, with large splotches of brown-bunny fur, he wasn't intimidated by a dog three times his size or the strange person walking her. Whenever we came out the door, the small cat would pop up,