

More Cat Tails

*My Journey from RESQCATS™ to
God's Little People in Syros, Greece*

Jeffyne Telson

More Cat Tails: My Journey from RESQCATS to God's Little People in Syros, Greece

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All profits from the sale of this book directly benefit RESQCATS, Inc. RESQCATS™, founded by Jeffyne Telson in 1997 in Santa Barbara, California, is a non-profit organization dedicated to the rescue, care and adoption of stray and abandoned cats and kittens.

For more information or to make a donation, please visit:

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Dedicated to:

*Joan Bowell and God's Little People Cat Rescue,
and for the 13,000 stray cats on Syros*

*In loving memory of "Honey"
(April 30, 2005 - March 15, 2020)*

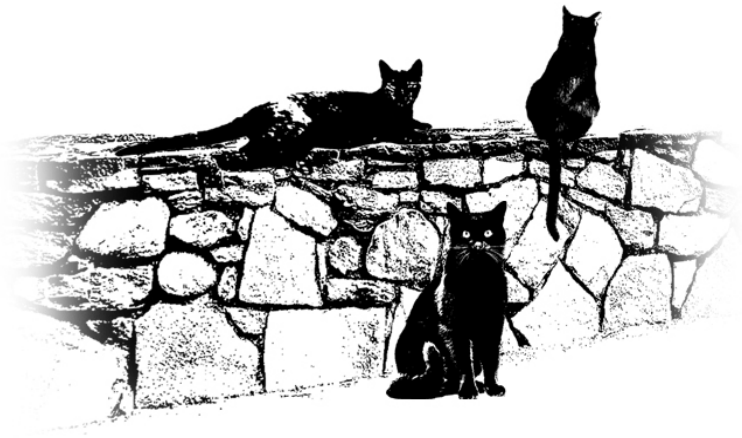
A special thank you to my wonderful husband, Mitch

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Foreward

In 1982 Jeffyne and I were colleagues at the same company in Dallas, Texas. She worked in the corporate graphic design department and I ran a recently purchased division of stores. The acquired stores, as well as the products they sold, were old and tired and drastically needed a refreshing new image. Jeffyne was assigned the project of working with my team to develop an upbeat new interior graphic look, as well as innovative eye-catching packages for the products.

I vividly recall the first day I met her at one of the stores. She was the model young Dallas professional... impeccably dressed in 4-1/2 inch yellow spike heels with a wide, patent leather belt that matched. She wore a classic Neiman-Marcus 6-inch above-the-knee skirt and an off-white angora sweater. Her hair was impeccably coiffured and her perfectly done nails and make-up highlighted her youthful good looks.

Dazzled by her stunning appearance, it would have been hard for me to fast-forward to today and realize that same woman would ultimately become “the cat lady of Santa Barbara...” and the woman of my life!

As you read *More Cat Tails: My Journey from RESQCATS to God’s Little People Cat Rescue in Syros, Greece*, you’ll learn that there is much more to Jeffyne Telson than simply a cat rescue person... as if any rescue person could be described as simple! You’ll hear in her own words how she feels about the world we live in, our roles in it and how we can make it a better place... for all living beings... people and animals alike. As you read, you’ll learn about the passion that Jeffyne embraces for the rescue work she does and feel the gentleness that she herself expresses for all living animals, especially cats and kittens.

My exposure to Jeffyne's kindness for nature's creatures came very early in our relationship. Aside from having met Tattoo, Jeffyne's first rescue cat that she introduced in her book, *Cat Tails: Heart-Warming Stories about the Cats and Kittens of RESQCATS*, I never realized that this woman was so in love with the feline species... that is, until one spring Saturday morning in Dallas. After finishing a long run around White Rock Lake, Jeffyne and I returned to our cars to discover a large cardboard box in the middle of the parking lot. As we approached the container, we could hear scratching and the cries of small animals. Upon opening the sealed lid, we discovered five tiny kittens desperately trying to free themselves. I didn't know what to think, but Jeffyne knew instantly what to do. One by one, she scooped up each wriggling mass and checked it for injury. Satisfied that they all appeared healthy, she told me, "We've got to get these guys to a rescue right away or they're not going to survive!"

Dressed only in t-shirts and running shorts, we drove to the nearest animal shelter arriving just before their noon closing hour. Without any money or identification, Jeffyne begged the shelter clerk to take care of the kittens. She promised that she'd return during her lunch break on Monday with the necessary \$10 per kitten relinquishment fee. But she implored the clerk, "PLEASE, don't euthanize these babies. I PROMISE I'll be back!" Well, of course, Jeffyne did return on Monday with the required fifty dollars... a sizable sum for an entry level designer in the early eighties.

That incident was my first exposure to Jeffyne's concern for animals... but it certainly wasn't my last. Over the ensuing 38 years I've witnessed literally hundreds of times when Jeffyne's love of animals has been on display.



Jeffyne and I were married in the yard at our ocean front home in San Diego. Less than a hundred yards from our house was the inlet to the bay where the sailboats and small motorized vessels passed as they traveled from their moorings in the marina to the open Pacific. On both sides of the inlet were large man-made rock outcroppings... huge boulders that had been placed along the sandy shore to protect the inlet from erosion. This jetty of rocks, with its many crevices and hiding places, was the perfect home for a colony of feral and semi-feral cats.

Shortly after we were settled in our new environment, Jeffyne joined several other people taking care of the “wild” cats. Initially, she only fed the cats in the mornings and evenings. But those routine activities quickly became much more. If Jeffyne noticed that a cat had developed an abscess or became lethargic from some sort of feline infectious disease, she would trap the animal and take it to the vet for care. When she saw that the females were indiscriminately breeding and giving birth to litter after litter of at-risk kittens, Jeffyne developed her own spay-neuter-return program. It would be difficult to estimate the exact number of unborn kittens Jeffyne saved from a terrible life on that jetty through her dedicated intervention.



We re-located to Phoenix several years later when I received a lucrative job offer. It was no secret that Jeffyne was not happy to leave San Diego. She felt as if she was abandoning her “jetty cats” but she was equally upset about having to give up her schooling for what was going to be her new career... veterinary technician. But always being a glass-half-full person, Jeffyne’s positive attitude prevailed. After we were established in Phoenix, Jeffyne sought out a cat-related organization that might be able to use her

assistance. She joined an animal grief support hotline to help individuals and families through the grieving process when they lost a pet. Having been through the loss of so many animals herself, Jeffyne was more than qualified to help other people through this often misunderstood family transition.



For those of you who know Jeffyne personally, you're already aware that she's not a particularly vain woman. In fact, she usually defers the spotlight to others so she can concentrate on taking care of the animals. But there has also been a personal driving force behind Jeffyne's efforts with cats and kittens... she has always wanted to make a difference. She occasionally spoke privately about the opportunity of someday being recognized for her work... perhaps on *NBC's Nightly News* or *The Ellen Degeneres Show*... but that was more of a lighthearted wish than an expected reality. The thing that Jeffyne really wanted was for people to recognize her as a person who cared deeply for animals. Well, a couple of years ago that opportunity actually presented itself.

Being on a number of animal rescue social media platforms affords me the chance to see a lot of what's going on throughout the animal rescue community. It also provides many of my rescue friends the chance to send me innumerable copies of fascinating photographs, hilarious antidotes and links to some extraordinary and remarkable animal-related articles. That was the case in late summer 2018 when I started receiving notices and emails about a cat sanctuary in Syros, Greece. God's Little People Cat Rescue was seeking a temporary sanctuary manager to care for upwards of 50 cats on this remote Cyclades island in the middle of the Aegean Sea. From the number of emails I received, it became apparent that many of my animal colleagues felt Jeffyne

should apply for the publicized position.

I carefully read the post and then re-read it several more times. They wanted a “mature and genuinely passionate cat lover... who [could] take over the daily running of a Greek cat sanctuary.” Someone who could “feed and medicate 55 cats [and] be expected to trap or handle feral or non-social cats.” And they wanted a person “who was responsible, reliable, honest, [and] practically inclined... with a heart of gold!”

As I read the article one more time, I couldn’t help but think, “This position is describing my wife! They’re seeking a person with all of Jeffyne’s characteristics. She’s eminently qualified for this job.” And then it suddenly occurred to me, “My goodness, this IS a job for my wife... they’re looking for Jeffyne!!”

The position had a couple of drawbacks... after all, Greece is 7,000 miles and 10 time zones from Santa Barbara... and it would require a commitment of 4-6 months for us to be separated. But my actual biggest concern wasn’t the distance or time requirement, I was more anxious about which side of the road the Greeks drove on; especially since the position required the person to be able to drive a car with a manual transmission! Recalling our driving experiences in New Zealand, I began to have second thoughts about sharing the post with Jeffyne!

But after a little research and learning that Greece is a country that drives on the right side of the road, I decided that Jeffyne needed to see the job advertisement. A commitment of this type would have to be her decision, so I put the link about the God’s Little People opportunity in her email box.



Jeffyne's book picks up the story from there. She'll tell you that she had already seen and discarded the posting several times, how we talked about the upsides and downsides of her being so far away for such a long period of time, and how, surprisingly, the months the sanctuary needed someone coincided almost perfectly with when RESQCATS closes for the winter.

But we spent most of our time talking about Jeffyne's qualifications for the position. After what seemed like hours of conversation, I finally couldn't contain myself any longer and shouted, "Jeffyne, this ad has your name written all over it! What are you going to do... wait till you're too old to live your dreams?"

I'm not sure whether it was our lengthy conversations or Jeffyne's life-long desire to spend time in Greece that eventually convinced her to devote the next two days composing her letter to God's Little People.

That time writing was very good for Jeffyne. It gave her the opportunity to put down on paper all the things that she had learned and done since she left her career in graphic design. It provided her the unique opportunity to reflect on the many things she had done with cats and kittens since before her time with RESQCATS. It gave her the chance, in writing, to do what she hates to in person... talk about herself.

Jeffyne literally spent hours editing and re-editing her letter. When she finally felt comfortable with what she had written and was ready to send it, I gave her a final suggestion. "Sweetheart, you're going to be competing against a lot of other people for this job. You need a 'grabber' headline if you want to be read." I told Jeffyne that her email needed to "SHOUT" at the reader. It needed a bold headline. After all, by that time Joan Bowell, the president of God's Little People Cat Rescue, had already received more than 35,000

applications for the position with hundreds more arriving every day.

With a little prompting, Jeffyne decided to be forceful and boldly headlined her email:

"JOAN, THIS IS LONG, BUT PLEASE READ IT!!"

Well apparently, it worked, because less than 12 hours after hitting the "send email" button, Jeffyne got a response from Joan with an equally direct heading:

"CAN WE MEET?"

As the saying goes, the rest is history. Joan and Jeffyne spoke by email, then by Skype and then Joan and her husband, Richard, came to Santa Barbara to offer Jeffyne the position.



Jeffyne has frequently wondered what was the key ingredient that got her selected for the job. Was it her years of experience? Or her articulately-written application letter? Or was it the compassionate picture — taken from the inside cover picture of her first book — that was required by Joan for each submission? Regardless of the exact reason, being selected to be the temporary caretaker at a cat sanctuary on a Greek island has undoubtedly been one of the highlights of Jeffyne's life... and mine as well!



By the way, by the time Jeffyne opened RESQCATS in 1997, her wardrobe had morphed from those 4-1/2 inch stiletto heels into much more comfortable Birkenstock earth shoes. And her chic Dallas designer brand outfits were replaced with more practical overalls, baggy sweat pants and Wal-Mart's cheapest jeans... all randomly decorated with colorless bleach splashes!

But despite Jeffyne's evolution from Southern Belle

fashion maven to practical working cat woman, some things about her appearance have never changed... and probably never will. She still loves to pride herself as being a cat woman with social skills. Jeffyne never leaves the house without her cropped calico hairdo and make-up just right. Because, after all, you can take the girl out of Texas, but you can't take Texas out of the girl!

— Mitch Telson



How It All Began



In August 2018, I noticed an intriguing email in my Jeffyne "to read" inbox. A link in the email described a temporary job offer that involved caring for cats on the Greek island of Syros. It read:

PAID JOB OFFER WITH CATS

A very special position and living circumstance is being offered on a little Greek island called Syros (a small paradise no less!) for a mature and genuinely passionate cat lover who knows how to handle many cats and would love their company! I am looking for someone who can take over the daily running of my Greek cat sanctuary, God's Little People Cat Rescue, in my absence. You will have 55 cats in your care and need to be able to oversee them, feed and medicate (big added bonus if you are a trained vet nurse!). As part of the job you will have a fully paid (including water & electricity) semi-detached modern house with its own garden and a direct view to the Aegean Sea... plus a salary. The daily hours are those of a part time job (approximately 4 hours) and the salary reflects the fact that you will have a house and utilities at no cost to you. All expenses for the cats will, of course, be paid, including veterinary care. You will be expected to take cats to the vet in case of illness. Therefore you will need to be able to drive a manual car. We are located in a secluded nature preserve area which is very tranquil and quiet in winter time but busy during the summer. You will no doubt thrive best if you are the type of person who appreciates nature and likes tranquility...and rests comfortably in your own company. That said, you will never feel lonely in the company of the cats! You will be expected to

live with a small handful of cats in your house. From past experience the job is most suitable for someone 45+ years of age, who is responsible, reliable, honest, practically inclined - and really, with a heart of gold! Apart from feeding the cats, they will also need heaps of love and attention. At times, you will be expected to trap or handle a feral or non-social cat, so knowing something about a cat's psychology is important. Understanding their behavior should come naturally to you. (Joan Bowell, founder, God's Little People Cat Rescue)

I had seen the link several times already, but I had deleted it as I never imagined applying. This time, however, it was different. My husband, Mitch, had put it in my mailbox. He knew I loved Greece and thought I would be an ideal candidate for the dream job.

I read about a beautiful place on the island of Syros where the founders of the non-profit sanctuary, God's Little People Cat Rescue, were looking for a caregiver for more than fifty-five cats for several months while they worked on plans to expand their operation in America. Having been to the Greek islands on three different occasions, I've always had a desire to return, but not for the reasons one might think. Yes, of course, the Greek islands are utterly picturesque and among the more beautiful places in the world. But there was something else about the islands that repeatedly drew me back.

Each time I visited, I found myself separated from the tourist guides and fellow travelers in search of the Greek street cats. Many were easy to spot in the hustle and bustle of the tourist shops and around the busy town; as one might guess, I was quite intrigued by them. They didn't seem at all bothered by the multitude of tourists scurrying past them. Some cats remained aloof, pretending that they didn't notice me... a typical attitude among cats who pride themselves on appearing independent! Others loved being petted and made

a fuss over. Because of my twenty-three years of experience in animal rescue, I've come to appreciate each cat's personality and to honor its wishes about being petted or not, so, accordingly, I thoughtfully acknowledged a cat's need for space or its call for attention.

What I enjoyed most about Greece was strolling where the local people on the islands live, eat and spend their time... AND where the neighborhood cats roam! I avoided tour groups and at times would desert my husband and the couples we traveled with to follow these captivating creatures. With camera in hand, I wandered the streets and photographed cats sitting in the brightly painted chairs at cafes, sauntering up white-washed paths between the thick-walled buildings with their blue-tiled roofs or perched on wide recessed window sills. Most of the cats were meandering about trying to survive; they weren't headed for home... the large majority of them had no homes. They were street cats and life hadn't always been good to them. The lucky felines got their food as hand-outs from restaurants, locals and tourists... like me! The less fortunate ones had to forage in trash heaps and dumpsters. While some of them fared well, many did not... needless to say, they all tugged at my heart-strings.

Over the years, I've traveled to many places, but not one has ever quite matched how I feel about the Greek isles. The beauty of the islands is enchanting, but most importantly, I could feel the cats calling to me.



In 2005, Mitch and I bought a second home on the Oregon coast in the quaint village of Yachats. At that time, we agreed that we would spend our vacations there. Since then, I've enjoyed quiet winters in Oregon relaxing and recovering from the long kitten seasons and the dawn to dusk days that are required of me at RESQCATS. I thought my overseas

traveling excursions were over, and I was actually okay with simply retreating to my getaway paradise.

By nature, I'm an artistic person with a background and training in graphic design. Rescuing stray and abandoned cats nine months of the year certainly doesn't require any artistic ability! So it's during my downtime in Yachats that I have the opportunity to satisfy my creative energy. I love to quilt and, more recently, I discovered my love for writing. Each year, by the end of kitten season, I feel like a bird whose wings have been tied and all I want to do is fly... fly and be a free spirit. Not having a set schedule in Yachats allows me to do anything that my heart desires... at any time that suits me.

My constrained imagination unfolds and takes me to wonderful places as I create colorful quilts that have personal meaning to me. I once made a Rainbow Bridge quilt with a beaded rainbow that stretched across a background fabric with blue skies and clouds. I quilted the names of all fifty-seven cats I had given a home to at that time; today I could add many more names. It was one of the most difficult quilts that I had ever set out to do. It involved building a scene from carefully chosen fabrics to symbolize the view from my window in Yachats. Green grass with colorful flowers overlooking a rocky shoreline and a tumultuous ocean just recovering from a big rainstorm was the main theme. The cloud fabric I chose for the sky was the perfect setting for a rainbow. The difficulty was that I used a fabric adhesive on the back of each piece of material to build the scene. I became extremely frustrated when I had to stitch through several layers of cloth... and glue! The sewing machine needle continuously gummed up making it almost impossible to quilt more than an inch at a time. I knew that I needed to find a better way to deal with my aggravation or I would see the process as nothing more than a tedious chore. So I resolved early on that somehow the tricky elements in the mechanics

of the quilt and the symbolism of it should intertwine.

Loss is difficult and many of the names on the quilt represented animals who had passed, so it seemed appropriate that the mechanics of the quilt should be challenging as well. That realization changed my entire perspective and made it possible for me to complete the project. The quilt became the most therapeutic creation I've ever attempted. I revisited the cats as I stitched their names along the border; I reflected on the ones I still had at the time and remembered the ones I'd lost. I smiled, I wept and I laughed out loud as I reminisced about each one. I found solace in the process, healing in my soul, and a gratified creative spirit.

I enjoy not having a timetable; I look forward to spending time with friends and taking long walks along the ocean with Mitch and our dogs. Catching up on movies every afternoon is a special treat for all those long days I spent during the season caring for sick kittens, traveling to and from the vet, and staying on top of the tremendous amount of paperwork that comes with my job.

For me, Yachats is more than a home away from home. It's a place where I heal my heart from loss. The winter storms are dramatic with high winds, a threatening surf, dark clouds and heavy downpours. After the storms, there are rainbows that stretch across the sky in a magnificent display of red, orange, yellow, green, blue and violet. The brightly-colored arched prisms above the ocean are reminders of my animals that have passed over to the Rainbow Bridge. I couldn't think of anywhere I'd rather be during the winter months. I recall having said a number of times, "I'm done traveling overseas. I've seen all I desire to see, BUT, if I ever had a chance to go back to Greece and help the cats, I'd definitely make an exception!"



When I read the job description, I thought to myself, "Wow! That's a really neat opportunity for someone", but I didn't think about it as something I would do... until two days later when it was again brought to my attention in a most unexpected way.

I was sitting at dinner when Mitch asked if I'd seen the email he put in my mailbox. He's always putting "stuff" in my mail folder... most of which I don't have time to read. I had just happened to read this particular one. I looked at him quizzically and asked, "You mean the one about Greece?" He said, "Yes, that one." I reminded him that the founder, Joan Bowell, was asking for a six-month commitment. Mitch said in his usual opinionated and convincing way, "Jeffyne, this has YOUR name written all over it. You've dreamed of going to Greece to make a difference for the cats! Are you gonna wait until you're too old to live your dream?!" For a moment, I just looked at him in silence. After a long pause, he continued as if to revive me from a state of disbelief and said, "I'm 100% behind you if you want to do this! I REALLY DO think you should apply." So I did.

I took the next two days to write about myself, my love of felines and my experience with RESQCATS over the previous twenty-one years. Believe me when I say it was tough to "toot my own horn," but it was important to share my knowledge and clearly communicate about my life and dedication to animals. For me, it wasn't about living on a Greek island with a beautiful view... I had visited the islands already! Besides, my homes in Santa Barbara and in Yachats have spectacular ocean views. It was about helping... spending time with cats and learning another way of doing things for them. But most of all, this was my opportunity to make the difference I had dreamed about. To make it more of a possibility, the requested time commitment coincided perfectly with the end of kitten season and with my usual winter sabbatical in Yachats.

My application email to Joan was long... and I mean VERY long... five pages to be exact! I warned her upfront in the subject heading. It read "Joan, this is long but please read." I knew she had already received thousands of inquiries and, despite my strong cat rescue qualifications, I didn't hold my expectations too high. But, Joan did read it and by the next morning she had replied. Mitch opened her email while I was in the upstairs bathroom getting ready for the day. All I could hear from downstairs was him yelling "Jeff! Jeff!" I thought, "Oh no! He's fallen off the treadmill and hurt himself again." By the time I rushed to open the door to head downstairs to save him, Mitch was already halfway up the steps with his laptop in hand and an open email from Joan. It started, "Can we meet?" In disbelief, I stopped in my tracks. Could she really have already read my letter? I stood on the upper landing of the stairs... speechless.



The next two weeks were spent communicating back and forth with Joan and her husband, Richard, about their trip to the U.S. and coordinating a time for us all to meet. Even when they arrived in Santa Barbara, I wasn't certain that I'd been selected. I did think there was a good chance, but I can be rather naive at times and not at all presumptuous. After all, at that point, they had already received more than 35,000 applicants for the job! So I really WAS surprised when they shared that they would like me to come to Syros as the interim caretaker.

Joan's personal background and mine are uncannily similar. We are both artists by degree; she's a wonderful illustrator and my major was graphic design. We each married later in life to husbands that are thirteen years older. Neither of us wanted to have children. Joan also shares my enthusiasm for dancing, especially to Michael Jackson. And believe it or not,

we are both addicted to ChapStick!

From our first conversation, I felt a kindred spirit with Joan. Her compassion for cats was as fervent as mine. We spent hours in the cattery together: sitting in enclosures petting the kittens and sharing stories of past rescues. We talked about the challenges of managing a sanctuary as well as the heartaches that inevitably come with rescuing animals. I immediately felt at ease with her; it was as if I were sitting there with a long-time friend. It was then that she told me that she knew I was the right person when she looked at my photo; she had requested one from each applicant. She said, "I knew you were the one for the job; I saw it in your eyes." A soul sister might be a good term to describe our new relationship.



There have been three times in my life where I felt truly connected to someone in the animal rescue world. The first time was when I met Wayne Pacelle, the former president and CEO of The Humane Society of the United States, at his book signing for *The Bond: Our Kinship with Animals, and Our Call to Defend Them*. It was a time in my life when I felt very isolated as a rescuer and that no one in the world could possibly understand my compassion for animals. I was at a crossroads with RESQCATS and desperate to find a way to continue my work by spending more time with animals but without all the people and administrative issues that come with managing an organization. I was on the verge of burn-out... or perhaps I was already there.

Wayne spoke so eloquently about his dedication to all animals and I unexpectedly realized that there really are others who feel as I do. I heard in his words what I had been telling myself; there are people with the same passion and desire to make a difference for animals. It was as if a light suddenly

went on in my head. His words reenergized and inspired me. I give Wayne a lot of credit for helping me to refocus and find a way to continue my life's work.

The second time I felt connected was when I visited Black Beauty Ranch in Texas, a sanctuary founded by Cleveland Amory, the author of *The Cat Who Came for Christmas* and a true animal advocate. Mitch had bid on a behind-the-scenes tour of Black Beauty Ranch for my sixtieth birthday. He spent a small fortune making sure that he made the highest offer so that we would win the trip. (In fact, he was so intent that at one point, the auctioneer had to stop Mitch as he was bidding against himself!)

The experience of visiting the facility was a dream come true. I had read all of Cleveland Amory's books and had even named a RESQCATS fund for special-needs cats after Polar Bear, the cat in his first book. When I arrived at the ranch, I walked into the reception area and the first thing I laid eyes on was a photo of Cleveland Amory with Polar Bear. I felt a kind of euphoria come over me! Everyone at the ranch was warm and friendly, but after only a day, I felt they were more like family. Like me, their lives were dedicated to animals. We shared the same goal to make a difference for them. Then, as if things couldn't get any better, I realized that the head staffers were vegan, as am I. Here were others standing and eating right in front of me that chose the vegan lifestyle because of the inhumane treatment of animals. I felt like I had "found my people."

The last time I felt that kind of connection was when I met Joan. My feelings began with our first telephone conversation. Our first face-to-face meeting validated those sentiments. That special connection has remained to this very day. As an added plus, her husband, Richard, and Mitch also shared mutual views about the animals and the common good. All around, it has been a phenomenal match.

For me, it was both an honor and a privilege to have the chance to make a dream come true. I was overcome with joy and excited to work with people who share the same enthusiasm as I do about the lives of cats and desire to bring a better awareness and understanding of these fascinating little creatures.

By working together, God's Little People Cat Rescue and RESQCATS, had the potential to make positive changes for cats around the world. By bringing awareness of their plight, we could encourage others to recognize cats for the beautiful living beings that they are.



My goal is to inspire others to do something to make cats' lives better. My hope is that by setting an example for others, human kindness will be paid forward. Showing humanity towards all creatures will, in turn, help us all become better, more compassionate human beings.

My Application Email to God's Little People



I labored over my letter to Joan for two days before hitting the "Send" button. It was one of the most difficult correspondences I have ever written. I had only one chance to make my dream of going to Greece to help the cats come true... I needed to make sure I included my qualifications, but also express my passion for felines and all living creatures. Joan has since told me that she read every word and that when she saw the attached, requested photo, she knew I was the one for the job.



TO: JOAN BOWELL

SUBJECT: JOAN, THIS IS LONG, BUT PLEASE READ.

Dear Joan,

I don't want to appear presumptuous, because I realize that you have probably been inundated with hundreds, perhaps thousands, of emails requesting consideration as the temporary caretaker for God's Little People, but I am hopeful that you have the time to read this email as I think I have the qualifications you are looking for. I believe I have the experience, the compassion and the energy to do the job.

My name is Jeffyne Telson and I am the Founder and President of RESQCATS, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to the rescue, care and welfare of stray and abandoned cats and kittens. I operate a cat rescue facility and adoption sanctuary for the benefit of all Santa Barbara, California communities with the assistance of a small, but extremely dedicated, group of unpaid volunteers. During the height of kitty season, from early May to mid-October, our

facility could be the temporary home to as many as forty to fifty adoptable cats and kittens, as well as the permanent residence for an additional eighteen to twenty-five felines.

I began RESQCATS in 1997 and, over the past 21 years, have rescued and adopted out more than 2900 cats and kittens as we have grown into the second largest cat rescue organization in Santa Barbara County.

As for my background, I grew up in Dallas, Texas and graduated from Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas in 1979 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. (In reading about you, I saw that we share a similar artistic interest!)

After graduation, I worked as a graphic designer in the Dallas area, until I married at the age of thirty and relocated to San Diego, California. I do not have children, in fact, children were never a consideration... a decision I have never regretted. My husband, Mitch, has children from a previous marriage and while he was concerned that I might want our own children at some point, I never did. We often joke that we made a deal that I could have as many cats as I wanted as long as I didn't get pregnant! We married in 1986 and between the two of us had three cats at that time. By the end of our first year together, we were up to ten! He said, "My goodness, every month that you don't get pregnant you adopt another cat!" All kidding aside, the cats have always been like my children. However, we did renegotiate that original deal!

We lived by a jetty on the ocean where many cats were simply dumped by unscrupulous people. Few of these animals were spayed or neutered so, of course, many kittens were being born. While some local residents fed the cats, even back then I knew that something had to be done to stop the cycle of so many kittens being born into less-than-ideal conditions. It was then, more than 30 years ago, under the guidance of a local veterinarian, that I began my own trap-neuter-return program. While I didn't totally solve the feline overpopulation

problem, I'm proud to say that my initiative was successful in reducing the number of homeless cats reproducing.

Two of those early jetty cats, Twilight and Squint, who were leukemia positive, moved in with us and lived out their remaining years in the comfort of our home. They both later relocated when we moved to Phoenix. Squint died at the age of three. Twilight moved again when we came to Santa Barbara and he lived to be six!

While in San Diego, I enjoyed being creative with my art, but my love for animals kept driving me to do something that would make a difference for cats. I went back to college to become a vet tech. However, my new college career was interrupted when my husband, who had been the President of Petco Pet Supply stores, was offered an executive management position with a major retailer in Phoenix, Arizona.

In Phoenix, I received professional counseling training and became a volunteer pet grief counselor on a hotline for three years. I also helped facilitate local pet grief support groups and seminars. The work was worthwhile, but I still wanted to do something that would make a difference in the world for cats. That passion for cats is what led me to establish RESQCATS.

When Mitch retired in 1996, we moved back to the coast of California and chose Santa Barbara as the future site of our cat rescue facility.

RESQCATS operates out of a 1500 square foot greenhouse that has been converted to a unique cat sanctuary with large, roomy enclosures, common play areas and a separate isolation area for ailing or unsociable cats. The facility also includes eight remote 100 square foot, open-air enclosures connected by more than 750 feet of outside, overhead trails. Mitch and I spent our own money and did most of the physical labor to transform the property's dilapidated greenhouse into our cat sanctuary. We recycled old cabinets and doors from the

original house and created a wonderful place for stray and abandoned cats and kittens. Over the years, grants and donors have enabled us to upgrade the facility to a one-of-a-kind sanctuary.

With the help of a local vet who believed in my dream, the medical protocol for RESQCATS was set and has essentially remained the same for twenty-one years. Every cat and kitten has a vet exam, fecal exam and is tested for Felv/FIV. In addition, each cat is de-wormed, vaccinated, spayed or neutered, and micro-chipped. However, if a cat or kitten requires care beyond the normal protocol, we provide whatever is necessary.

I have outstanding relationships with virtually all the local veterinarians including specialists in the fields of orthopedics, internal medicine, cardiology, board-certified surgery and ophthalmology.

I believe that every life is precious and worth saving. That philosophy led RESQCATS to becoming a truly "no-kill" shelter. If a cat or kitten arrives that is not adoptable, it becomes a resident and I take the responsibility for the lifetime care of the cat. My viewpoint is that, "If a cat is too shy, too feral, has too many health issues or just too anything... it stays!" Today, there are eighteen resident cats.

Over the years I have taken in three seventeen-year-old cats who would have been euthanized in county shelters. Three leukemia positive kittens, Liora, Asya and Katsu, were given their own, specially-designed, fully-isolated area to live out their short lives. And soon after the last one passed away, Talulah, another leukemia positive cat was given a home here at RESQCATS for all her remaining days. I have provided lifetime care to cats with mega-colon, cerebral hyperplasia, irritable bowel syndrome and heart disease. It is just the right thing to do!

Joan, after reading about you, I can certainly appreciate all

you have created for the cats on Syros. It takes a compassionate being to craft such a haven. But having a heart of gold is only part of it. It is a commitment of patience and time and that is certainly something I understand.

During kitten season, RESQCATS often has forty to sixty cats and kittens in addition to the resident cats. I am very accustomed to caring for many animals at any given time.

I have learned so much during my twenty-one years of operating a cat rescue. While I'm not a certified vet technician, I am very familiar with the medical requirements of caring for the cats including administering oral medication, giving sub-q fluids, providing surgical or injury aftercare, giving vaccinations, and recognizing when a cat needs to see a veterinarian.

In addition, my relationship with a local TNR (trap, neuter return) group has offered me the opportunity to work with many feral kittens. There is more to cat rescue than just healing the body; many times the souls of the cats need special attention as well. It is rewarding to see a frightened, lonely kitten blossom into one that trusts humans and enjoys a gentle touch or a game of chasing a feather teaser!

When I began RESQCATS, I wanted to make a difference for the cats. What I did not realize is the difference they made in the lives of not only those who adopted them, but in my life as well. After years of writing about the cats in my RESQCATS fund-raising newsletters, I was encouraged by a dear friend to write a book. I accepted her challenge and recently released my first book, *Cat Tails: Heart-Warming Stories About the Cats and Kittens of RESQCATS*. Over 700 copies have sold since November, 2017, with 100% of the proceeds going directly to RESQCATS. It is a book about the valuable life lessons that the cats have taught me, the challenges of rescue, and finding resolution when I lose one. I have included a link to an overview. You may also want to

read some of the reviews on Amazon. I would be happy to send you a free copy so you can read about my passion to rescue and the beautiful life lessons the cats have taught me.

I have been married for over thirty-two years to a wonderful man who shares my love for animals. We have given a home to thirty-three collies, fifteen African sulcata tortoises and more than seventy cats during our marriage... all rescues, of course. We currently have six collies, fifteen cats and fifteen tortoises. We live on three-and-one-half acres in Santa Barbara overlooking the Pacific. The ocean has always had such a healing spirit for me.

I have visited the Greek islands on three different occasions and, like you, fell in love with them. It probably goes without saying that much of my time there was spent petting and photographing the cats in their beautiful surroundings. I remember separating from a tourist group that was visiting the sites to walk along the back streets of Mykonos to photograph cats that were sitting on cafe chairs and peeking around corners of the white-washed buildings. It was like heaven for me.

My feelings for animals stretch across all species. I recall visiting Kusadasi, Turkey several years ago on a cruise. I skipped the tourist sites and spent all day buying roasted chickens from the local vendors and feeding them to the stray dogs.

I have always dreamed of one day returning to do something that would make a difference for the Greek felines! The opportunity you have presented would be so rewarding and make that dream come true.

The busy season at RESQCATS is May through October, kitten season in California. My work days are long and arduous... usually from dawn to dusk, seven days a week. I work side by side with the volunteers cleaning enclosures, changing litter boxes and completing all those tasks that need

to be done after the cats and kittens party all night! (I often wish I had a camera in the cattery at night to see just what they do during those wee hours to create such disarray!) But it is the private time that I spend with the cats that I cherish the most. Many afternoons, after the volunteers have gone, I spend hours with the cats: weighing, de-worming, vaccinating, petting and getting to know each and every one of them.

I am fortunate in that Mitch and I have the resources to have a second home in Oregon... on the ocean, of course! That is where I usually spend my winters and have time to reflect on the past year and plan for another cat rescue season. It has also given me the opportunity to focus on my creative energy... I quilt, draw and, during the last four years, wrote and released my book.

I cannot imagine a more rewarding way to spend this winter than making a difference for the cats at God's Little People. My husband is one of many who shared the link about your quest. Mitch said, "Jeffyne, this job has you written all over it. It would be a wonderful opportunity for you and I am 100% behind you if you would like to go to Syros and give it your best, as you always do."

I have been vegetarian for over twenty-five years and vegan for almost five... so hummus and Greek food fit perfectly on my menu!

While I have the means, I'm happy with a relatively simple life. I am not a fancy restaurant person. I do enjoy people, but I also like my alone time. At the end of the day I am content with half a glass of wine and a couple of lap cats!

I understand that you are looking for someone responsible, committed and compassionate. I am energetic, in perfect health, and extremely enthusiastic. My past experience and acquired feline knowledge is an asset that would enable me to do a great job for you.

I invite you to visit my website to learn more about me.

I am also prepared to provide references from the veterinarian who believed in me more than twenty years ago when he helped set up the protocol for RESQCATS. Several other veterinarians that I currently work with can also provide both personal and professional references about my animal experience as well as my contributions to the community. In addition, two long-time volunteers and personal friends are also available as references.

Joan, I would be absolutely thrilled with the opportunity to talk with you to see if I am the kind of person you are looking for. I know I could do what you expect and would be honored to be chosen to help you and entrusted with the cats of God's Little People.

Sincerely,

Jeffyne Telson



Reality Sets In!



While I'd known for several weeks that I had been selected to spend the winter months at God's Little People Cat Rescue in Syros, Greece, it felt surreal until just a few days before I was scheduled to leave. What had seemed like a dream for weeks now came rushing forward like a flash flood. Reality set in. Suddenly, I was aware that I had to pack and, if you're like me, that's a dreadful undertaking!

Until a week prior to my leaving, my days were spent as usual at RESQCATS. They were filled with chores, paperwork and visits to the vet. Spay and neuter surgeries were scheduled and I hoped that all the cats and kittens at RESQCATS would be adopted by the time I left. As usual, I worked from the time the sun came up until the last light of day.

An unfortunate habit of mine is to wake up in the wee hours of the morning thinking and fretting about my day ahead. My mind spins as I try to assess the challenges of the day that has yet to even arrive! I lay awake worrying; sleepless nights just seem to come with the territory of rescuing. What else can I do to help the kittens with upper respiratory infections? How can I get that little one to eat? Is there anything else I can try for the explosive diarrhea the litter of eight has? How can I convince someone to adopt a sweet mother cat when most people are only interested in her kittens? The list of worries is endless and, honestly, there isn't much I can do to solve any of them in the middle of the night. Well, on second thought... there is a lot that can be done in the following hours!

On many of those restless nights, I get up, find my way downstairs and drink my chai latte in the dark; I need that caffeine and sugar "fix" before I can think clearly. Then I

head to my office. In those dark, early hours, all is peaceful and quiet; there's no phone to answer and only the late night emails to read... and the annoying advertisements to delete! It's the perfect time to get much of my paperwork done. There are health records to update, thank you notes to write and email inquiries to answer. I then compose the posts for social media, so all of our cats and kittens can find their forever homes. I find that particular paperwork to be the most creative thing I get to do during the busy season.

When I accepted the position at God's Little People, it often felt like I had two jobs. Those weeks prior to my departure were especially demanding. My days continued to be dawn to dusk in order to finish all the business of RESQCATS. Simultaneously, I had already begun to think about my winter assignment and had actually started working on the project.

Since the link for the job had gone viral, news organizations from all over the world wanted the story. Suddenly I was cast into an unfamiliar world of doing interviews for the BBC, *The Washington Post* and my local newspaper, *The Santa Barbara NewsPress*. While I'm frequently up before dawn, I don't normally shower and dress until after sunrise. However, on one particular occasion, I had to be dressed with make-up and combed hair in time to connect with the BBC in New York for an interview that began at 5:00 a.m. Santa Barbara time! My interview was timed to coincide with a televised discussion with Richard Bowell from God's Little People. *CBS Sunday Morning* sent reporters to do a segment on RESQCATS with the intention of following up when I was settled in Syros. The interview lasted over four hours! Locally, a new series called *AnimalZone* was being filmed and I was asked to be on the show. Being in the limelight isn't something I'm comfortable doing, but I did my best to be a good spokesperson. I do have to admit that while it was exhilarating and I'd do just about anything to further a good cause, interviewing is exhausting

for me. Afterwards, I just want to disappear into the cattery with only the cats for at least a day.

I worked tirelessly to finalize everything I could at RESQCATS. I wrote and designed the RESQCATS Winter newsletter six weeks ahead of schedule and I made sure that all the cats and kittens were adopted. The one exception was a kitten who needed to remain in foster care.

At the same time, I was thinking about my upcoming responsibilities in Syros. For example, I put together a campaign to raise funds for the Syros cats. I asked people for donations to God's Little People in lieu of gifts for my birthday as I wanted to make a difference for the cats even before I arrived. The generosity of so many actually enabled Joan to buy a new "tumble" dryer for the cats' laundry. Not long after I arrived, the dryer was delivered and installed. It was then that I learned why it's called a tumble dryer. That's all it does! It tumbles the clothes! Unlike the dryers in the US that use heat to dry garments, this appliance works quite differently. It removes water from the laundry by friction, not heat! The water is collected in a special compartment that has to be emptied often. It's no wonder that without heat it takes three hours to dry a single load! The new tumble dryer did make my job on the island easier by eliminating the need to line dry everything.

Still, much of this felt unreal... like a dream, or a movie, or that this was happening to someone else.

When the last mother cat was adopted, only one tiny kitten remained in foster care. I realized that the departure date was quickly approaching, so my attention turned to packing. Packing! Oh my gosh! Packing! That has to be one of my least favorite things for any trip and I usually put it off to the last minute. But the time to pack came all too swiftly and I had to consider what to take. It was quite different packing for a short vacation versus anticipating being gone for months! I

felt anxious about deciding what goes and what stays. What do I take? What do I leave behind? Will it all fit? What if I forget something? If I don't pack something, will they have it in Greece? What if they don't?

Excuse me, could you repeat that? I'm allowed only one suitcase! You've got to be kidding! How much can it weigh? Twenty-three kilos! Really? That's not even fifty-one pounds! Is that all? Can you double check on that? There has to be a way to fit all I need into a single bag and please, please let there be room for the four-pound bag of chai mix; those lattes are what get me going in the morning!

One would think that I would've realized six weeks ago that I really was going to Greece when I discovered Mitch's list of "things to do before you leave" sitting on top of my computer. He placed it there so I couldn't miss it. His list alone was enough to keep me up at night: get new glasses, shop for drip-dry clothes, buy a warm vest and schedule a colonoscopy.

What? A colonoscopy! I recalled the one I had done ten years ago. I went through the miserable preparation of not eating solid food the day before followed by a horrible tasting liquid to empty my bowels. When I arrived at the doctor's office at six a.m. the following morning, the attending nurse had the nerve to ask me how I was doing. I glared at her for a moment and then said, "I've had no solid food for twenty-four hours, diarrhea for twelve hours due to the "stuff" you made me drink and I haven't had my chai latte. So, I'm pretty grumpy!" Why Mitch thought I needed to go through that again right before leaving, I'll never know!

He also asked me to write instructions for feeding and medicating the resident cats; that was easy enough to do.

Next on the list was "get your flu shot." I think Mitch thought he could slip that in as I usually pass on flu shots because I faint every time someone sticks a needle in me. But

this year I simply gave in and brought papers home from the doctor to prove that I'd actually gotten it.

Mitch's list also included "update any prescriptions you might need." When I asked what he meant, he suggested anti-diarrhea meds and antibiotics. That added yet another thing to do... make an appointment with my doctor. I thought about ignoring that directive, although later, when I was bitten by a kitten in Syros, I was glad I had brought the antibiotics.

Then there was a long list of technical computer information I needed to learn such as installing and running cleaners and malware. Mitch ordered extra cords and adapters for my computer and phone, but I had to learn what they were for and where to plug them in.

Also on my to-do list were such items as: get phone service for overseas, figure out how much money I needed to take, change dollars into euros and apply for an international credit card. Mitch's list went on and on and on! I thought to myself, but dared not say, "Who asked YOU to put together a list for me!?" But one by one, I checked off every item as "done." Later... much later... I would thank him for that list!

However, despite all my planning during those last days before my departure, I would still wake up in the middle of the night worrying about all things... cords! What plugs into what and where? And what if I don't plug them in correctly? Will something blow up? Is it possible to lose all communication with Mitch and the rest of the world? What is WiFi and how does that work? How much does texting cost? Oops! Too much! What about Facebook Messenger? I know how to do that and it's free!

It all seemed so alien to me. At least when I got up in the wee hours concerned about upper respiratory infections and diarrhea in kittens, it was familiar territory!



If you're like me, you dread packing. Didn't I say that already? I thought there must be a way of doing it that would make it easy. I decided to go about it creatively. To start, I set up a card table in the closet, so I could see all the items I wanted to take. Later I could decide what was absolutely necessary. I gathered the clothes I thought I might need and went so far as to try and stay within a color range, so that I could mix and match. I considered wearing layers thinking that whether it was warm or cold, I would survive. I picked out enough socks and underwear to last a week in case there was no easy access to a washer and dryer. And of course, everything had to be color-coordinated to satisfy my need for order that stems from being a graphic designer and growing up in the fashion capital of Dallas, Texas where the shoes, belt and purse had to match! I thought my method of putting everything imaginable on the table might help in the process... but it didn't. Even the table didn't seem big enough.

Is there anything worse than trying to decide what to take and what to leave behind? My idea of necessities is quite different than some, especially Mitch! When he saw that I'd packed my Paul Mitchell lavender moisturizing shampoo and conditioner, I saw by the look on his face even before the words left his lips, "Why do you need to take that? Don't they have shampoo over there?" I then went into the long explanation that Paul Mitchell doesn't test on animals and I wasn't sure they'd have cruelty-free products on a tiny island in the middle of the Cyclades. I further explained that my hair gets very dry and this particular moisturizing formula would ensure that I came back from a foreign country with hair at all! I'm certain he has no idea of everything it takes for a woman my age to take care of herself! There are lotions and creams and hair-dye and treatments just to name a few! After that discussion, I decided to hide most of those types of "must-go" items from his sight so that no additional justification

was needed!

During the grueling undertaking of packing, I discovered the total waste of product packaging! I managed to fit 150 envelopes of floss in a small bag that measured two inches by four inches, about the size of a single packet of thirty in the store! A box of Q-tips, dental picks, and cotton balls fit in a quart-size baggie once I squeezed out the air.

Oh, now there's the trick that my well-traveled friend, Janet, shared. Squeezing the excess air out of plastic bags proved to be a lifesaver! It was astonishing to see how much space air alone can take up. Believe it or not, I fit three pairs of drip-dry pants, a pair of jeans, seven pairs of underwear, a few squished toiletries AND my shampoo in a single plastic bag! That "must take" conditioner was included in a bag with three flannel shirts, pajamas and socks! So I got this!

With a little twisting and gyrating, I was able to fit everything into a single suitcase. Granted, it was more like a steamer trunk as opposed to a light weight carry-on bag, but there was still some room for any last-minute things that I was sure I'd forgotten, and, of course, would remember in the middle of the night.



Not surprisingly, on the night before I departed, I woke up in a panic. It suddenly occurred to me, "What if my luggage doesn't meet the weight restrictions?" I was just not willing to part with my new house slippers and certainly not the four-pound bag of chai latte mix!

It was too late now... the bag was packed, in the car and ready to board for Syros!

A Time of Transition



As I prepared for my winter stay at God's Little People, I found myself in an uneasy state of mind. It is an emotional time that I refer to as my "gray" area! I was neither here nor there. It was a time of transition, anticipation, questioning and double-checking my long to-do list as I approached my last days in America. Being a person who sees things in black and white, this gray area is always uncomfortable. Had I forgotten anything? What had I forgotten? If I had forgotten something, would it fit in my suitcase at this late stage? When I got there and didn't have something I needed, would it be available in Syros? The same questions circle in my head even when I'm headed to Oregon for the winter. I always feel unsettled when change is on the horizon. So, not surprisingly, the shift from my familiar life at RESQCATS to God's Little People Cat Rescue would conjure up my insecurities about change.

On the one hand, my excitement grew by the day. I felt eager to face whatever lay ahead. On the other hand, the butterflies in my stomach were certainly understandable, too.

Accepting all the congratulations and good wishes from friends, family and my peers meant a lot to me. While I realized I wasn't leaving forever, saying good-bye for several months was not without tearful emotions. I was compelled to tell the people close to me how I felt about them. While it was unlikely that anything serious would happen to me while I was away, I have a sensitive nature and I wanted them to know how much they meant to me. I also felt that there were many people who were part of a bigger picture and who were partially responsible for how I came to have such an amazing opportunity. I made sure the volunteers and supporters understood that this journey was not about me

alone. It was about RESQCATS... and they were all a part of RESQCATS. Without the support of so many over the years, my dream to make a difference in another country would never have come to pass. I wanted them to know they would be going with me to Greece... even if just in spirit.

I promised to do my best and nothing less. While I knew in my heart that I'd love the job and was capable of doing whatever was needed, I also hoped to make my friends and family proud. Still, it was hard to say good-bye, even for a few months.

My closest friends know my outlook on life is to see "the glass half full." I believe in the goodness of people and that kindness goes a long way. If we're compassionate towards animals, then we become better human beings to each other. It's always been my goal to spread that message to the world and to offer change and hope for the animals...and humankind.

However, I'm also aware that I can be somewhat naive when it comes to giving people praise as I tend to only see the best in them. Therefore, I may not always see the truth. Fortunately, I had a friend, who I'll call Jenny for this story, that always had my back. She was a wonderful ally and a good balance for my sometimes overly-optimistic outlook. She cautioned me about people since I most often look at the world through rose-colored glasses.

When I told Jenny that I was selected for the position at God's Little People, she went into protective mode! She warned me to not drink the water, alerted me to illnesses I could catch overseas and suggested numerous medications to take for any possible ailments I may contract. Lastly she said, "Now, don't talk to strangers!" Jenny worried about me, unduly I might add, but she had the best of intentions; I'm certain of that. I knew I would ignore her last piece of advice or I'd never make friends in other lands!

We had conspired in many rescues over the years, and

without incriminating myself too much, I will admit that not all of them were above board. There's a quote that reminds me of Jenny; "A good friend will bail you out of jail. But your best friend will be sitting next to you saying...'Damn! That was fun.'" It probably goes without saying, but she would have been sitting next to me in that cell if it had ever come to that!

I thought it was hilarious when she suggested I get a microchip so that if I got lost, I could be found and returned to my proper home! She was teasing, of course! At least, I thought Jenny was joking until after a few days of thinking about me being in a foreign country, she recommended that I also get inserted with a GPS chip so that she would know where I was at all times! Was she kidding? She must have been! On second thought, I'm not so sure!

Joan sensed the love and support from my closest friends and said, "I'm beginning to realize that if I don't get you back to the States on time, there'll be a search party for me to return you!" When I shared Joan's statement with Jenny, she replied, "Well, maybe Joan should get a GPS chip, too!"

For me, the unknown can conjure up a lot of questions. I wondered what the house where I would be staying looked like. Was it as beautiful as it appeared in the photos? Could I be comfortable living by myself with no husband and no dogs? Would I be permitted to have cats in my house at God's Little People? How busy would I be? How would I cope with the loneliness? Would I even have time to get lonely? What would I do in my spare time? Might there be an opportunity to write about my experience? Are any of the television stations in English? Would there even be a television? Would I have internet access? What was the best way for me to stay in touch with home?

However, all these questions and potential problems seemed minor compared to my biggest worry... my major concern about going so far away was the fact that I'm a vegan.

Joan assured me that I would have no problem in Syros with my diet. She told me there was a health food store on the island that carried meatless, dairy-free, eggless ingredients. Ingredients! Oh my! Ingredients meant that I had to make things.

Now, many of you reading this are aware of the fact that I don't cook! Mitch does all of our cooking. In fact, it's well known to my friends that I consider the kitchen to be the "hallway" that leads to the most important room in my house... the laundry room! Think about it! RESQCATS can have as many as fifty or sixty cats in our care at any given time, so the washing machines and dryers are in constant use. Who has time to think about ingredients... or cooking... or the kitchen?

To be completely honest, I used to cook in the days before I became a vegetarian. But my experiments in meatless cooking were so bad that it wasn't long before Mitch took over the job. I don't remember exactly when it happened, but his decision may have been based on the experimental lentil loaf I prepared. It was so dry that it drew all of the moisture out of our mouths and my make-believe meat loaf proved inedible. I do recall that the very first bite reminded me of the cardboard that dry cleaners used to put inside newly pressed shirts to keep them from wrinkling. It wouldn't even go down the garbage disposal! And it landed like a heavy brick when I dropped it into the trash container.

If it wasn't the lentil loaf that convinced Mitch, perhaps it was the veggie kabobs that had been marinated for hours in a special sauce. I'm not sure what I did wrong, but the vegetables only absorbed the vinegar! As Mitch took the first bite, I saw his cheeks pucker and his eyes begin to water. I thought he was exaggerating, so I took a bite of a cherry tomato and bell pepper hoping to disprove his sour look. But he was right! The saliva rushed into my mouth in an effort to

wash away the horrible taste. My eyes watered and I literally spit the veggies back onto my plate! The kabobs were so acidic that our taste buds were numb for an hour afterwards and nothing else tasted the least bit appetizing. One can certainly understand why the task of vegetarian cooking needed to be reassigned and Mitch happily volunteered for the position!

My point is this: I had a strong suspicion that while in Greece, I would once again be experimenting with cooking unless, of course, there was a corner take-out deli with vegan options or the supermarkets were well stocked with a variety of canned vegetables! Because I would be in the Mediterranean, I was confident that pita and hummus would be readily available and would become a major staple in my diet. As long as I had my chai latte mix and a good supply of pita and hummus, I felt I was close to being set!

Oh, what could be the worst thing to happen when I got to Syros? Probably, the "Joy of Cooking!"



*Those Last-Minute Things
Can Be the Most Important*



When the major packing for my trip to God's Little People was complete, there were still a few small things to tuck into my bag. Those chosen sentimental items that have special meaning just couldn't be left behind.

I spent my last morning saying tearful goodbyes to my dogs and the fifteen resident cats. While it was bittersweet and I would miss them, I knew I was leaving them in good hands with Mitch, the house-sitter and the RESQCATS volunteers.

I wished for only three things while I was away: 1) that none of my animals became ill and passed to the Rainbow Bridge during my absence, 2) that Mitch didn't get sick, and 3) that Mitch had to spend time and play with my newest addition, Twilite. In the past summer, I had become quite smitten with this adorable black kitten, so I adopted her during the height of kitten season. Yes, even I fail at fostering! Twilite is a prime example of that! When I left, she was still a kitten, just six months old, so I knew by the time I returned she'd be almost full-grown!

I packed my eight collies in the bag as I didn't expect to see many dogs on Syros. Well, not literally packed them! A simple framed photo of Adonis, Whisper, Echo, Fantazy, Phoenix, River, Summer and Breeze, which had been taken for our annual holiday card, fit nicely inside my suitcase. I love our dogs, but they are not the aloof, independent beings that cats are and sometimes they can be a bit much. They are typically inside the house and are frequently under my feet or greeting me at the door when I'm carrying loads of laundry in from the cattery. While I often find that frustrating, I knew I'd

miss them and their devoted companionship. I secretly hoped there might be a few dogs in Syros so I could get an occasional "dog fix!"

I carefully wrapped two photographs of my most beloved canines, both of whom are now on the Rainbow Bridge, and cushioned them safely between my flannel shirts and pajamas. Mijek (pronounced Magic) was my soul-mate and, although it's been many years since she passed, she still has her own special place in my heart. Every night before I fall asleep, I look at a painting of Mijek that's mounted above the bedroom fireplace. And then there's MisJef (pronounced Miss Jeff). She was my best friend and the love of my life when it comes to dogs. Adopting MisJef not too long after Mijek died is what saved me emotionally. I was so distraught about the sudden loss of Mijek that I can remember very little about what happened in the following weeks. What I do remember though is that Mitch suggested that I adopt another collie to help me work through the loss and pain I was experiencing. I emphatically said, "No! There isn't another dog that could ever replace Mijek!" But, sometimes Mitch knows what's best for me so, with good intentions, he arranged for me to meet a litter of rescued collie puppies. That was when I first saw MisJef and there was an immediate bond between us. I smiled and, for the first time in weeks, my heart-light went on.



I've since come to realize that we don't replace relationships. The next one is just different... not better, not worse... just different. But MisJef and I were certainly a match made in heaven. She came home with us that day and we spent the next ten years together. MisJef died suddenly in March 2017; there still isn't a day that goes by when I don't think of her. In memory of her, I have a tattoo on my arm, but that's not the same as seeing a picture of her sweet face at night before

I retire, so a photo of MisJef had to go to Syros.

I'm grateful to have loved both Mijek and MisJef so deeply. It was unique to have such a special attachment twice in my lifetime. But often, with that kind of love, comes grief. They certainly left pawprints on my heart... so much so that I dedicated my first book, *Cat Tails: Heart-Warming Stories about the Cats and Kittens of RESQCATS* to both Mijek and MisJef.

I'm the kind of person who needs something tangible to touch and hold in order to feel comfort. When Mijek died, I had a glass bead made that contains some of her ashes and put it on a silver chain to wear as a necklace. Then, when MisJef passed, a long-time friend had a silver pendant designed to look just like MisJef with her cremains placed inside a molded sterling silver heart. I wear it every day.

On Mitch's recent trip to Israel, he came upon a pendant of a dove in a local jewelry shop. It was a brilliant fire opal on a sterling silver chain. He knew that I already had two very special necklaces that I wore daily, so he had another idea. He bought two dove pendants and had them made into earrings. Many people may not know this, but opals are only to be worn if they're your birthstone, or when they're given to you. Well, I was born in October, and I am a Libran, so opals are my birthstone and they were given to me. That means it is 100% legitimate for me to wear them!

When Mitch presented the earrings to me in a pretty package wrapped with fancy ribbon, I couldn't wait to open the box and see what gift he had brought me. I carefully untied the ribbon and tried not to tear the paper. It's not that I save ribbon and paper, it's just that I hate to ruin pretty things! I opened the jewelry box and tears came to my eyes, not only for the beauty of the earrings, but for what the doves symbolized to me. You see, when you rescue animals and adopt older dogs as we do, there are many losses to face. The dove-shaped earrings remind me that my animals' spirits can fly but that they always

return to my heart. So the earrings were an absolute essential to pack.

There was still room for a couple of other small, but important, pieces in the suitcase. A jade pendant on a simple chain was recently given to me by some dear friends. Jade is a gemstone that is said to keep one grounded. I suspected I might need to feel a sense of stability with all the unknown adventures awaiting me in Greece! Perhaps wearing a jade pendant would keep me steady as I faced my new challenges and experiences. A close friend who is a jewelry artist made me a necklace with rose quartz. She said that rose quartz represents healing. The soothing energy fosters empathy and lowers stress and tension in the heart. I imagined it might be good not only for me, but perhaps for some of the cats that would cross my path in Syros. And of course, the matching cat earrings she made were a must for a cat rescuer!

I couldn't leave my peace symbol earrings behind either. I wear them almost every day. They're a reminder that there's always hope in the world for love and peace. That wish starts with each one of us working towards a better world every single day.

While the photos and jewelry were symbolic and have special meaning, there were some things, much bigger, that couldn't be contained in my luggage. They were the feelings of friendship, love and support from my friends, family and RESQCATS volunteers. By the time I left, I had assured all of them that they'd go with me in my heart.

But there was also someone very special that I haven't mentioned. That's my wonderful husband, Mitch. He was, after all, the one who put the link about the job offer in my mailbox. He was the one who said, "Jeffyne, this job has YOU written all over it!" He was the one who encouraged me to apply although he knew it meant we would be apart for several months. He was the one who vowed to support me 100% if I wanted to

apply and if chosen, fulfill my dream to make a difference for the cats in Greece.

Most importantly, he is the one... and the only one for me. I carefully tucked the card Mitch wrote to me that said, "My dearest Jeffyne, I'm so proud to be your husband and your greatest champion. You can do anything you put your mind to... and your heart. I will always stand by you in whatever you do. I love you with all my heart."

What I didn't realize until I unpacked in Syros was that Mitch had tucked several cards in my suitcase. Each envelope had a date on the outside instructing me when it was to be opened. His love notes were like opening a Valentine every three or four days.

As I boarded the plane to leave Santa Barbara, I felt surrounded by the warmth of well wishes and good feelings. I planned to pay those sentiments forward to the cats at God's Little People, to Joan and her husband, Richard, and to everyone that I met on my journey.

My Arrival



My goodness, it was a long way to Syros! Even with all the excitement of a new adventure, one is never quite prepared for the lengthy flights, layovers and the number of hours it takes to get to a remote place in the world.

My flight began in Santa Barbara and my first stop was Dallas, Texas for a quick two-day stay with my mom. After visiting her, the real journey began. From Dallas, I flew to Atlanta and, after a brief two-hour layover, I was comfortably sitting in my seat for the next leg of the flight to London's Heathrow Airport. I was fortunate that Mitch had enough reward miles to upgrade me to business class. What a treat! I felt like a queen in my own private pod, especially after seeing what coach was like; it was cramped from side to side and head to foot! Business class had privacy windows, fluffy pillows, slippers, eye masks, blankets, a toiletry bag, and headphones, so I could listen to and watch a movie of my choice. The pod seat adjusted to a lay-down position with an adjustable footrest that made my seat into a bed. Although I never figured out just how all the gadgets worked, it was nice to know they were there! It was just before seven at night when we took off. I was offered champagne or whatever my thirst buds desired. I asked only for water so that I could take some herbal jet lag pills that a friend had suggested. I had preordered a vegan dinner... surprisingly, it was quite delicious. Afterwards, I curled up and was able to sleep through most of the flight.

With a five hour time difference between London and Atlanta, I was scheduled to arrive around nine in the morning local time. Then I had a ten-hour layover before the flight to Athens! What was I to do at the airport for ten hours!? Those

who have ever visited Heathrow know that the terminal is like a giant mall with shops and restaurants and a spa all wrapped into one. It was wonderful! There were comfortable lounges, places to charge my phone and plenty of meals and snacks that are free to first and business class passengers. There was even a place to take a shower and the spa offered a fifteen minute back and shoulder massage. The best part was that it cost me absolutely nothing! So I didn't fare badly at Heathrow. Ten hours at an airport with all those amenities was certainly doable!

My flight from Heathrow to Athens was an additional three-and-a-half hours. Although it was booked as business class, it was actually set up as three seats in coach with an empty seat between myself and the next passenger. That seemed like a rip-off to call it business class, but thankfully the flight wasn't terribly long. I arrived in Athens at 1:30 in the morning local time.

I'm not sure what I expected... Heathrow maybe! But when I arrived, it was anything but the activity of the London airport. Instead, I found myself standing in a massive and deserted building. There was little sign of life; only a few people were in the long hallways, most of whom had been on my flight. All the shops and restaurants were closed except for one that served a few snacks and bottled water. The only activity was a work crew that was remodeling an area next to the check-in gates... which didn't open until two hours before the next flight. Realizing that few planes arrive in the middle of the night, it made sense that everything would be closed. Still, I was disappointed after my luxurious experience at Heathrow. I was now tired and cranky and would be stuck for the next six hours with nothing to do... no lounge, no food and no place to get comfortable until my flight to Syros.

I have since traveled back to the Athens airport several times during the day and realize it is quite a bustling place

with lots of activity, nice shops and restaurants. But it wasn't on this night.

I collected my suitcase, or trunk actually, and kept it with me for the next six hours as I waited for my final flight. I tried sleeping on the benches and the chairs... propped up on my luggage. I covered myself with my jacket and used my carry-on bag as a pillow, but I couldn't get comfortable. I remember seeing several young people traveling with huge backpacks and nothing else. They seemed content to sleep on the floor or twisted into a chair, which are positions my body just can't get into anymore. I wondered if they were backpacking through Europe, had joined the Peace Corps or, like me, were on some mysterious adventure. But whatever they had in store certainly couldn't have been as thrilling as my coming to Greece to make a difference for street cats! I was sure of that!

Finally, after sixteen hours of flight time and just as many hours in layovers, I arrived in Syros where I was greeted by Joan and Richard. Although I had only met them the one time in Santa Barbara, there was a familiar enthusiasm in our reunion. We exchanged lengthy hugs and it felt like no time had passed since their September visit. It was like seeing long-lost friends again.

We made a fast trip to the city with the first stop being at the health food store so that I could stock up on some meatless, dairy-free and eggless vegan entrees! I was thrilled to find tofu, granola, soy cheese and almond milk. I felt I was set, at least for a few days. After settling in, I planned to stock up on pita and hummus!

The drive through town gave me just a quick glimpse of what island living is like. The hustle and bustle in the early morning hours of the downtown area surprised me; it was not exactly like rush hour in Santa Barbara, but there were certainly a lot of early-risers out and about getting their

morning chores and shopping done. Afterwards I realized why many of the locals did their shopping early. The later it gets in the day, the less chance there is of finding a parking space anywhere in this busy town!

The streets were extremely narrow and several were quite bumpy due to the uneven cobblestone. Some of them appeared to be one-way, but being unfamiliar with the street signs made it difficult for me to be certain. I couldn't quite figure out how maneuvering around parked cars, in a single narrow unmarked lane with two inches to spare, was going to work. I did realize that sooner or later, I would have to learn how to drive in Syros as it was part of the job description. I foresaw this would certainly be a challenge. I hoped that the locals were ready for this American driver! But, for the moment, I was glad Joan was behind the wheel and not me! I just wanted to take it all in. Any fatigue I felt from the long journey was overcome by adrenaline and the pure joy of being in Syros.

My arrival at God's Little People Cat Rescue surpassed all of my expectations. It's located in a remote spot on the island at a nature preserve, so it was quiet and secluded. It was a warm sunny day, not unlike the weather in Santa Barbara. I quickly unpacked my luggage, got my clothes and toiletries organized, and headed out to meet Joan so that she could show me the sanctuary. She introduced me to many of the resident cats and after a brief tour left me on my own to explore and become acquainted with my new surroundings.

As I sat on the porch overlooking the property, a few of the cats came by to scrutinize their new visitor and several became immediately comfortable in my presence. Two took no time at all finding a nice spot and curled up next to me. Then a tabby cat, that I later learned was named Jessie, found her way into my lap. I loved watching the curiosity of the cats and it seemed the afternoon could slip away without warning. When I finally looked up from my new feline companions, the

view of the Aegean was breathtaking. The water was a deep cobalt blue. The rhythmic sounds of the tide were tranquil. The sun was warm and soothing. A slight breeze brushed past my face. Since the sanctuary was so isolated, it was also extremely quiet.

There was no noise from traffic on the road. The only sound that could be heard was the chirping and singing of a few distant birds. As I took in a deep breath, a sense of peace came over me. Any apprehension I had felt about coming to Syros gradually dissolved. I was as serene as I have ever been.

It was evident that this was heaven on earth for the fortunate cats that lived here. I was surprised at just how friendly most of them were! I expected aloof, scared, feral cats. However, many of them greeted me and loved any attention I gave them. Several came running as soon as they spotted me, rubbed against my legs and wanted to be petted. Some were lap cats and I soon realized that it was not uncommon to have one OR MORE cats on my lap at any given time! Obviously, these cats were loved and I would like to think they were grateful for all that they have at God's Little People.

I do believe that rescued animals most often realize that they have been saved from life on the streets where they were always searching for a warm place to sleep, foraging for food and dodging in and out of traffic. The cats at the sanctuary appeared to appreciate their fortunate conditions. Their constant purrs were a sign of their contentment. While there were a few that remained a bit hesitant, I hoped to win them over in a short time.

Then suddenly, I heard a strange noise that startled me from my Zen moment. Was that a rooster? Being a girl from the city, I wasn't accustomed to such sounds, so I was unsure at first. But what else could it be? I listened closely and heard more unfamiliar sounds in the distance. It sounded like "baa!" Could that be sheep I wondered? I supposed I had a lot to

discover, but I felt that this day was perfect and I was ready for anything. I thought to myself, "Let the adventure begin!"

The house where I was to live was stunning. It sat at the top of a long driveway overlooking the sanctuary. It was painted white with light blue shutters, just like the photos I had seen of Greek houses. Inside, it was more than comfortable. It was beautifully furnished and decorated with some special designer touches by Joan. There were two bedrooms and a bathroom downstairs. These rooms were partially underground as many of the Greek houses are constructed. I chose to use the closet in one of the bedrooms for my clothes and set up my toiletries in that bathroom. Later in my stay, when both of these bedrooms became temporary homes for foster kittens, I decided to sleep upstairs on a built-in bed next to a cozy seating area. I wanted to wake up to see the sun rising each morning and that would have been impossible from the downstairs accommodations. There was a huge balcony that wrapped around two sides of the house that overlooked Joan and Richard's property with a direct view of the Aegean. The desk for my computer and television was upstairs as well. In no time at all, I felt contented and relaxed in my home away from home, although I would have to become accustomed as to what to do in one of the rooms... the kitchen!

There was one cat in particular that stole my heart from the first day. Although I'd like to think I was special to her, I strongly suspected that I wasn't the only person she had charmed. She was captivating in her looks and had a loving disposition. She was a striking brown and golden tabby and I detected from the moment that we met that she also had quite the engaging personality. She was insistent about coming inside. I invited her into the house hoping that she'd stay to sleep with me. I could just see myself curled up with a sweet kitty, just like at home with Suga' Bear and Honey. Her name was SweetPea.

However, SweetPea's sleeping habits were quite different from my cats in Santa Barbara who found a spot and settled in for the night. She initially perched on my chest, then she moved to my head, and later made her way under the covers. Finally, she found the crook of my body as I laid on my side. There she snuggled close and we slept spooning most of the night. That is, MOST of the night! At home, I usually have one ear open listening for the dogs as they may need to go out, or I am wakened by Mitch's snoring (or my own!). But here in Syros, my slumber was only interrupted by SweetPea. There was the occasional crunching of food or digging in the litter box. Sometimes she discovered an object to bat around on the tile floor! She entertained herself with a make-believe hockey puck beginning around 4:30 in the morning! However, a little commotion, even at that hour, was worth it. She made me laugh and I knew then that I didn't need to worry about ever feeling alone with SweetPea around.

It was a grand first day!



My First Encounter
With the Stray Cats of Syros



Within a few days of my arrival on this idyllic Greek isle, I saw firsthand the plight of the country's cats. There are only 22,000 people on Syros, but it's estimated that there are as many as 13,000 stray cats! The island is just eight miles at its narrowest point and ten miles at its longest. So I probably don't need to say that there were cats everywhere we went! I never had to look for them. They were alongside the curvy, steep mountain roads on my six-mile drive into town. Cats loitered beneath trash dumpsters where the locals discarded their garbage. Cats scurried in and out of traffic in the city. But the more fortunate cats lived in established colonies in the small villages where they were fed regularly by some of the caring local people.

In the main town of Hermoupolis, cats crossed the busy streets, dashing between cars and motorcycles... some narrowly escaping catastrophe. Most drivers didn't seem to notice them, much less slow down! I wondered if somehow the cats had just become a part of the local landscape, so most people didn't even see them. To me, that notion was distressing. Some scampered beside buildings seeming to know exactly where they wanted to go. Others were more reclusive and peeked out from cobblestone corridors that ascended off the beaten path. The cats that were more comfortable with people confidently meandered in the open-market areas, perhaps hoping for handouts. I began to see the heartbreaking picture.

On one of my first visits to the city center, I was especially intrigued by a brown tabby sitting next to the fish market. Perhaps she was poised to sneak a piece of fish when no one

was looking! She looked well-fed and it appeared that this savvy girl knew exactly what she was doing... just waiting for the right moment! I sure hoped so!

Later I saw a handsome orange with white tabby in the main shopping corridor where local vendors sold their fruits and vegetables. Sadly, his white ears were burned and crusty from too much exposure to the scorching summer sun. But they didn't appear to bother him... not yet anyway! He was accompanied by a pretty calico female. They seemed to know exactly where their next meal would be coming from. The owner of the adjacent pet shop left kibble out for the neighborhood market cats. His generosity and kindness were comforting to me as I tried to take in all that I saw! I did notice that for the most part, the cats in town looked healthy, and by that, I mean that none of them appeared to be undernourished. They looked well-fed! Somehow, they seemed to survive, although it's not the kind of life I would ever want for a cat.

In the past, Greek cats were considered vermin and were horribly mistreated. They were drowned, burned, and kicked and many were discarded like garbage. However, because of Joan and other caring people like her, the perception of cats as living, sentient beings that deserve to be treated well is changing in Greece... slowly, but nevertheless changing.



Joan's desire was for us to have a special project that we could do together so that I could truly experience the lives of the cats on the Greek islands. She knew of a colony that lived at the end of the road by a Greek Orthodox church that towered above Hermoupolis. As we drove up the mountain, I got an inkling of what I was about to witness.

We saw several colonies of cats along the way that were living in the wooded area below the road and near a less-frequented bus stop. There were cats crouched on the stone

wall beside the street; many appeared hungry. We saw them on top of dumpsters, under dumpsters and even inside dumpsters foraging for something to eat. Some looked worse for wear with runny noses and infected eyes. The reality of the Greek cats that weren't fortunate enough to live at God's Little People became crystal clear to me. I felt a knot in my stomach and realized then that this was not going to be an easy project. But I also had a strong desire to do something for these cats. My time on Syros was limited and during my short stay, I wanted to provide the greatest benefit for this colony and make a lasting difference for them.

The church is an exquisitely ornamental old structure with its terra-cotta tiled roof and decorative design. It is a beautiful place of worship overlooking the Aegean Sea. I felt like I had stepped back in history two hundred years. It was much later in my stay before I really took the time to visit the church and appreciate its magnificence.

But on that day, our focus was not on the beauty of the church and the panoramic views; we were there to begin our mission to help this colony of cats. As Joan and I drove towards our destination, we chatted about cats and I jokingly commented, "You know, everyone else driving up this picturesque route would be admiring the view, not trying to spot all the cats that need our help!" For us, two cat rescuers, looking at the breathtaking surroundings was only an afterthought!

When we arrived at the church, there were about twenty cats perched on the ancient stone wall that separated the paved road from the steep hillside. It was a very isolated place for cats. Initially, I could feel tears begin to well up inside me, but I did my best to hide my feelings. At this stage in our relationship I wasn't sure if Joan would see my emotions as a sign of weakness or realize that I'm just a very sensitive person. I knew I needed to be strong in order to help the cats. I credit Joan with realizing from the beginning that I'm a very compassionate person, but

that I am also capable of doing whatever needs to be done.

There were several male cats with big jowls and noticeable battle scars that were not neutered. Three gorgeous, look-alike tortoiseshell females appeared; apparently they were sisters. And kittens were everywhere! Some of the smaller ones peeped through a drainage hole at the base of the wall but quickly disappeared when I approached. Most had probably seen humans, but they weren't accustomed to them being too close.

Surprisingly, many of the adult cats were friendly, so I assumed that the remote area must have been a dumping ground. I don't understand that! How can anyone abandon a cat in such an isolated area with no food or water? So how did they survive? How many didn't endure the elements? I had already learned from Joan that the brutally cold winters and the sizzling hot summers were miserable for the cats. There was no question as to why some of the church colony cats had upper respiratory issues, or even pneumonia. The proof of the scorching sun was evident by the many scabby ears and burned noses we observed.

As we walked through dozens of cats, I spotted a woman carrying plastic bags. Joan said that the bags were filled with dry cat food. I realized that the cats in Greece had not always been treated well, so I was thankful that some of the local residents appeared to have empathy for them.

Bless the Greek women and men who make the trek every few days to feed and water the cats. But often the locals were cooking rice and spaghetti and leaving huge piles of these starches for the cats to eat. Now, don't get me wrong; I know they had good intentions in their offerings, but rice and spaghetti are not a proper diet for felines. And I doubt that the cats ate much of it as most piles looked as if they had been there for a very long while.

When Joan and I reached the church and we saw the piles of dried-out pasta, we headed straight down the mountain to the pet store and loaded up on proper cat food! Once the car

was filled with food, we drove back to the church and a late brunch was served! And oh, what a delicacy it was. The cats ate heartily and seemed grateful for something other than rice and spaghetti!



To my surprise, there were many pet supply stores in Syros. I did some comparison shopping and quickly realized that dry cat food was very expensive, especially considering the low Greek wages. Many bags of food were unsealed or were displayed in exposed bins where customers could purchase as much or as little as they needed. The unsealed bags seemed strange to me, but I could certainly understand that it might be more economical for those on a budget to buy smaller quantities. I recognized a variety of brands such as Purina and Science Diet, but many other were unfamiliar to me. I was pleasantly surprised to see that a high-quality food like Royal Canin was offered in most shops. I later learned that the local veterinarian carries that brand as well. The Royal Canin bags were sealed and very pricey.



Once we arrived back at the church, more cats and kittens appeared through the drainage hole in the wall while others leaped over it when they smelled the canned food. We opened can after can of the aromatic food and spaced heaps of the tasty morsels several feet apart so that the cats could eat without altercations arising. Surprisingly, each cat was polite enough to not intrude on another cat's food territory once it was clear there was plenty for all. To finish off the meal, we offered kibble, leaving a bit extra for any latecomers. We watched as the cats, with fuller tummies now, groomed themselves, something cats don't always do when they have insufficient diets. It was a gratifying sight. Even while living in such squander, the cats

still exhibited so much dignity.

After they had all been fed, Joan and I had a better opportunity to inspect the cats and kittens and come up with a plan of action. There was one in particular, a blue tortoiseshell kitten, with a horrible eye infection. We feared that, if untreated, she would go blind. We decided to return that afternoon with a trap as she appeared to be very skittish, but when we later returned, she was nowhere to be found.

However, another kitten, that I guessed to be about ten weeks old and that we had noticed earlier, was there. He was a long-haired tabby cat with a white chest and paws and quite the character. Holding his fluffy tail high, he appeared confident as he approached us. He deliberately placed one foot slightly crossing in front of the other as he pranced towards us. It reminded me of a fashion model making her way down the runway. The best way I can describe him is "he knew how to strut his stuff!" Sadly, his eyes were runny and one was glued half shut. Joan feared that he could go blind if he didn't get immediate medical care. She easily trapped him and we took him to the vet. Joan named him "Charmer," a name that certainly characterized that flirtatious boy! Charmer became my first foster kitten at God's Little People.

A few days later, the pretty blue tortie kitten that we had seen previously was at the church. Her eyes looked much worse. Joan was able to trap her and she joined Charmer as a playmate. Joan named her Indigo and she became my second foster.

Indigo was quite skittish, but I knew my experience with shy and feral kittens would help transform her frightened soul into a kitten that would trust humans. I looked forward to the challenge of helping Indigo overcome her fear and I trusted that Charmer's outgoing personality would encourage her transformation. After a few days of antibiotics and eye meds, both Charmer and Indigo looked much better. I lavished the kittens with affection and spent many hours playing with them.

Having the time to spend with Charmer and Indigo was a gift to my soul. RESQCATS requires so much of my days: the administrative duties of paperwork, arranging vet appointments, and scheduling volunteers often leaves me feeling shortchanged in having personal time with the cats in my care. I love nothing more than visiting them after the volunteers are gone. Then it's just me... and the cats! I monitor their weights, medicate them, give vaccinations and tend to the sick. But rarely do I have the opportunity to sit for hours and just have fun with the kittens for the sake of playing. There is never enough time for that sheer delight. Now, here at God's Little People, I had all the time in the world to do what I love the most...that is, being with the cats. So fostering Charmer and Indigo filled my heart with joy.



Joan and I knew that the best way to help the cats was to take it a step further than most of their Greek benefactors. The church colony needed to be spayed and neutered. So we devised a plan. The first step was to make a trip to the pet supply shop. I purchased food and new pop-up enclosures to keep the cats secluded, safe and well-fed while they healed after surgery. Since several of the adult females were friendly, they could have whatever time was necessary for them to heal. We wouldn't have to release those cats in twenty-four hours as is typically done with feral cats due to the stress it causes them from being confined.

Then we met with the veterinarian, Manos, as we needed to schedule surgeries. He was enthusiastic about our plan and was committed to helping. I later learned that Manos often held spay/neuter events that were funded by an animal welfare group in Athens. Often, Manos spayed and neutered more than one hundred cats in a three-day period!

Now, with Manos' assistance, our plan to help the church colony was set into motion!

My Greek Diet



For those of you who know me personally, you are aware that I'm vegan. While having cruelty-free dietary requirements has been an easy commitment for me, the fact that I don't cook does complicate matters!

It follows that when Mitch goes out of town, my friends worry about me. Out of concern, they ask, "What will you do without Mitch here to act as your personal chef?" It surprises some that I actually do have a plan! I usually have a bagel in the morning. Yes, I do know how to toast a bagel. Most often, I skip lunch; however, occasionally I'll have a granola bar or a tablespoon of peanut butter as a quick snack and that typically suffices until dinner. In the evenings, I order take-out Chinese with an extra side of rice...that lasts for three nights! If Mitch is gone longer than a few days, I can usually find a friend to go out for dinner. With a bit of luck, there are leftovers to bring home for the next evening. And as a last resort, there are frozen dinners that Mitch has prepared that can be microwaved. Some of you may remember Swanson TV dinners. In comparison, I have "Mitch TV dinners." As a backup, the freezer is always stocked with soy chicken nuggets and meatless burgers that are quick and easy to microwave. If I'm feeling particularly creative, I add that to a salad... of course, my version of a salad is simply cut-up lettuce.

Joan was aware of my vegan diet before I arrived and had already located a health food store. It was our first stop on the way from the airport to God's Little People. I was pleased to find so many things that I have at home: almond milk, soy yogurt, veggie burgers and seasoned tofu filets. The shop also stocked vegan cheese and plant-based margarine.

I was especially keen to try the Greek version of vegan

burgers, so I planned to have one for my first dinner. I was disappointed to discover that it was quite dry and tasteless, certainly not the best I've ever had. Another time I experimented with the meatless patties and found they were much more tolerable once I heated them in a skillet with a bit of sunflower oil and buried them in warm pita bread with vegan cheese!

While in Syros, I frequented that shop many times. The owner was most helpful and very pleasant. He spoke almost perfect English, so we often chatted about why I was on the island, my home in America and how much I was enjoying the people of Syros. After a few exchanges, he began greeting me whenever I came into his shop as "that nice lady from California."



Being in this particular region in the world, I thought I would find pita bread everywhere! But that simply wasn't the case. Did my memory not serve me right? Wasn't that warm pita served with the Greek salads that I had years ago when I visited Mykonos and Santorini? Weren't there little Greek ladies in the market making the delicious pita in open ovens where I could purchase as much as I wanted? I had planned on a staple diet of chai lattes, pita and hummus! Where were those ladies? I couldn't find them anywhere! The only pita I was ever able to locate was a sorry excuse from what I had anticipated. It was a packaged grocery store item! It's just not the same as smelling and tasting freshly-made, warm pita directly from the oven. But I had to accept that mass-produced pita would have to do.

Surprisingly, it was also tricky to find a grocery store that carried hummus, a popular Middle Eastern dip that is typically made of pureed garbanzo beans, ground sesame seeds, olive oil, lemon juice and garlic. When Richard learned of my love for hummus, he made it his personal business to look for it

whenever he went grocery shopping. Quite often, when he returned, he knocked on my door and presented me with a huge container. It was such a touching gesture and I expressed my gratitude each time. I think he liked feeling appreciated for his effort... I did make quite the fuss about it. That could be why Richard never let me in on his secret of where he found the elusive hummus!



During my first week on the island, I decided to experiment with cooking by making a big pot of vegetable soup. Mitch had instructed me to "just throw everything in but the kitchen sink and let it simmer all day!" My first attempt turned out fairly well, certainly not as good as his, but it did last me for several nights.

When my soup was gone, I was feeling emboldened about its success. I set out to make another pot, but this time I wanted to add some things for variety. Vegetable soup with rice sounded perfect on those cold fall evenings in Syros. I decided that a nice pot of vegetable-rice soup would be my Thanksgiving dinner since I missed being at home on this, my favorite holiday. It would have to take the place of my usual tofu turkey, traditional vegan side dishes and mouthwatering array of desserts that Mitch always prepares for the large group of people that join us on the holiday. I intended to brag about my soup when he called!

I repeated the same recipe as best as I could remember. I started with a vegetable bouillon cube. Then I added celery, carrots, green beans, onion and garlic that I had purchased from the local farmer's market. I let it simmer for a while before adding the final touch: half of a four-pound bag of rice. I turned on the stove at a low setting and let it cook slowly, just as Mitch had instructed me to do with the first pot. But strangely, when I checked the soup, something had happened...

all the broth had been absorbed by the rice! But there was still room in the pot, so I added more water. I continued to check on it every hour. Each time, I saw that all the liquid had been absorbed by the rice and the soup looked more like stew! I had to add water three more times! There was no more room, but everything appeared cooked so I sat down at the table with my concoction anticipating a good hearty bowl of vegetable-rice stew. It was to be my celebratory Thanksgiving feast. However, because of all the rice, it tasted like paste... gummy, thick, tasteless white paste! I believe I could've used it as glue for wallpaper! To make matters worse, with all that rice, I wasn't able to taste any of the vegetables. But I wasn't ready to give up on it.

The next day, I found a bigger pot, put the concoction back on the stove, added more water, another bouillon cube and boiled it. AGH! It was worse than ever as the rice just continued to soak up the liquid like a sponge! But I still wasn't ready to throw in the towel (pun intended!)... not just yet. The second day, I took the pot from the fridge, removed the lid, looked at it, and then put it back. I thought to myself, "I can try this again tomorrow." On the third day, I came to the same conclusion, "I can try this again tomorrow." On the fourth day, I discarded the entire contents of the pot, now weighing over five pounds. I've never attempted to make soup again!

Luckily, Joan introduced me to a take-out kitchen where Greek women cooked homemade food. Prepared food! What a marvelous idea that is! And believe me, those Greek ladies saved me! I selected several dishes each time I visited so that I had enough meals to last for a few nights. And it was simple... all I had to do was choose what I wanted for dinner and reheat it in a skillet. I learned quickly to get there early as they sold out of every dish by two in the afternoon! Although the flavors were quite different from what I was accustomed to, they were delicious. The ladies found creative ways to hide

vegetables that I've always disliked. I'm not a fan of green peas, but disguise them in exotic spices combined with sautéed artichokes, leeks and carrots and they're scrumptious. Potatoes with roasted veggies became a staple item. But my favorite dish was a special spinach and rice combination that they only prepared on Tuesdays and Fridays. I worked my trips to town around that dish!

Spanakopita, layers of filo dough filled with spinach, is a traditional Greek dish so it was available in many of the local bakeries. Here again was a clever way to hide another vegetable that I usually dislike immensely! But on Syros, spanakopita became one of my favorite meals. With my newly found prepared cuisine, and thanks to the Greek ladies, I could just heat and eat! (On a side note, I still crave spinach. I've discovered two Greek restaurants in Santa Barbara that serve an outstanding spanakopita. And the Chinese restaurant that I rely on for take-out when Mitch is gone cooks a very tasty sautéed spinach.)

Mitch and I spoke every night... it was morning for him with the ten-hour time difference. He often asked, "What are you having for dinner?" At first, I was intent on not giving him too much information about my newly found cooking skills. He knew I had made vegetable soup when I first arrived and that it turned out well. And I did tell him about reheating food in a skillet. But it took me several conversations to confess about the pasty rice stew. That was a certain guarantee that cooking duties would not be expected of me when I returned home.

On second thought, maybe I didn't need to be concerned. I think Mitch still remembers that lentil meat loaf that tasted like cardboard, the one that wouldn't even go down the garbage disposal. And I'm positive that he recalls the sour tang of the veggie kabobs that absorbed only the vinegar. So when it comes to me doing the cooking when we are together, I was probably safe all along!



Tumbelina



It's human nature that people are especially attracted to the sickest and most vulnerable animals; they seem to satisfy an unexplained desire in our makeup to nurture and love. These neediest animals bring out the tenderness in our hearts and allow us to openly show our affection. Just think about how many times you may have witnessed someone that you would least expect stooping to kiss a kitten or puppy, speaking baby talk to their cat, or rolling on the floor with their dog!

While I'm a deeply compassionate person, when I rescue animals, I need to be strong enough to set aside all of the horrors and suffering that too often occur with rescues. At RESQCATS, I try to retain a levelheaded perspective so that I can make the most objective and best decisions possible for the well-being of our cats. But that doesn't mean that I don't inwardly agonize.

Many of the kittens that arrive at RESQCATS are ill with upper respiratory infections, diarrhea, flea anemia and more. Because of their weakened conditions, they must be monitored and medicated throughout the day. But medical attention is only one aspect of the care they must receive... they need human touch and love. The sick kittens especially require much of my personal time, so it's not surprising that I become emotionally attached to them. I feel enormous gratitude and joy when they become healthy because of all that RESQCATS has been able to provide. But because of this emotional bond, parting with them at adoption time is always bittersweet.

Other kittens are so fragile that nothing short of a miracle could save them. Sadly, even with the best medical attention and love, they have little chance of survival. When they inevitably pass, I tell myself that at least they knew love and

human kindness before going to the Rainbow Bridge. That thought comforts me and helps me deal with loss.

Like many people, I'm particularly drawn to the weak and the sick. I find personal fulfillment in providing for them, but they are also the ones that pull at my heartstrings.

It probably goes without saying, but yes, I do cry. Sometimes I weep when I'm alone, but at other times I'm unable to hold back my sobs. It is then, when I'm overwhelmed with raw emotions, that I usually withdraw and isolate myself from other people. Only Mitch witnesses me in such emotional despair. I'm especially thankful for him on those days; he listens, comforts and offers me understanding and love.

As the person in charge of RESQCATS I have a preconceived idea... however senseless it may be... that I must always appear emotionally strong and not break down into tears.

Perhaps that is a reflection of my childhood when my parents told me, "You're too sensitive." "You wear your emotions on your sleeve." "People will take advantage and walk all over you." I grew up thinking that something was wrong with me. Now I appreciate that my folks' intentions were simply to protect me. I'm unable to change that part of my personality so I've accepted it as part of who I am. Today, I have a much healthier outlook and embrace my sensitivity by reminding myself, "The day I don't feel is the day I shouldn't be doing rescue."



Over the years, I've had experience with feral cat colonies and untamed kittens. When Joan mentioned that she wanted our project to be focused on the church colony, I anticipated that the cats there would be feral. Originally, my perspective was that because feral cats are wild and accustomed to being on their own, they could take care of themselves. Now, after

years of rescuing cats, I know that's not true.

Being part of a feral colony is a difficult life. Cats must hunt for their food and water, both of which can be scarce depending on the location of the colony. The unaltered males fight and compete for dominance, especially during mating season. Females give birth to litter after litter. In fact, mothers can become pregnant while they are still nursing and kittens start mating when they are as young as six months. Altercations between cats are frequent and injuries are common. It's impossible to socialize the adults and it follows that the kittens in a feral colony learn the same untamed behavior from their peers. In my experience, the older the kittens become, the more difficult it is to domesticate them; most often, it's not possible. One can certainly understand why the behavior of feral cats doesn't allow me the chance to fulfill my nurturing side. I suppose that all that hissing, swatting, growling and spitting keep my sensitive emotions from getting the best of me!



However, to my surprise, many of the cats at the church colony were not feral. The first time Joan and I went, there were approximately twenty cats that appeared. While some were shy, others were very friendly and seemed to have once belonged to someone. I wondered, "Were they dumped? If so, why were they abandoned in an area where the survival rate seems minimal and the conditions are miserable? What kind of person could do such a thing?" Dumpsters with discarded garbage from the surrounding neighborhood seemed to be the main food source for the many cats. The rocky and mountainous coast certainly couldn't provide enough hunting for that many cats to survive.

Thankfully, some caring person had set up a feeding station, but I questioned how often the trays of food and water were tended because the cats were hungry. They devoured several

cans of food each time we fed them.

Early on, Joan told me that it was essential to squash the empty cans. Many of cats were what she called "dumpster divers;" it would have been very easy for them to get their heads stuck in uncrushed cans.

It took only a few trips before the cats started to recognize the sound of our car engine. They swiftly appeared when they heard the now familiar noise and knew that canned food was about to be served! It was obvious we were the "talk o' of the town" because more and more cats joined the party with each subsequent visit; even the most cautious ones made appearances. There were no less than twenty-five on most days and sometimes they weren't the same cats! I estimated there must have been more than fifty cats that made up the colony.

There were beautiful cats of every size, shape and color: black and white tuxedo kittens, ginger tabby males and tortoiseshell females... long hair, medium hair, short hair... calicos, blacks and grays. I was surprised by the huge number of calicos on Syros. That particular color pattern is not as common in America as it is in Greece. I don't consider myself biased about the color of an animal and that has never been a criterion when I adopted (or failed at fostering) a cat. But I do have a soft spot for calicos, so I was quite mesmerized by the sheer number of them.

I wondered how many of the cats were related. It made sense that many of them must be since none appeared to be spayed or neutered. Several were similar in looks, so I tried to guess who may be sisters, brothers, moms and dads. Others looked completely different, so it brought up other questions: Had they been deserted, how long had they been there and how had they managed to survive? I thought, "I'm sure each of these cats has a story to tell." But perhaps it was better that their pasts remained a mystery. Some of their tales would have broken my heart.

On one of our outings to the church, there was a particular kitten that caught my eye. I was horrified when I first saw her. She was one of scrawniest and most pathetic-looking kittens I'd ever seen. Her skin and fur barely draped over her emaciated skeleton. Her eyes were infected and it appeared that she had already lost sight in her right eye. She was frightened and I knew I wouldn't be able to get near her. She looked hungry, so I placed some canned food on the pavement and backed away to give her enough distance to feel safe. She gobbled it quickly, as if there were no tomorrow, and sadly, I realized that maybe for her, there might be no tomorrow. I maintained my distance while she kept a watchful eye. Once her belly was full, she retreated to the sea side of the retaining wall where she felt protected. I have no real explanation about what drew me to that kitten. But I followed her. I leaned over the wall and looked straight into her sad eyes and said, "You're going to be all right, little one. I'll save you, I promise!"

I don't know what prompted me to make that pledge. But she looked back at me as if she somehow understood. We gazed at each other for a long time and I repeated my promise once again. Looking directly into a cat's eyes is often intimidating for a cat, but this kitten didn't seem to feel threatened at all. The only way that I can explain this moment is that I felt a spiritual connection. It was as if I hadn't needed to speak those words aloud; somehow she knew that she was going to be okay.

Before I left the church that day, I named her Tumbelina.

When Joan and I returned the following morning, Tumbelina already looked better. That hearty meal of canned food had gotten her through another miserably cold night on the mountainside. Over the next several days, we returned to the church twice daily to feed the cats. By the fourth day we noticed that Tumbelina's demeanor had completely changed. She wasn't as fearful; in fact, she had become quite brave! She appeared from her hiding place and boldly walked past the

other cats without any hesitation. She growled and swatted at any who invaded her feeding spot and amazingly, even the big males took notice of this less than two-pound kitten and backed away! She was evolving into quite the confident little creature. There is no doubt that from the first day I saw her, Tumbelina became "the apple of my eye!"

In the following days, I attempted to approach her, and although Tumbelina was cautious at first, she became open to being petted. I sat on the pavement during feeding time and inched my way closer and closer. Soon I was able to sit down next to her food and she would walk straight towards me. As she ate, I slowly reached out my hand and lightly stroked her back. She didn't withdraw and actually seemed to enjoy my touch.

Then one day, something unexplainable came over me! Without really thinking, I took advantage of the moment and whisked Tumbelina off the pavement and gently tucked her into my vest. I could feel every bone of her tiny skeleton as I pulled her close to my chest. She never squirmed or tried to escape. Instead, after a minute or two, she poked her little head out, so I kissed her on the forehead. I felt her relax; it was as if she had surrendered into the comfort of my warm body and knew she had been saved. It is a moment that I will never forget.

Joan had been preparing a drop cage to trap her and was quite surprised when she turned around to see me holding Tumbelina. I admit that I took that same approach several times at the church. Joan would be busy setting up a trap while I just reached down and picked up a kitten that needed help. To this day, Joan still teases me about my ability to avoid trapping and "just go for it." In hindsight, even when I did it, I knew Joan's method was probably much less risky!



Even on my first visit to the church colony, I realized I was going to face some difficult choices. "Can I rescue them all?" "No, I can't." I've always said that you can only save one at a time. Now that was going to be tested. One of the toughest decisions was choosing which ones to help. How do I decide who to save and who to leave behind? The answer to that seemed to fall into place as we rescued those that looked to be the most compromised: the frailest who certainly would not survive the approaching freezing temperatures, the ones who appeared to be going blind because of eye infections and the cats that were injured. We helped the most vulnerable adults and kittens first.

Next, Joan and I intended to have as many of the cats as possible spayed and neutered, thus preventing future generations of strays from a life of pain, adversity and hunger.

I agonized as I tried to comprehend the sadness I felt for the cats. They lived in an isolated area with brutally cold winters and scorching hot summers. Was I being tested by some higher power? Could I find a way to move forward? How could I remain positive and not be overwhelmed by what I was doing? Somehow I had to be of the mindset that every small thing that Joan and I did for the cats made a positive difference in their lives.

As a rescuer, my desire was to help them all, but I knew that there would be limits to what we could accomplish. I was reminded of the story attributed to the philosopher, Loren Eiseley, about the starfish on the beach.



One day a man was walking along the beach when he noticed a boy picking something up and gently throwing it into the ocean. Approaching the boy, he asked, "What are you doing?" The youth replied, "I'm throwing starfish back into the ocean. The surf is up and the tide is going out. If I don't

throw them back, they'll die." The man looked at the beach and then back at the boy and said, "Son, don't you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can't make a difference!"

After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish and threw it back into the surf. Then, he looked up and smiled at the man and said, "I made a difference for that one."



I took Tumbelina to God's Little People where she remained under my care for many weeks. Unfortunately, by this time, she had already lost sight in her right eye, but with the proper antibiotics and eye medication, we were able to save the vision in her other one.

I will always feel a tug at my heartstrings when it comes to Tumbelina. I think of her often and remember my time with her as if it were yesterday. When I close my eyes, I can picture her looking at me from the other side of the wall as if she already knew I would be her savior. I still shed a quiet tear when I recall making my promise to rescue her...not knowing how I would make that happen. I can still feel her tucked inside my vest, her frail body allowing the warmth of mine to surround her. And I can still remember gently kissing her on the forehead.

I loved nurturing Tumbelina back to health. As she recovered, she became a normal kitten, full of energy with an insatiable desire to play. I laugh when I think about her racing back and forth across the bed as I tried to sleep. She would start out on top of the covers, then plunge under them and back out again. If I moved even slightly, it was an invitation for her to pounce. I was her personal playground beginning at two a.m.

I'm grateful for every moment I had with her. Tumbelina

will always have a special place in my heart.



During my stay on Syros, I spent a great deal of time with several of the adult cats that remained at the church. As I petted and loved them, I couldn't help but admire the dignity they showed, especially under such difficult circumstances. They were eager to give and receive affection. I talked to them out loud and from my heart. They approached me, stood next to me and curled around my feet allowing me to caress them. I sat on the pavement and let them come onto my lap. Their deep, rhythmic purrs were a sign of their contentment! I think that at least for those moments, they were happy.

I realized that they couldn't all be rescued and become part of the sanctuary at God's Little People. For some, life at the church was all they had ever known and maybe it would have been unfair to relocate them. Although I still struggle with that thought, I have come to appreciate the lessons I have learned from their difficult lives.

Perhaps the cats were there to remind me to seek goodness in every situation. We can all choose to show kindness in the world. While we may never fully realize the impact, I believe that there is no better gesture than taking the time to do a good deed, no matter how small! The cats at the church colony gave me that opportunity.

Yes, of course, I wanted to help all of them...I always do.

But like the little boy who saved the starfish, I believe I did make a difference... one cat at a time.

Healing Body and Soul



It took no time for Tumbelina to realize that she had been saved from a harsh life at the church. When we arrived at God's Little People, I set her up in a large pop-up crate in my bedroom. She ate some canned food, inspected her litter box and settled into a pile of soft fleecy blankets as if she had checked into a fancy five-star hotel. I placed a portable heater in the room to keep her warm and I checked on her numerous times throughout the day. She slept most of the first two days, waking only to eat, use the litter box and receive her medications. Prescribed antibiotics treated her upper respiratory infection and I applied eye drops several times a day. Although it was too late to save Tumbelina's sight in her right eye, the eye never seemed to bother her. My objective was to relieve the discomfort in both eyes, but I also wanted to save the vision in her left one. With wholesome food and a warm place to rest, her body began to recover from the harsh street life she had endured. Every day, she became stronger and stronger. Tumbelina's once emaciated frame slowly transformed from a fragile sick kitten into one that was much more robust and healthy. It was like watching the metamorphosis of a butterfly.

Nurturing Tumbelina came easily for me, as over the years, I've had extensive experience at RESQCATS caring for ailing kittens. But tending to her medical needs was only one part of her recovery. Being in the house with unfamiliar sounds and smells was stressful for Tumbelina. She needed exposure to her new surroundings and constant reassurance from me. From her first day under my care, I spent a tremendous amount of time with Tumbelina. There were times when I sat for hours cuddling her in a blanket. Sometimes I brought her upstairs

while I worked at the computer or watched a movie so that she would become accustomed to new areas and household sounds.

Her natural cat curiosity emboldened her and it wasn't long before she wanted to explore. As I embraced Tumbelina, her tiny pink nose pushed its way through an opening in the blanket. Then out popped her little head, which wasn't much bigger than a quarter. She peered at me inquisitively. Her left eye was like a glistening emerald gem while the damaged one looked like a dull blotchy marble. But to me, she was perfect. When she began to purr, I knew that she was going to be okay in her new surroundings.

I wondered why Tumbelina was so amenable to accepting my affection. There was never a single hiss, spit or strike as I would have expected from a kitten that had had limited or no human contact. Had she really understood when I had promised to rescue her? Did Tumbelina somehow know that now she would be okay? Or was she so desperate to be saved that she was willing to take the chance of trusting me? Were those contented purrs her way of letting me know she was grateful to have been rescued? I suppose I will never truly know.



A week later, a kitten that I thought might be Tumbelina's sister appeared at the church feeding site. She was a severely emaciated gray and white kitten, also about two months old. Her goopy eyes were glued half shut, her nose was runny and her fur was incredibly dull. The frail kitten sat on the pavement swaying back and forth as if she were about to faint; she looked almost lifeless. I suspected that she was terribly dehydrated. Although at the time we couldn't be sure, it appeared that she had lost sight in her right eye, the same as Tumbelina. Joan and I doubted that she would survive another night especially since frigid temperatures and heavy rain were forecast for the

next several days. We needed to do something... now!

The kitten was rather timid so I knew that, even in her fragile state, I wouldn't be able to approach her easily... or swoop her into my vest as I had done with Tumbelina! No, I probably needed a different approach for this shy girl. Perhaps Joan's plan of trapping her would be best. But once again, as Joan was setting a trap, something came over me and I decided to "just go for it."

I placed a teaspoon of canned food on the pavement. Starting at a safe distance away, I added more small scoops several inches apart that lead towards me. The aroma of the food would certainly coax a starving cat in my direction! The kitten inched nearer to me as she gradually ate her way through the offerings. Unlike most hungry cats, she moved slowly from one pile to the next as if she were too weak to eat. When she was finally close enough, I picked her up by the scruff and swiftly placed her in a carrier... I doubt the poor kitten knew what was happening. I covered the crate with a blanket hoping it would keep her warm and offer a sense of security.

Once again, Joan looked at me with surprise! I had swooped another kitten off the street before she had had a chance to trap her! Joan teased me, "You don't waste any time, do you?" We laughed, secured the carrier in the car and drove to the vet. The kitten was "quiet as a church mouse" (pun intended!) during the drive.

I'm not sure what I expected... perhaps a charming purring kitten like Tumbelina who was thankful that I had saved her. Due to the expected forecast, she could have perished from exposure to the harsh weather. The only shelter on the mountainside was in crevices between rocks or under brush. It was a horrible existence. So I anticipated another grateful kitten, but I was in for quite the surprise.

When we arrived at the vet, we were immediately escorted

into the exam room. My heart raced with excitement for having saved another cat from almost certain death. I reached inside the carrier to remove the kitten so that the veterinarian could examine her. In my haste, I did so without any consideration of the fate I might be dealt. But before I realized what was happening, the seemingly quiet and helpless kitten had transformed herself into a ferocious wild cat! Her sharp nails clawed my arms as she desperately attempted to get away. As she twisted and turned, she kicked with her back feet causing me even more injury. In my efforts to hold onto her, I felt her claws penetrate my hands and forearms. When I refused to let go, her razor-sharp teeth pierced into my finger! Within seconds, I was covered in my own blood. Strangely, it took several moments for my injuries to become painful. Recognizing the potential seriousness of the wounds, the vet insisted that I wash them with an anti-bacterial solution.

I never blamed the kitten; I should have known better. I had frightened her with my rapid movements, so she had every reason to be defensive. That was the moment when I realized that this kitten was no Tumbelina!



Animal rescuers should never be without a supply of antibiotics as cat bites can be extremely dangerous. Cats have small teeth, but they can penetrate deeply. Bacteria can enter the bloodstream and cause blood poisoning. If the toxic microorganisms reach the heart, it can be fatal.

I recall being bitten once by a frightened kitten. Within a few hours, a red streak moved up my arm, a sign that a bacterial infection was headed towards my heart. I also remember a coworker who spent a week in the hospital on intravenous antibiotics because she didn't start treatment immediately after receiving a cat bite. I was thankful then that Mitch had put "get antibiotics" on my endless to-do list!

I started taking the prescription right away. Within a couple of days, the intense swelling and bruising began to subside. And once again I could bend my finger! However, I'm still taken aback by how a small kitten can potentially cause such severe injury.



Joan named the kitten Violet. I already had a special attachment to that particular name for several reasons. Long before I started RESQCATS, I had rescued a kitten and named her Violet. During rush hour, I had stopped traffic on a three-lane service road next to the main expressway in Dallas, Texas to save her from getting hit! She was about nine weeks old at the time. I'll never know how such a young kitten ended up in the middle lane on one of the busiest streets in the city and had miraculously only suffered from a mild concussion and a bruised shoulder. I do know that that kitten helped me to realize my calling in life... to save animals. Violet lived with me in Dallas, San Diego, Phoenix and Santa Barbara, where she passed away at the age of seventeen!

Violet also happens to be my favorite color, perhaps because it's the highest spectrum on the Rainbow Bridge. A violet is also a delicate flower that, when given to someone, symbolizes that the giver's thoughts are "occupied with love." And love was just what my latest rescue needed.



I had worked with feral kittens before and knew that not all respond well to human contact. It's a commonly accepted theory that untamed kittens can be socialized if they are exposed to people at an early age. I have found that to not always be true; some never quite make the transition from fearful to outgoing, but instead remain timid and cautious. Some animal shelters have programs that are specifically

designed to transform feral kittens into socialized, adoptable ones. While those shelters do have much success, I believe there is more to taming a feral kitten than simply following a certain protocol. A kitten's heart must be open to receiving love and compassion. I hoped that was the case with Violet.

Mending broken souls is sometimes just as difficult, if not more so, than healing an ailing body. Violet needed me in ways well beyond giving her antibiotics, sub-q fluids, nutritious food and a warm place to recover. Time, patience, compassion and love can go a long way in helping kittens like Violet to trust... if their hearts are open to it.



Several years ago, a kitten named "Prince Charming" arrived at RESQCATS with seven other kittens from a feral colony. They were about six weeks old, theoretically young enough to be tamed. His siblings took only a short time to become accustomed to human touch and affection. But even though I spent several hours a day trying to socialize Prince Charming, his feral behavior was anything but charming! Eventually, after I was finally able to pick him up, I placed him on my lap, allowing him the choice to leave whenever he felt threatened. It took many weeks before he felt comfortable staying on my lap.

One afternoon, seven weeks later, Prince Charming finally came around. He had been curled up on my lap when all of a sudden, he stared up at me. But something was different about his look that day. His scared and dilated saucer-like eyes softened into a relaxed gaze... and for the first time, he began to purr. He was content to stay right there on my lap. It was as if a switch in his mind had flipped... suddenly, I was an okay human being! I remember that day and the happiness it brought me, so now I was prepared to do whatever it took to help Violet feel at ease.

I set Violet up in the bedroom in a separate crate close to Tumbelina's enclosure. Tumbelina didn't have access to the entire room yet, although she would have enjoyed it. Violet, however, was too sick and timid to have free roam. There were many places under the furniture where she could have hidden or gotten beyond my reach. And because she was ill, I needed to be able to readily get to her to give her the proper care she required. For several days, Violet didn't want to eat... and there isn't anything more worrisome than a kitten who isn't interested in food. Because she was tired and frail, I could easily administer subcutaneous fluids through a small needle under her skin. It was also simple to give her oral medication and eye drops. I took advantage of Violet's weakened condition and spent hours holding her... reassuring her... and loving her. Within a few days, Violet began to thrive. She started eating. And when I approached her, instead of cowering, she let me lift her from her bed, wrap her in a fleece blanket and kiss her on the forehead... just like Tumbelina! While she was still a bit shy, Violet had completely abandoned her defensive behavior from that first traumatic day!

After a couple of weeks, when Violet was feeling much better, she was ready for the next step in her socialization. I put her in the same pen with Tumbelina. My hope was that Tumbelina's confidence would have a positive influence on Violet. And it certainly did! Tumbelina was a perfect mentor for her shy roommate.

While I have no proof that Tumbelina and Violet were biological sisters, they certainly did become the best of friends. I checked on them many times during the day and would often find them curled up with each other like spooning lovers. Tumbelina's companionship had become the perfect prescription for gaining Violet's trust.

Finally it was time to let the girls out of their pen, so they would have access to the entire bedroom. As I expected,

Tumbelina was the first to explore, but Violet soon followed her lead. They checked underneath the armoire and behind the night stands before they ultimately settled down between the bed pillows. Once I realized they could jump onto the bed, I introduced a fabric condo hoping they would enjoy cuddling together inside. And they did! Many times as I entered the room, I would see their two heads pop out simultaneously from the hole in their tented house. It just made me smile. I have never forgotten that image!

During the following weeks, "my girls," as I began to call them, recovered from their respiratory infections. Tumbelina was usually standing by to greet me when I opened the bedroom door but Violet was never far behind. The kittens' personalities were very different... Tumbelina demanded my upfront attention while Violet waited patiently in the background. Tumbelina preferred head strokes and under the chin scratching whereas Violet would flop over on her back for gentle belly rubs!

The girls slept in the bedroom with me for several weeks. Every night, after getting into bed, I gently tucked Violet in the crook of my torso where she remained most of the night. Tumbelina began the evening on top of the covers curled between my legs. Once the two kittens were settled, they began to purr in unison. That calming sound was like a soothing lullaby that put me to sleep.

But my sleep was interrupted when Tumbelina's playtime began each morning at two a.m. and lasted until I got up... well before dawn! She jumped, hopped and leaped across me inspecting every nook and cranny. She weaseled her way under the covers and then back out again. If I moved my leg or foot, that was encouragement enough for her to playfully attack.



Tumbelina and Violet will have a special place in my heart forever. I love and cherish the hands-on time I had with them while at God's Little People. To this day, "my girls" are still part of my life. Tumbelina and Violet were adopted together by a wonderful lady in the United Kingdom. She and I stay in touch through social media and she has become a dear friend who refers to me as Tumbelina and Violet's "first mum."



And I will always remember Tumbelina and Violet's special message. There is more to rescue work than healing bodies. Mending broken souls is just as important... and truly my most rewarding gift from Violet.



Woolly; and Kini, the engine cat



Shadow and a peephole at the church colony



The underdog at Kini



A rooster and one of the kittens at Kini



The Kini cats



Saffron, SweetPea, Patchouli and Magic



Jessie, Indigo (before her rescue), Graucho and Kini



Jeffyne with the church colony, and feeding time at God's Little People



Fanta, Cookie, Charmer, and Tumbelina



Feeding the church colony



The Syros Cat Garden and Charmer in his new home



Driving in Syros, and feeding the Kini cats



Jeffyne with Shadow, and the Cat Garden of Syros



*Kini cats, Mitch visiting a new friend,
Jeffyne with the church colony, and Tumbelina*



The Syros Cat Garden



Jeffyne with Tumbelina



The widower who feeds street cats



Two inseperable pairs: Jeffyne and Mitch, and Tumbelina and Violet



Manos, the veterinarian of Syros



Jeffyne and Joan, and Jeffyne's view at God's Little People (by Claire Dannatt)

The People of Syros



While in Syros, I thought that I would feel socially awkward... like an outsider, an alien of sorts. I didn't know how to speak Greek, so I thought it would be difficult to communicate with the local people. Joan doesn't speak Greek either, but she did teach me some useful words and phrases like good day, "kalimera," and thank you, "efcharisto." A few times I caught myself saying "good day" in English, so I continually worked on that! To my credit, however, I did have *efcharisto* down pat!

I think that when visiting a foreign country it's important to make an attempt to greet and thank people in their native language. It shows respect and the locals seem to appreciate the effort.

Many years ago, before Mitch and I visited friends in Germany, I took a few German lessons. Since our friends spoke the language, there was no need to worry about ordering food, getting directions or asking how much something costs when we were with them. But when Mitch and I explored the countryside by ourselves, it was my job to communicate, so I got to practice some of what I had learned. We usually started looking for a place to stay in mid-afternoon anticipating that it might take a while. Mitch typically waited in the car while I went in and out of the many quaint bed and breakfasts asking, "Hast du ein Zimmer mit Bad?" which means, "Do you have a room with a bath?" Having a bathroom of our own was an absolute prerequisite.

In France, I knew how to order a ham and cheese sandwich please, "Jambon et fromage s'il vous plaît." Obviously, I visited France before becoming vegan; I would never think of eating ham now!

I admit that I didn't always understand what the Germans said in return or how the French responded! But at least I tried and they usually acknowledged my efforts with a warm smile.

Later when we visited Australia, I wondered if saying "G'day mate" counted as speaking Australian!

To my surprise, many of the people on Syros spoke English. I learned that early during my visit as I made numerous purchases at pet supply shops and grocery stores. Because I knew only a couple of phrases, there were several times when at the end of the transaction, the check-out person would ask me something in Greek and I would just look at them with a blank stare. My bewildered gaze must have been an absolute giveaway! So they would ask in English, "Would you like a bag?" Relieved that they spoke English, I smiled and said, "Yes, please." However, on my way out the door, I could never resist the urge to show off a bit by thanking them in Greek! "Efcharisto!"

The local people in Syros were incredibly kind and eager to please. Their lives are simple and meager due in part to the circumstances of the struggling Greek economy.



They work hard for little pay and for many, any chance of a more prosperous life is probably just a dream. Even so, everyone I met was upbeat, outwardly friendly and always had a smile on his or her face. And their generosity took me by surprise. It wasn't uncommon for me to leave a store with something extra the shopkeeper had added to my bag... free of charge.

I made several trips to the pet supply store to purchase crates for the church colony rescues. Each time we rescued a kitten or cat, I would go back to buy more provisions: another pop-up crate, more bowls, litter, a scoop and some food. I recall telling the shopkeeper that I was an American and that

I was here to help Joan and the cats. After only that one visit, the manager at the pet supply recognized me. One day, as she tallied the bill, she looked at me, smiled and said, "The litter scoop and bowls are a gift." I suppose she told the sales associates about "the American lady" and the church project because when I returned a few days later to purchase another crate, the man behind the counter was especially eager to help. As I handed him my credit card, I couldn't control myself and teasingly said, "I suppose your sales have been great since I came to town!" The salesman got a big grin on his face and enthusiastically replied, "YES!" And he said it in English! When the transaction was complete, he followed me to the car to load my purchased items. I smiled, thanked him and was about to close the trunk when he smiled back at me, handed me two packets of treats, and said, "These are for the cats!" Not only was this great customer service, but it confirmed my observation that the Greeks are happy to help and eager to please! That particular shop extended the same courtesy time and time again. Unfortunately, I can recall few occasions when I left a store in the U.S. with a "gift for the cats!"

Another instance of Greek hospitality was when Joan, Richard and I stopped at an out-of-the-way produce stand to pick up fresh vegetables. It was situated down a dirt side road fairly close to the major thoroughfare, but you had to know where it was because it wasn't visible from the main road. I doubted that few passersby stopped. There wasn't a sign or marker to indicate that anything existed beyond the dirt turnoff.

Joan waited in the car while Richard and I walked down a steep incline to the produce stand. The farmer himself was there selling fresh fruits and vegetables from his fields. He was a jolly, heavy-set man... the Greek Santa-type without the red suit! His clothes were soiled and his calloused hands still showed signs of dirt from the morning harvest. He greeted

us enthusiastically and invited us into his roadside market. When he spoke, he smiled and I noticed he was missing several teeth, which added to his character! Obviously, his livelihood was selling his produce, so he was delighted to have customers. I guessed that the farmer was poor and had a tough time making ends meet. But I'd never know for sure based on his generosity. He insisted that Richard and I take some tangerines at no charge. The farmer's English was limited, but he understood enough to know that he was talking to an American lady from California. He kept smiling at me and repeating, "California, California, California!" After Richard and I made our purchases and thanked the farmer for the free tangerines, we walked towards the car to head home. Just as we started to pull onto the main road, the farmer came running after us as if we had forgotten something. He was waving the biggest head of cauliflower I've ever seen and wanted us to have it as another gift from his farm.

I frequented a jewelry shop several times during my stay in Syros. The shopkeeper was a jewelry artist and she made everything in her own studio. I loved her work, but I also liked the idea of supporting local artisans. I returned to her shop at least five times while I was on the island. I purchased two pairs of earrings for myself and several necklaces to give as gifts. On my last visit, I told her that while in Syros, I had bought jewelry only from her. A big smile crossed her face and she seemed delighted to hear such a compliment. I bought another necklace and asked if she had earrings to match. She didn't have any already made, but she offered to craft a pair while I waited. She told me that since I had been in her store so many times that I would receive a "special price." And she did give me a great deal. When my last purchase was made, I thanked her and began walking towards the door. But before I could step outside, she called and said, "This is for you, a special memory from Syros." Then she handed me a beautiful

charm to hang on my keychain. I thanked and hugged her and left the shop overjoyed. Now, every time I use my keys, I think of her kindness and her big bright smile!

As a customer, I was always greeted warmly and shopkeepers took whatever time was necessary to answer my questions. This was especially true of the ladies at the Greek takeout kitchen. They became accustomed to me asking, "What is that? Does it have meat in it?" Their menu is different every day and much of it looked unfamiliar with the exception of mixed vegetables with potatoes, carrots and zucchini... I do recognize vegetables! After only a few visits, the Greek ladies had me completely figured out! "No meat for the American lady!" My trips to the Greek kitchen were quite frequent and I'm sure that their sales increased during my stay as well!

I usually stocked up on enough food from their kitchen to last three to four days. A few side dishes and spanakopita was a typical meal on most nights. On the first night of Mitch's visit, I planned to serve him a classic Greek meal and tell him that I made it! Of course, I wasn't sure that he'd believe me! After all, he'd already heard the story about my vegetable-rice stew! When I served him that first meal, halfway through the dinner, I confessed where his food had actually been prepared. It was then that Mitch said that he wanted to meet the ladies... and thank them for taking such good care of me! As is typical of Greek hospitality, they greeted him with enthusiasm!

On many of my supply runs and trips to the vet, I often stopped at the Plaza Bakery and Coffee Shop where they served what is arguably the best squeezed orange juice on the planet! By my second week in Syros, one of the young ladies who worked there began recognizing me. Regardless of how long the waiting line was, she would start making the fresh juice the minute I walked into the shop. The shop also had a bakery section with a selection of cakes, cookies, candy and irresistible chocolate delicacies. Many of you may know that

I have an insatiable chocolate habit, so I usually purchased a few chocolates from the bakery. Like the lady who made my orange juice even before I ordered it, the girl at the register knew about my sweet tooth and anticipated that I would want to buy some of their homemade chocolates as well. She always asked me, "How many of those chocolate treats would you like today!?"

Spending the local currency had its awkward moments. I have an international credit card that I use for larger purchases such as pet crates and jewelry. Using a credit card for purchases never feels the same to me as spending cash. It's different when handing over a fifty euro note. A credit card postpones payment, encourages some to overspend and can get people into financial trouble. While I pay my entire credit card bill at the end of each month, I am more likely to think twice about purchasing something if I'm using cash. However, a currency that's not American doesn't seem authentic; it's more like Monopoly money... play money! My brain tells me, "Spend it, it's not real!" I also had a difficult time distinguishing between the different coins. Euros come in one and two euro coins that look similar. I often stood at the cashier flipping the coins from front to back trying to decipher what was what! When 50, 20 and 10-cent coins were added to the mix, it further confused me and I delayed customers waiting behind me. Most often, I simply pulled every coin from my billfold and held them in my hand, allowing the cashier to pick out the appropriate coins. I trusted them and never felt like I was being taken advantage of... not once!

I am humbled by the good nature of the Greek people. I'm sure I look different to them... tall, light complexion and calico-colored hair. I often saw them peering at me, perhaps out of curiosity. Sometimes, I took the opportunity to catch their eye and flash them a friendly smile.

I believe that a smile goes a long way when it comes to communicating with people anywhere in the world. It is truly the universal language that breaks barriers. The people of Syros gave me many reasons to smile... and they, in return, smiled back.

Driving in Syros

As courteous as the Greek people are in their shops, they are quite the opposite on the road. For the first two weeks after my arrival, Joan drove us everywhere: to the vet, to the church colony, to the pet supply store, to the Greek ladies take-out kitchen, to the post office and to the grocery store. I told myself that I was refraining from driving so that I could get my bearings and focus on where everything was located. But the real reason was I simply wanted to avoid it!

The majority of the cars in Syros have manual transmissions. Gas is very expensive on the island and vehicles with stick shifts get better mileage than automatic ones. Having to manually shift gears also makes maneuvering on the curved roads and steep hills easier. I've driven a standard car in the past, but that was many years ago and I thought I should practice before going to Greece. I knew from the job description that part of my responsibility would include supply runs, vet visits and feeding cats some distance away from the sanctuary.

In anticipation, before I left Santa Barbara, I convinced my friend, Denny, to let me drive his manual car for practice. He has ridden with me many times but was always somewhat nervous when I was behind the wheel. I have what he calls "a lead foot!" That means I have a tendency to drive over the speed limit! I was sure that's why he suggested that we find a large open parking lot with plenty of room for my test drive!

With so many things to consider before my trip, I kept postponing the driving lesson. But time was growing short and I still hadn't practiced. Finally, there was no avoiding it, so I asked Denny if we could practice in my driveway. After he arrived for the lesson, I climbed into the driver's seat while he took his place on the passenger side. When I was set, I

looked at him and asked half kidding, "Denny, are you ready for this? Better hold on!" He smiled and laughingly replied, "I think so!" We buckled our seatbelts and Denny took the usual position he takes when I drive. He held on for dear life, gripping the door handle until his knuckles turned white while digging his heels into the floorboard!

To my surprise, driving a car with a standard transmission was the same as what people say about riding a bike; "It all comes back to you." And it did. (However, admittedly, I've never been fond of riding a bicycle; I like to have my own two feet on the ground.) After my successful drive, I felt confident about my skills and with Denny as my copilot, I drove us to lunch... avoiding the freeway, of course! He treated me. But in hindsight, due to the stress I must have caused him, I should've bought Denny's meal!

After my triumphant lesson in Santa Barbara, I felt confident about driving in a foreign country. That is, until I got to Syros! Those friendly and courteous Greeks that were in every shop had an entirely different attitude when it comes to driving!

As they showed little consideration for stop signs, I quickly learned which stops the locals obey and which ones they just sail through. Joan pointed out a cross street where I should always halt completely because there is a blind corner that blocks the sight of oncoming traffic. "Others," she said, "you can completely ignore."

As Syros has a mountainous topography, many roads have sharp switchbacks with limited visibility of oncoming traffic. And to make driving there even more challenging for me, the local drivers didn't always stay on their side of the street, so I was extremely cautious every time I rounded a curve.

Many of the village roads were exceptionally narrow and often there wasn't adequate space for cars approaching each other. Either the other driver or I had to back up, pull to the

side or completely get off the street in order to let the other car pass. I did manage to be successful in those circumstances! Once the Greek drivers saw me, a foreigner with a look of panic on her face, they were eager to get out of my way!



When it was time for me to drive in Syros, I expected that Joan's car would handle differently than Denny's. Nevertheless, I was ready to learn and make the necessary adjustments. However, I certainly wasn't prepared for all the variations in the irregular terrain. Shifting gears on the steep hills and making sharp turns on the drive to town were nothing like practicing in my driveway.

A few days after I arrived, Joan drove me to a nearby parking lot for my test drive... she no doubt thought I'd avoided driving long enough! But my renewed skills from the Santa Barbara outing had completely disappeared. The car seemed so much more sensitive when I shifted, released the clutch or pressed the accelerator. I suddenly felt like I was sixteen again with a driving instructor sitting next to me. Several times, even after giving it my best effort, the car died. It was especially tricky to determine how much gas was needed to give while, at the same time, releasing the clutch to back out of the sloped driveway or to head up a steep hill. It took numerous practice times for me to get it right. I tried to maintain my humor, but, in reality, I felt embarrassed by my failed attempts. I think Joan realized that when she gave me credit for trying. In her polite manner, she reminded me to "Just give it some UMPH!" I could only hope that I didn't wear out her car's clutch during my stay. In her endeavor to make me feel better, Joan told me that she had taken a volunteer out the previous summer to teach her to drive. After one attempt, the volunteer exclaimed, "No thank you!" From then on, that volunteer walked wherever she went!

Joan knew I had difficulty getting out of her steep driveway. Whenever she returned from an outing, she was extremely considerate and parked the car in a flat area at the top of the driveway. She knew it was easier for me to accelerate properly from there. Or perhaps her real reason for parking it in that area was that she knew they might save some of their landscaping from being run over. While it was much more convenient for Joan and Richard to unload their groceries and supplies on the downhill in front of their house, I had little success backing out from there. On more than one occasion, when I attempted to back up the hill, I destroyed some of their shrubs. If I had an errand to do on my own, I was always relieved to see that Joan had moved the car to the level area of the driveway!

For whatever reason, the paved road that led to God's Little People became loose gravel about one-half mile before the entrance. Perhaps it was because it was less traveled; I never knew for sure. The road wasn't maintained, so there were areas where the sandy gravel had washed away. Driving through an unforeseen pothole could easily result in a blown tire. I drove that gravel road many times and wondered if one might fare better on it with a tractor! The street got worse after it rained; rivers of gravel washed away leaving deep crevices that could easily swallow a tire. The potholes filled with rainwater, so there was no way of seeing how deep they were. The more it rained, the worse the potholes and crevices became. Whenever I had to travel to and from the sanctuary, my main consideration was to avoid all the places a car could become stuck. If I had become stranded, I doubt there was a tow truck anywhere on the island to rescue me. Consequently, I was extremely cautious and drove very slowly. With practice, I soon became a master at zigzagging around the dangerous spots.

I'll always remember those times when I went to town with both Richard and Joan. I sat in the back. Joan was in the passenger seat and Richard drove. I thought, "Oh my gosh...

Get ready for a ride and hold on tight!" Richard must have memorized every pothole and crack. He sped along, rarely braking on the gravel road... just "hit the gas and go" seemed to be his approach. Somehow he managed to miss every pothole and cavernous gap. I bounced around in the back seat like a cork in the ocean. I teasingly reminded Richard that I was hoping to be sent back to America in one piece. In all honesty, while I did trust him, it was still quite a ride! Even today, we laugh about it.

I had one firm rule while driving in Syros. It came about one day when Joan and I were coming back from the vet's office at dusk and I was driving. While in a high gear, I made a turn too quickly and almost landed us in a ditch! I exclaimed, "From now on, I'm not driving in the dark!" She readily agreed that that was a rule she could live with!



The main city in Syros is Hermoupolis. It's a bustling town with many cars, motorcycles and pedestrians. It is a dangerous place because no one seems to look anywhere but straight ahead! People are focused on getting around without any consideration about what may be coming towards them, alongside them or from behind! Driving in the city was just as taxing, if not worse, than maneuvering in the mountains. The graciousness I usually experienced while I was in the Greek shops completely vanished when the locals took to the road.

Parking was on a first-come, first-serve basis. And if there were no spaces available, the locals parked illegally in clearly marked "Do Not Park" areas. Often when they couldn't find an open spot, they double-parked illegally, turned on their emergency blinkers and left their vehicle unattended. Most drivers had no regard for traffic signs; they acted as if the signs didn't exist. It seemed to me that no one stopped or obeyed the rules of the road... that is, no one but me!

Driving in Syros reminded me of when I was a little girl visiting my grandmother in Jasper, Florida. Her town was populated by less than a thousand residents. One could drive through the middle of downtown in less than two minutes. There were no traffic signs or lights, and in fact, there was really no need for them in such a small town. Years later, my cousin told me that the town council voted to put in a stoplight, but the locals ignored it. Now that might be fine for the little town of Jasper, but it certainly didn't fare well for me in Syros as an American who, with the exception of my lead foot, obeyed the traffic rules.



Unlike the road to God's Little People, there were many paved roads and sidewalks in Hermoupolis, but some of those streets and walkways were constructed of cobblestone. The cobblestone lanes that led to the majestic structures, such as its opera house, government buildings and churches, added charm to those historic buildings. But the cobblestone roads were tough on vehicles. Cars rattled and bounced as the tires made contact with the uneven stones. Driving on them reminded me of the bumpy rides with Richard on the rugged, washed-out gravel road. Thankfully, I could hear the approaching cars on the cobblestones, so if I was walking, I could get out of the way.

Another major driving challenge for me was the roundabout in the middle of town where cars, scooters and motorcycles merged from four directions. Roundabouts remind me of a merry-go-round that never stops. I've never been fond of them as I don't think anyone really understands who has the right-of-way, so people drive into traffic without consideration of others and frequently without looking for oncoming cars. Many times while I was driving in Hermoupolis, I wished the Greeks had yielded, or better yet, stopped to let me, an

inexperienced American driver, merge! But they didn't. In fact, they showed no sign of knowing what merging into traffic really means. Joan was with me when I decided to be courageous by forcefully wedging my way into the roundabout. I forewarned her, "I'm going to be brave and try this," and then I hit the accelerator. She saw the oncoming cars forging ahead without any signs of slowing or stopping. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed that she, like Denny, frantically reached for the door handle! Then I heard her gasp as she desperately tried to muster the word, "Stop!"

By my third week in Syros, I felt I was ready to drive into town by myself even though I was exceptionally nervous about driving alone for the first time. I needed to pick up cat food and stop at the vet for antibiotics. I remembered that the pet supply store was just a few steps past my favorite coffee shop, The Plaza, the one I frequented quite often to purchase "what is arguably the best squeezed orange juice on the planet" and irresistible chocolate delicacies. But as I drove the familiar road that day, I couldn't locate the coffee shop or the store. It was difficult to look for a specific retailer while also watching out for cars pulling in and out of the side streets. To add to my confusion, many pedestrians stepped off the curb without first looking for approaching vehicles. I made three passes trying to locate the pet supply, but I just couldn't find it. Finally, I parked the car in the first available space and walked along the road. It seemed like a much safer idea.

I found the pet supply store about a half-mile away, a few doors down from the coffee shop... just where it was supposed to be! But how was I going to get two thirty-five pound bags of kibble and four ten-pound bags of litter to such a faraway parking spot? I spoke with the owner of the shop and told her that it was my first time driving alone in Syros. I admitted that I was anxious about trying to turn around in traffic. After I paid for the food and litter, I said to her, "Now that I know

where the shop is, I hope there'll be a parking spot in front when I come back with the car." She heard the anxiety in my voice and asked, "Where are you parked?" I said that I had walked quite a distance but couldn't tell her exactly where the car was. She smiled and called her husband. He stacked the seventy pounds of food and forty pounds of litter on his motorcycle! He drove up the street, recognized Joan's car and loaded the food and litter into the trunk before returning to the shop. I thanked him profusely and offered a tip but he flatly refused and flashed me a great big smile. Here was one more example of how nice the Greek shopkeepers are; but I've never figured out what possesses them when they get on the road!

By the time Mitch arrived for a visit, I had mastered driving in Syros. I was much more confident about winding in and out of traffic, taking on the curved roads in the mountains and wedging my way between approaching vehicles on the roundabout. I could drive anywhere and do just about anything! That is... except parallel park. I flunked parallel parking on my driving test when I was sixteen. And I haven't succeeded at it yet. Oh, I've tried and I've set guidelines to help me achieve it. First, there must be enough room to drive the car into an available spot... front-end first! Secondly, I need to be able to turn the wheels while backing up, so I can edge forward as many times as it takes to fit into the space. And lastly, maybe... just maybe... the car ends up somewhat near the curb! Since the streets in Syros are extremely narrow, there wasn't the option of parking far from the curb as that would further constrict the lane for passing cars. I was lucky if I found a parking spot at all, but I rarely located one with enough room to drive in hood-first or that would allow me any room to maneuver.

When Mitch visited, he never complained about my driving... or offered to take the wheel. Maybe he didn't want

to infringe on my responsibilities. But more likely, he probably felt uncomfortable about swearing at Greek drivers who upset him as he often does with drivers back in California.

I suspect, however, the real reason was that he remembered our trip to Auckland many years ago. In New Zealand, cars travel on the left side of the road and the driver's seat is where the passenger seat is in American vehicles. We had planned on renting a car so that we could tour the city and countryside for five days. We left the airport in our rental car and headed towards our hotel. But we hadn't given much thought to driving until after we got into the car. It was odd sitting on the opposite side. Everything was backwards. It was confusing. Which way do I look? What lane do I turn into? How do I shift gears with my left hand? We followed other cars and finally made it to the hotel, but Mitch couldn't gauge where the curb was and hit it so hard that he caused a flat tire. To this day, I don't know exactly what he said to the rental company about the flat, but they immediately delivered another car and genuinely apologized for sending us on the road with a compromised vehicle!

The next day, we decided to get away from the busy city traffic and explore the surrounding country. But it was as challenging as driving in town! There wasn't much traffic so there was no one to follow. Turns were difficult because we had no idea which lane to turn into. We sat in the car trying to get our bearings.

The New Zealand country roads were narrow and winding and there were no medians or curbs, only a steep drop-off into a ditch below. Without realizing it, Mitch continuously came dangerously close to the edge. I yelled several times, "Mitch! You're too close to the edge! You're going to put me in the ditch!" After several near misses, he pulled over and slammed on the brakes. He got out of the car, stomped over to my side, swung open my door, glared at me and in a raised voice said,

"Do YOU want to drive?" My answer was an adamant, "No!"

After we both calmed down, we returned to Auckland, turned the car back to the rental agency and walked everywhere for the next five days.



I supposed Mitch knew better than to criticize my driving. The only time he said anything was the one day I got lucky and spotted a space on the main road that was ample enough for me to parallel park. Per my guidelines, I headed in front-end first! When he got out, he teased me, "Well, you could've gotten three feet closer! But that's okay, I can take a cab to the curb from here!"

I recall one of our trips to town when parking spaces suddenly changed from the right side of the road to the left. There was no apparent reason; it just changed! After several trips around the block, we found a parking place... one of those dreaded parallel spaces that would involve backing in. To make it even trickier, it was on the left-hand side of the road, not the usual right side. But feeling brave, I attempted it anyway... and failed miserably! I drove around the block hoping to find another place but came upon the same space... again. Once more, I tried to park... and again, had no success. I pulled out and once more circled the block hoping to find an easier spot. But as I came around the corner, I couldn't believe that the same place was still open. So I tried one more time, but my third attempt was just as futile as the first two. Finally, I turned to Mitch and said, "I'm sorry, I just can't do it!" He reassured me, "It's okay, sweetheart, don't worry about it." Interestingly, since then he has never said another word about my parallel parking.

In addition to the parking issues, there was the stress of the local pedestrians dashing in and out of traffic. I constantly watched trying to anticipate their next moves. Then, of course,

there are the cats! Although the felines seemed accustomed to cars, I could never be too careful whether driving in town or on the mountain roads!

My driving experience in Syros was certainly an adventure! Watch for cars. Stop at this sign. Don't stop at that one. Be daring at the roundabouts and careful of pedestrians. And cats... please don't cross in front of me!

There were times when I struggled with driving in Greece. I was unsure of how to get to my destination, I was in an unfamiliar car and I couldn't speak the language. At times I felt like I was doing something so far out of my comfort zone that I asked myself, "What am I doing trying to drive in a foreign country?" Fortunately, I have a sense of humor so my frustration didn't last too long. I was able to laugh and even thought that by the end of my stay on Syros, I would probably drive just like a Greek.

But... on second thought... I certainly hoped not!



Cat Gardens in Syros



Changing people's views doesn't happen overnight. It takes commitment, patience, communication and education but, most of all, it takes time. Sometimes, convincing people to modify their outlook starts by setting a good example. One must "walk the walk," not just "talk the talk!" Or as Mahatma Gandhi said, "You must be the change you want to see in the world." I do my best to follow Gandhi's wisdom every day.

For me, at RESQCATS, it's always been about the cats. My decisions are based on what is best for them medically... and emotionally. My philosophy is simple: "The day it's not about the cats first is the day I don't need to be doing rescue."

From a personal standpoint, and because of the suffering of animals in the food industry, I have chosen a compassionate lifestyle. I don't consume animal products and I also avoid goods that are tested on animals. My thoughtful choices are not something that I preach to others, but when the occasion presents itself or when I'm asked, I take the opportunity to educate others about the cruelty that many companies inflict on animals. It is my hope that I'll influence others to consider changes in their own lives that can benefit all animals. I'm polite when I talk to others, but I also come across as strong in my conviction about how animals are treated. I believe that even small changes in our lives can make a positive difference for animals.



There are estimated to be 13,000 stray cats on Syros. They live in the city parks, at the markets and on the streets in Hermoupolis. They're on mountain roads, under dumpsters and alongside neighborhood walkways. Some cats reside in

colonies while others live a more solitary life. There isn't a village on the island that doesn't have cats... and plenty of them! In fact, most of the Greek islands are overrun with cats.

My belief is that because the cats are everywhere, they've become part of the local landscape and go largely unnoticed by many people. That would never be the case for me as it is my passion in life to make a difference for the felines! There wasn't a single time when I ventured out into Syros that I didn't see cats. I'm certain, however, that there were hundreds, perhaps thousands more whose paths I never crossed. Sadly, because they are often overlooked, they frequently succumb to disease, respiratory infections, blindness and starvation.

In the past, Greek cats have been grossly mistreated due to their low social status. Many people considered them "disgusting" because they survived on discarded food left in open dumpsters. Unlike in Egyptian times, when cats were worshiped as gods because they saved the grain harvest from rodents, Greeks viewed cats as vermin. The Greek cats were treated like the rats were in Egyptian times! They were often tortured, burned, drowned or poisoned.

Thankfully, the plight of cats in Syros is beginning to change. There are many kindhearted Greeks who spend their hard-earned euros buying food for the local felines. I often witnessed caring women and men hauling bags of kibble to feed to the strays. I learned that many of them are dedicated to a regular schedule so that the cats always have a food supply. I credit those people with the fact that many of the felines are accustomed to humans and some of the cats are remarkably friendly.

As I tried to assess and accept all that I saw, I wondered what could be done to change the minds of the people who don't appreciate the felines... or worse, harm them. Can the Greek people be persuaded that cats are worthy of their compassion? Is it possible for the locals and cats to coexist

in harmony? Is there a way to educate them about the cats' needs? And most importantly, is there someone who can start a program that promotes the well-being of the island cats?

Fortunately, for the cats of Syros, there is!

His name is Manos Vorrissis. Manos is a veterinarian at the only animal clinic on Syros. In addition to dedicating his life to veterinary medicine, he also volunteers much of his time to making the lives of cats better. I had the opportunity to work with Manos on many occasions. During my twenty-plus years of rescue, I've never met a vet more devoted to improving the lives of stray cats.

There were many times when Manos and I talked about the island cats' sad existence. I assumed that there must be occasions when he felt overwhelmed with the uphill challenge of so many cats needing his help. I thought it would be easy for him to experience a sense of powerlessness simply due to the enormous number of cats in need.

But Manos' enthusiasm and dedication never wavered. He was eager to assist with the church colony project in any way he could. His commitment to helping became a reality when, during my stay on the island, he set aside two three-day weekends to spay and neuter cats. And Manos did so on his own time... without pay!

On the first spay/neuter weekend, Manos sterilized 106 felines and on the second weekend, he altered 119! It was a coordinated effort that took a great deal of planning. He needed a place to perform the surgeries with the assistance of experienced staff. Trapping had to be coordinated with many volunteers. A precise system for checking the cats into the clinic was critical. There needed to be a plan for post-surgery cats... how and when to return them to their respective colonies. Manos made certain that spay and neuter days flowed smoothly, but I also give enormous credit to the dedicated staff and volunteers who worked tirelessly at his side.

After I left Syros, Manos continued to schedule several more spay-neuter weekends.

I asked Manos how he became involved with the stray cats. He said it began when he reached out to help an elderly man who had lost his wife. The wife had been feeding the strays for many years. They lived in the old part of the city which dated back to the mid-1800s.



When I visited the old city, I discovered that the neighborhood architecture wasn't typical of what I'd seen on the rest of the island. While most Greek houses have a rather simplistic style, the buildings in this old neighborhood were quite different from the box-like houses that I had grown accustomed to seeing. I learned that traders and mariners had transformed Hermoupolis into a major port. At one time it was more important than the mainland Greek port of Piraeus because it connected Eastern and Western civilizations. Refugees who settled in Hermoupolis in the nineteenth century introduced new architectural elements known as Classicism. The structural design is characterized by two-story houses with a basement. The walls are built of local stone and then covered with a layer of plaster. Wooden floors and cornices were part of the construction which enhanced the decorative aspect of the interior. Roof tiles added dimension and interest to the outside of the buildings. Balconies, open terraces and outdoor staircases that connected the levels were also part of the classical design.

It was a breathtaking part of the city. I stood in awe of the beauty of the buildings, the constant motion of the sea and the vast panoramic view.

An ancient stone wall separated the street from the neighborhood and a wide cobblestone walkway. A colony of about twenty cats lived between the wall and pathway. Manos

told me that the widower continued to feed the cats there after his wife passed away and I hoped to meet the old man when I visited the area.

I got lucky; he happened to be feeding the cats! I watched him from afar as I considered whether or not to greet him. The man was in his nineties, but I would have never guessed his age. He appeared to be in excellent shape. Although his posture was slightly stooped, he was muscular, lacking the usual pot belly that elderly men often get. By that time, I knew that walking up and down the steep hills in Syros gets you into good shape! The story was that the old man carried several kilos of food in plastic bags down the steep cobblestone path to feed the colony of cats every day.

I was curious about him and tried to catch his eye to say "kalimera," but he never glanced my way. He ignored everyone who strolled past him, never looking up to offer that smile I had seen so many times from the Greek people. Manos had described the old man as a grumpy curmudgeon who was set in his ways, but I like to think that he dearly missed his wife and filled his lonely days feeding the cats.

When Manos met the widower and witnessed his dedication to the cats, he wanted to do something to help. The feeding area was adjacent to the cobblestone walkway, but it had always been neglected. At that time, there was no landscaping, only dirt that served as a giant litter box! The unkempt area was in full view of passersby. But Manos imagined that it could become a stunningly picturesque stroll for locals and tourists to enjoy.

That's when Manos got the idea of creating a "cat garden." In his mind, he knew what it would look like and how it could best be landscaped to accommodate the cats. But he knew he needed help, so he recruited volunteers to lend a hand and to make his vision become reality. On an agreed day, Manos and the volunteers gathered together with donated plants and

tools in hand. They planted shrubbery that would flower in summer and succulents that would bloom throughout the year. Trees were strategically placed to provide shade during the hot weather. Bougainvillea climbed the old stone wall boasting deep purple and dazzling magenta petals. In a single day of work, they transformed the barren plot into a beautifully manicured garden.

Raised feeding stations had been specially designed to keep kibble off of the ground. The stations were set back from the main walkway, so the cats could eat in private, away from public view. Neither the cats nor the passersby would be bothered. A water dispenser was placed in the garden. Someone replenished it every week providing the cats access to clean water. The transformation from a desolate dirt plot to a colorful fertile garden was spectacular! The newly-landscaped garden encouraged the locals to provide for its upkeep. As an added benefit, the garden also "planted the seed" that the cats are living, breathing creatures, worthy of being cared for.

The garden also served as a memorial. The legend was that a kitten had been nearly kicked to death by a cruel woman and then left to die (I dare not call her a lady!). Sadly, other cats had also perished there at the hands of unscrupulous people, but the saga of this particular kitten tugged at Manos' heartstrings. While in the garden, I strolled towards the ancient wall stopping only to pet the cats. As I walked its length, I discovered something unusual between the stones. Tucked in the crevices were skeletal bones that appeared to be from a small kitten. I delicately moved my fingers across them as if I were stroking a living cat. I felt my heart sink. I wondered why someone would put them there. When I asked Manos about what I had seen, he looked at me with tears in his eyes and said, "I put the bones there to remind people to be kind."



Manos' idea of creating community cat gardens has been accepted in Syros and on the nearby island of Tinos. Since it only takes an afternoon of work from a few willing people to improve the lives of cats and enhance the neighborhood, the concept has begun to spread throughout the Aegean islands.

While I was in Syros, Manos and a group of volunteers built another garden in Kini, the small village where he lives, very close to God's Little People. He chose a spot by a mini-market where many felines frequented the nearby dumpster. Volunteers from Kini spent a Sunday afternoon laying large stones in a predetermined area to define the garden. A variety of native succulents and colorful flowers were planted. A raised feeding station and water dispenser were set up. The completed Kini cat garden looked like a work of art. Having a specific manicured site for the cats promoted participation among the Kini residents while also greatly benefiting the felines. As each cat garden was finished, it was given a name unique to that area.



To ensure the future well-being of the cats, Manos also visits local schools to teach children compassion for animals. He takes every opportunity to increase awareness and educate others about the cats' plight. But, this is only the beginning of a long process of finding solutions that will make certain that the felines in Greece will have better lives.



There is something else about the gardens that touched my heart. In addition to a hand-painted plaque with the garden's name, several of them have a second sign that reads, "We live together." To me, that symbolizes a message of changing attitudes... one that enables the Greek people to recognize that the cats should be treated well while living in harmony

with them. This reminds me of one of Gandhi's most famous quotes: "You can judge the greatness of a nation by how it treats its animals."

I think Manos' message is also an important one for humans. It's a testament that we can all live in peace when we recognize that we are worthy of compassion, acceptance and love. I believe that Manos represents, "...the change (we) want to see in the world."

We CAN all live together.

Shadow

In addition to caring for the foster cats from the church colony, I spent several hours a day with the sanctuary cats. I loved sitting on the large covered patio in the afternoons watching those residents come and go. They seemed to emerge from everywhere... behind the shrubbery, under the porch deck and from the adjacent garden. They raced towards me when they heard my footsteps on the wooden plank porch. The friendliest cats greeted me first, but even the more timid felines were curious and would observe me from a distance. Jessie, a long-time resident, was usually the first to show up and take what she claimed was her spot on my lap. There was an occasional tiff between some of the other cats to determine who got the second position! Others such as MousMous, Fanta and Fernando had to settle for sitting next to me, but they squeezed in as close as possible, so they wouldn't miss being petted. There were numerous others who stopped by to make sure they got their fair share of my attention.

I also visited Meadow and BluBelle, two one-year-old kittens who lived in one of the houses on the property while they waited for their adoptive home. Unlike the older residents, they were more interested in chasing a feather toy, playing with a ball or batting at a string rather than sitting in my lap. They welcomed me at the front door, eager to play as if I were their sole source of entertainment. However, it was obvious they had already been amusing themselves. By my afternoon visit, the tidy room from my morning rounds had been transformed into what looked more like a children's playroom after recess; toys were scattered everywhere!

While I loved my time with God's Little People's residents, the cats at the church colony really captured my heart. I felt

sorry for them and the circumstances in which they lived. Of course I always took food, but I spent a lot of extra time simply sitting on the paved road watching them. Many of the cats would come near to me and enjoyed being petted while others kept their distance. I could see that they had suffered; some appeared fragile and sickly, and others looked tired and worn down. As I sat in the street, I would talk to them out loud... and from my heart. On some days, my emotions got the better of me. But every time I visited, I told myself that I was making a difference.

Later, when I posted on social media about the conditions at the church, several people asked if I planned to bring any of the cats home. Believe me, with 13,000 strays on Syros, I certainly thought about it! Traveling with them to America was definitely doable. And even though several seemed like good candidates, adopting a Greek cat for myself just wasn't possible for other reasons.

RESQCATS has several resident cats that are not adoptable. Many years ago, I chose to keep, rather than euthanize, cats and kittens that could not get adopted. I committed to providing them lifetime care. My philosophy is clear: "If they're too old, too feral, too shy, have too many health issues or too ANYTHING, they just stay!"

As of this writing, there are fifteen cats that live at RESQCATS on a permanent basis. The current residents range in age from just one year old to twenty-one years old! In addition to the unadoptable resident cats, there are three special-needs cats who live with a permanent caregiver. RESQCATS is financially responsible for all of their expenses too, including food, litter, and medical care for their entire lives.

Many visitors to RESQCATS are amazed by the uniqueness of the facility. I am frequently told that they think the residents that get to live with us are very lucky. The sanctuary is located

on my personal property. The building itself is a fifteen-hundred square foot converted greenhouse. Connected to the building are over eight hundred and fifty feet of overhead covered trails that lead to large outdoor enclosures nestled in an avocado grove of more than a hundred trees. Unlike at God's Little People, cats in Santa Barbara cannot roam freely. There are predators, such as coyotes and hawks, and dangerous traffic. The covered outdoor tunnels and secure enclosures provide a safe haven where the cats can enjoy a protected outdoor experience.

The resident cats that get along, or at least tolerate each other, have access to the entire cattery. That includes the overhead tunnels and the large outdoor enclosures. The cats that need their own space have a private interior enclosure with an overhead tunnel that connects to their own outside space. Whether a cat is part of the general population or resides in an individual suite, they all have access to condos, scratching posts, toys, beds and much more. Because of the uniqueness of RESQCATS, visitors often exclaim, "This place looks like cat heaven; it's a real kitty Disneyland!"

I feel differently. I'm happy to have the residents because I know that they would have been euthanized if they had been at most other shelters. But sometimes I feel sad because I have so little time to spend with them. The majority of my days are devoted to rescuing, caring for and finding suitable homes for our adoptable cats and kittens. That leaves little occasion for me to be with the residents. While I make sure that I visit them, even for a little while each day, most of their play and cuddle time comes from the wonderful volunteers at RESQCATS.

I always want what is best for the residents. To me, that means that someone would come along and give them the home they deserve, where they are loved and part of a family. But that's not likely for cats with special needs or behavior

issues or that require continuous medical attention.

I realize that there are extraordinary people who choose the least adoptable cats but, from past experience, I also know these folks are few and far between. Over the twenty-three years that I have been rescuing cats, there have been only a handful of people who have considered taking a less adoptable cat. I am always grateful to those special individuals.

For the majority of people, however, it's different. I would be very surprised if anyone wanted to adopt one of our resident cats. For example:

- It is not likely that Earl would be adopted... he was relinquished to a shelter when he was seventeen years old!
- Serena is five years old and has suffered chronic pancreatitis since she gave birth to kittens when she was only ten months old. She requires subcutaneous fluids every week and bi-yearly follow-up veterinary exams.
- Talullah has feline leukemia and a life expectancy of only three years. Happily, she has surpassed that mark, but she could be fine today and gone tomorrow. Most people cannot bring themselves to adopt a leukemia-positive cat knowing their lives could be so short.
- As a kitten, Gellie was diagnosed with hydrocephalus, also referred to as water on the brain. She had to have constant monitoring to ensure that her medications were appropriate. Gellie was only expected to live three months, but with the tender loving care she received, she survived to almost her third birthday.
- Roux, named after a kangaroo, was born with short, deformed front legs. Amazingly, even though her legs are useless, she manages to get around just fine, chasing laser lights and playing like any normal kitten. But most people would never consider adopting a cat with a disability. (At RESQCATS we say that Roux has "special abilities!")

Those are only a few of the RESQCATS residents. I have come to accept that adoption for them is highly unlikely.

There are also adopters who have an unrealistic preconceived idea of their perfect feline. They want the tiniest kitten possible... but usually not a black one! Some people go so far as to tell me where they want the white markings on a tuxedo cat to be. Others want me to predict how big the cat will be when it grows up or that the kitten must become a lap cat... the expectations go on and on.

The majority of people insist on a kitten, not a young mom who may be less than a year old. Convincing people that the mothers are kittens themselves, still playful and energetic but without all the monitoring young kittens require, is usually impossible. I tell potential adopters that young mothers need homes too, but I'm rarely successful at getting my message across.

I often joke that sometimes it seems like I am running a home for unwed mothers!

The main focus of some adopters is purely based on looks. One can imagine the number of responses I received after posting an eight-week-old Siamese kitten with blue eyes. Prospective adopters seemed to come out of the woodwork. At one time, there were twenty people inquiring about a single blue-eyed kitten. I just wish that many people responded to the posts about black kittens... or the teenage moms.

I recall a lady who visited RESQCATS with the intention of adopting siblings. I was thrilled that two kittens might go home together, that is, until she gave me her list of requirements! She said, "I want siblings; one must be a boy and the other must be a girl." She continued, "It doesn't matter what one looks like, but the other has to be a brown tabby!" As she pointed to a kitten several enclosures away, she said, "It needs to look like that one, but with a fluffier tail and an orange nose." She went on, "I have young children, so they

have to get along with active kids. And, oh yeah, I have a dog, so the kittens also need to like dogs."

I listened attentively, not believing what I was hearing. I thought, "Did she really expect me to fulfill that list of specifications?" When she finally finished talking, I looked at her skeptically. Knowing that I didn't have, and would never have, kittens that met all her requirements, I replied, "Now, let me get this straight." I then repeated her criteria and asked, "Did I get everything right?" She arrogantly nodded, acknowledging that I had got it all. Then I said, "You do understand, this is rescue?" In all honesty, I felt like saying, "Adopting kittens is not like ordering a car!" But I controlled myself. She left thinking I would contact her. However, I must admit, I never called her back.

My perspective about adoption is very different from most. It's probably a result of doing rescue for so many years and hearing from too many people with lists! So one should not be surprised when I say this: if I could have brought a cat or kitten back from Syros, it wouldn't have been Tumbelina and Violet, the two darling kittens that I fostered for weeks. Nor would it have been Charmer, that fluffy boy whose personality fit his name. And neither would it be Indigo, the shy girl who warmed my heart when she finally came around to trusting me after weeks of working with her. No, it wouldn't have been any of these wonderful kittens.

If I could choose one cat to bring back to the States, it would have been a cat who lived at the Greek church that I named Shadow. I was immediately drawn to him the first time I saw him, but for reasons many people may not understand. It wasn't about his age, or his color or his looks. My feelings for Shadow were much deeper, and I saw his beauty in different ways.

Shadow was not a feline that most consider handsome. I feel certain that if he were in a shelter, he would be passed over

many times because of his less than striking appearance. His mottled black-tabby fur with a dull white undercoat is a look that most don't find attractive. His ear was tipped, a common practice among trap-neuter-return groups that identifies that a cat is neutered or spayed. Some people would have seen this less-than-perfect ear as mutilated. His large jowls and big head, a typical appearance of males that are neutered later in life, were disproportionate to his body. He was a large-framed cat who looked like he could easily intimidate other cats, although he was anything but a bully!

He walked with a limp in his back legs. I wondered what had happened to him and worried that he might be in pain. One day, I asked a kind Greek gentleman who was feeding the church colony if he knew anything about Shadow's past. He told me that Shadow was now seven or eight years old, but he had been hit by a car when he was a kitten. He hobbled because his injury had gone unattended.

As I watched him walk, I saw that Shadow had trouble placing his feet in the forward position. From past experience at RESQCATS, I know that can be a symptom of nerve damage. Years of compensating for his limp had compromised his hips; one actually looked lower than the other. It was possible that Shadow also had back problems. He appeared stiff and in more pain during colder weather. But on sunny days, the warmth from the sun seemed to ease his discomfort as he basked in the rays on the warm pavement.

It brought tears to my eyes when I first saw Shadow. I feared that his limited mobility would make him more susceptible to altercations with the other male cats. But it was actually quite the opposite. Shadow appeared to be the alpha male of the colony. Although he had a calm presence, the other felines always seemed to step back and bow when he appeared! It was as if he were royalty!

On one of my first visits to the church, Shadow hobbled

towards me, pushed his head into the palm of my hand asking for my affection. From that moment on, he had my heart. I fell in love with him... his looks, his "special abilities" and his sweet disposition. I always looked forward to the church visits... and especially the chance to spend time with Shadow!

On one bright, warm day, Shadow hurriedly limped from the hill below the church to greet me. Either he recognized the sound of the car or the tone of my voice (I like to think it was my voice!). I sat on the pavement waiting for him to come near me. When I reached out to pet him, he butted my hand with his head. He sat down next to me and curled up as close to my body as he could get. I felt my tears begin to swell. While I was happy that Shadow trusted me, I also felt so very sad for him.

Shadow's life was one of suffering. The weather is dreadfully hot in Syros in July and August with temperatures often reaching over one-hundred degrees Fahrenheit and the winters are brutally cold. Finding shelter in crevices along the rocky hillside or tucked beneath the shrubbery is a cat's only chance for survival during scorching summers and bitter winters. Meals for the church colony were sporadic as the people who fed the cats didn't come every day. When the weather was bad, the Greeks usually stayed home, which meant the cats weren't fed on those days. When the weather improved and the feeders were back on schedule, there could be thirty or more hungry cats jostling for food.

Joan and I deliberately made trips to the church on those freezing winter days. It's especially important to feed the cats when it's cold, so they have fuel in their bodies to generate heat and keep warm. We were well-stocked with plenty of canned food and kibble so that every cat had plenty to eat. After feeding, we always made sure to leave extra kibble for any late-comers.

I thought a lot about Shadow. I loved him, but I also

admired him for his strength and fortitude. Through all his years of hardship, he had probably suffered much. But Shadow had done so with dignity and grace... and had remained a gentle soul. My heart yearned to take him with me to RESQCATS. At the same time, I wanted what was best for him.

After many agonizing weeks of thinking about what to do, I concluded that, even with his adverse living conditions, it would have been an injustice to move Shadow from the only home he had ever known. His fitting in with the RESQCATS resident cats wasn't realistic. The high risk that he would not be treated as "royalty" by the residents concerned me.

Although Shadow loved being petted, he didn't like to be picked up or held, so getting him into a carrier would have been difficult. Being in an enclosed crate would certainly have been highly stressful for him. The journey from Syros to Santa Barbara with long flights, changing planes and an overnight stay at Heathrow airport would have added excessive anxiety. I tried to work out how I could make all that happen and take Shadow to a new life in America, but my biggest concern helped me make the final decision. I feared that Shadow would become just another resident at RESQCATS that I had too little time for. I realized that although his life would continue to be one of hardship at the church, it would have been selfish of me to ask so much of him.

Shadow was a proud cat and I needed to honor him.



Since my return from Syros, I have had time to reflect on Shadow, his acceptance of the life he leads and the grace he demonstrates. If he had been born a person, he would not have seen himself as a victim, but rather one who is always grateful for what he has.

Perhaps there is a lesson in that. There are people who constantly complain about their woes. However, adopting a

negative attitude can often turn people away. Others who, like Shadow, have aches and pains or struggle with life's ups and downs rarely grumble about their problems. These people see life as a gift and choose to live every day to the fullest. They inspire us to stay positive and remind us that there is always hope. There is always hope!

Months after I returned home, I asked Joan about Shadow. Sadly, she told me that he disappeared shortly after I left.

I hope that Shadow has found his way into someone else's heart. My wish for him is that he has a home where his food bowl is always full and that he has shelter from the weather. I hope when I left Shadow behind that I made the right decision... for him.

Still... IF I could have brought a cat home from Syros... it would have been Shadow!



SweetPea

At RESQCATS, my days are busy tending to the ten residents who live in the cat sanctuary. In addition, at any given time, there can be as many as fifty to sixty stray and abandoned cats and kittens under my care. But my life with animals is not merely confined to the cattery. I live in an active household with lots of animals! There are five cats and nine collies that reside in my house and they all require my attention.

Two of the cats, Pebbles and Paisley, were born at RESQCATS... and never left! A pregnant stray had been found by a concerned lady who had no experience raising kittens, so she asked RESQCATS for help. She was willing to take the mom back once the babies were weaned. I was elated that the woman offered to give the mother cat a home as it meant that would be one less mother cat to worry about placing. At that particular time, I didn't have an isolated area available in the cattery, so I set up a place for her in my office bathroom. I furnished it with a large covered crate so that the mom-to-be would feel that there was a safe enclosed space to give birth. There was also a cat bed and condo along with the usual toys, food bowls and a litter box. The cat quickly settled into her new surroundings. Wanting to get to know her, I sat on the floor, talked to her, gave her a chin rub and stroked her long fur. She was an exceptionally sweet and gentle tabby cat. Her soft rhythmic purr was a sure sign that she was contented. I named her Cassie.

A few weeks later, Cassie gave birth to four kittens. However, after they were born, her gentle personality changed drastically! She became extremely protective of her newborn kittens. Whenever I entered her room, she growled and

hissed as a warning for me to keep my distance. That kind of behavior is not uncommon for a new mom; the fierceness of a hormonal mother cat is something to take very seriously.

One morning, I put on a t-shirt and running shorts for a fast walk on the treadmill. Before beginning my workout, I went into the bathroom to feed Cassie. But as soon as I opened the door, she lunged from her crate and charged at me with extended claws and bared teeth. Before I realized what was happening, Cassie had wrapped her front legs around mine and dug her claws deep into my flesh. Then I felt her teeth sink in as she bit into my calf. The inflicted wounds were excruciatingly painful. When Cassie briefly backed off, it gave me a chance to get out of that bathroom and tend to my injuries! It took several minutes for me to stop the bleeding.

I have long known that cat bite wounds must be taken seriously. Bacteria from a cat's saliva can get into a person's bloodstream and, if left untreated, have serious health consequences. So after I was bitten by Cassie, I called my general physician who reluctantly agreed to prescribe antibiotics over the phone. This wasn't the first time I had called him after receiving a cat bite. In fact, the first few times he had required me to come in for an appointment. After my previous cat bite visit, he strongly suggested that I "find something else to do with my time besides cat rescue." Needless to say, that didn't sit well with me... at all. I glared at him and firmly requested, "Please, just give me the antibiotics." And he did!

I was to take the medication for two weeks, but meanwhile I also needed to protect myself from the vicious lioness living in my bathroom! So I developed some defensive body armor! Before I entered Cassie's area, I put on jeans and wrapped my legs with several layers of thick towels that I secured with ace bandages. If Cassie were to attack me again, her claws and

nails would have to penetrate three layers of heavy towels to inflict any more damage!

Cassie did eventually return to her former lovable self. After raising her kittens, she was spayed and went to live with the lady who had brought her to RESQCATS. Two of Cassie's kittens went to a wonderful adoptive home together. But I flunked fostering by keeping Paisley and Pebbles!

Pebbles is a lively, talkative calico while Paisley, her sister, is calm and quiet. The "sistas," as I call them, live downstairs in my house, so I see them several times each day as I walk from the cattery to my office. Pebbles and Paisley are rarely separated; they remind me of bookends as they spend most of their day perched on the back of the sofa.

In the evenings, I usually settle into a recliner for a much-enjoyed glass of wine before dinner. After I sit down, I turn on the news, put a blanket over myself and take in a deep breath. As I slowly exhale, I realize how grateful I am that the long day has finally come to an end. However, it's not long before Pebbles leaves her spot next to Paisley to claim "first dibs" on my lap. She flips the blanket one way, then another, twisting and turning until she finally settles into a spot that's comfortable for her! Soon after, Paisley follows. But with the perfect place already occupied, she has to settle for second best. Paisley tugs at the blanket and peeks underneath where she usually finds Pebbles hissing and glaring. So Paisley retreats and settles for a half-on-half-off position on my lap.

After dinner and more news, I head upstairs to the bedroom to spend time with Suga' Bear and his brother, Honey Bear. Both had medical issues as kittens and were not adoptable, so they became part of my house cat family.

At just three weeks old, Suga' was diagnosed with a life-threatening respiratory infection and almost died. He weighed less than eight ounces, so fighting such a severe

illness was touch-and-go for over two weeks. The vet monitored him during the day, taking blood samples, doing x-rays and observing his oxygen levels while watching for signs of pneumonia. At night I set up a critical care unit at home, so I could check on him every two hours. I took his temperature and kept him warm under a heat lamp. If a kitten's temperature is too low, it can't digest its food. So when his body heat was in the normal range, I bottle-fed him kitten milk replacement.

Although Suga' was not expected to live, his fighting spirit somehow helped him through. That was many years ago and it was the first time I realized that there is sometimes more to healing than great medical care alone. Suga's absolute will to survive during that crucial time is a testament to his being alive today.

Despite my best efforts, the virus affected Suga's eyes and caused an ulceration on his right eye. The ulcer caused so much damage that the vet feared that his eye would have to be removed. But he delayed surgery because of Suga's small size and fragile condition. Anesthesia can be extremely risky in kittens as young as Suga'. The vet's advice was, "Let's wait and see."

Thankfully, as time passed, Suga's eye improved, but he still required surgery to remove scar tissue that had adhered to his cornea. So when Suga' was older and healthier, I elected for him to have the operation. Unfortunately, the procedure was not as successful as I had hoped. The sutures placed inside his eyelid shifted slightly causing damage to his eye. Luckily, Suga' still has vision, but his eye is cloudy and partially closed.

While Suga' is perfect to me, most potential adopters would see him as flawed and would choose another, more perfect kitten. That is a sad, but true, fact. So I adopted Suga' as one of my own cats!

I felt that Suga' needed a playmate. He had become a playful, outgoing kitten and I thought he would benefit from a companion his own age. The other house cats were older and uninterested in play; they slept most of the day! I wondered, "Who would be a good buddy for Suga?" The ideal kitten was there in front of me all along; he was Suga's brother, Honey!

While it is rarely seen in kittens, Honey, at just six weeks old, had been diagnosed with megacolon, a condition that made it difficult for him to move his bowels. He requires medication twice a day for the rest of his life. I told Honey, "I doubt anyone is going to commit to a strict regimen like that so Honey, you'll just have to stay with me!" In all honesty, maybe there was that special someone, but I never really considered looking. Honey's medical condition was reason enough to keep him as a playmate for Suga'!

Suga' Bear and Honey Bear have lived upstairs in our bedroom suite since they were kittens; they are now fifteen years old! Every night before bedtime, we follow a regular routine. While I am brushing my teeth, Suga' sits on the floor next to me; he looks up and meows, letting me know that it's time for his nightly chin rubs. He also loves my hairbrush. It doesn't make any difference if I brush him or if he brushes himself. When he discovers the brush on the bathroom counter, I give him a quick grooming. That sends him into ecstasy. He is then satisfied for the night!

Honey and I play a game of hide-and-seek between the bathroom and my bed. We have the same routine every night. Once I lay down, he disappears into the bathroom. I call his name and he comes running, leaping onto the bed demanding to be petted. Then he jumps down, returns to his hiding place in the bathroom and anxiously waits for me to summon him again! Then once more, he darts from his hideaway and jumps on the bed for more love. This ritual plays out several

more times before Honey finally settles on my chest, making sure that he has my undivided attention for the rest of the evening.

The "Bears," as I call Suga' and Honey, also share the upstairs with my newest family member, Twilite. I have a confession to make; Twilite is another personal foster failure!

Twilite came to RESQCATS in the summer of 2018. She and two of her siblings were found running across a busy street in Ventura, California. Seeing the kittens were in danger, a compassionate woman stopped her car to rescue them. The kittens had narrowly avoided being hit by oncoming traffic.

A few days later, she called RESQCATS and asked for help with their medical care. They needed their vaccinations and their spay and neuter surgeries. She planned on keeping two of the kittens, so only Twilite came to RESQCATS.

When I first saw the small bundle of black fur, I thought, "Oh no! I'm really in trouble!" I have such a soft spot for black kittens... I was smitten from the start. She looked at me with her mesmerizing yellow-brown eyes; I found her irresistible. When she settled in her bed and turned belly-up placing her front paw over the side of the basket, tilting her head sideways as if she were posing for a Hallmark card, I thought, "Okay, that's it! You're not going anywhere!" Twilite became Suga's and Honey's adopted sister.

At the time I left for Syros, Twilite was just six months old. When I returned to California, she was a full-grown cat, although she still behaved like a kitten. Twilite has been a wonderful addition for Suga' and Honey, keeping them very active with her playful antics. And just like on the day of her arrival, I still adore her. She's fun... she's energetic... and she's absolutely adorable.

My house is also a home for nine rescued collies, all of which Mitch insists on keeping inside ninety percent of the

time! When I was growing up, our family dogs were always outside. We had dog houses that protected them, so our dogs were not allowed in the house. I suppose that's just the way it was in those days. Actually, until I married Mitch, I had never seen a dog take-up residence inside someone's home... or on the couch... or in their bed! How times have changed! In fact, living with nine collies, my timing has to be perfect in order to secure a place on the sofa! With cats on my lap and collies sleeping next to me, it's never lonely... that's for sure!



With such an active household at home, I wondered how I would feel at God's Little People living in a house with no animals. Joan had told me that the resident felines were outdoor cats. I knew that caring for them outside would fill my days. But what about my nights? Would I be lonely in the house? How would I feel with no cats... no dogs... and no Mitch?

I'm a highly motivated person, so I knew I'd find ways to fill my downtime. I would still be responsible for the administrative tasks for RESQCATS: keeping up with donations, book and calendar sales and fundraising. I thought that I could write a book about my time in Syros (obviously, I did!). But I still wondered how I would feel in an empty house without cats or dogs. I hoped that Greek television would have at least one English speaking channel and, if not, Mitch had downloaded dozens of movies and television series onto my computer! But none of that could possibly take the place of a living being to love and share my space. I worried that even though I am an early-to-bed, early-to-rise person, my evenings would be lonely.

Fortunately, it didn't take long until one of the cats at God's Little People decided to move in and take up

permanent residence in my house. Her name was SweetPea.

SweetPea had appeared at God's Little People in the summer of 2015. When she arrived she was horribly emaciated and very skittish, and to add to those concerns, she was nursing a litter of kittens! Joan had spotted her at the sanctuary eating from the other residents' bowls. Discovering that food was available, SweetPea came and went several times a day, leaving only to care for her babies. Joan eventually gained the newcomer's trust. Ultimately, being the savvy cat that she was, SweetPea decided to stay at God's Little People. She apparently recognized a good thing when she found it!

While I would have invited any of the resident cats into my house, SweetPea was the first one who chose me on my first day at God's Little People. She ran through the open front door, darted between my legs, and jumped on the closest chair to claim her territory. She sat up straight, then turned and boldly looked me in the eye as if to say, "I'm here, I'm your new roommate. My name is SweetPea, what's yours?"

SweetPea wasn't fond of the other sanctuary cats and often suffered with urinary tract infections due to the stress of being around them. She demanded to be the only one to take up residence with me! Once inside my house, she never allowed any other cats in... although several tried!

During my stay on Syros, I often saw Sparky, a striking, blue-eyed white cat who was deaf. The gene that is responsible for a cat's white fur is also linked to blue eyes and deafness. While not all cats with white fur and blue eyes are deaf, Sparky was born without hearing in either of his ears.

Sparky sometimes appeared on my balcony, peering through the glass door. When I ignored him, because of SweetPea's presence, he would walk around the corner to the kitchen window. There he sat, meowing, wanting to come inside. I couldn't hear his cries through the glass; I only saw

his mouth opening and closing in a most pitiful muted meow. I did my best to disregard his pleas, so I wouldn't feel bad about not letting him inside. When I asked Joan about him, she told me "If you let him in, he's likely to spray." Knowing that, it was easier to leave him outside, although I still felt guilty.

Jessie, a SweetPea look-alike, was one of the gentlest cats at God's Little People. She would have loved to come into my house, too. She would climb up the screen on my front door and hang there meowing loudly. She tugged at my heart to let her in so I was greatly relieved when I learned that Jessie usually slept in Joan's house. Still, I had a soft spot for her and wondered, "Would Jessie have been my chosen roommate if SweetPea hadn't claimed her territory so quickly?"

Some nights, I was startled by a big black cat at my back door. The dark silhouette lurking in the shadows was spooky. But unlike Sparky, this cat disappeared as quickly as she appeared. Joan told me her name was Cookie and offered to introduce me to her during the day. Unlike the frightening prowler I thought she was, Cookie was actually a stunningly beautiful cat with a thick, smoky-black coat. She was also exceptionally social, with an outgoing personality that was just as charming as her striking good looks.



I wasn't the only person whose soul SweetPea had captivated. I learned that in the past, she made her way into the hearts of several guests. It should have come as no surprise to me; SweetPea had everything going for her! She was a gorgeous brown tabby with a spot of orange right in the middle of her forehead; it looked like a ray of sunshine had permanently marked her head. She was playful and spent hours batting toys around the house. After I left, I'm almost certain that Joan discovered many crinkle balls and fake-fur

mice that SweetPea lost under beds, behind couches and underneath the refrigerator!

When SweetPea first showed up at the sanctuary, she suffered from an eye infection. Although it was not serious, she often squinted from the affected eye, appearing as if she were winking! I thought this look was adorable and often found myself winking back at her.

Like many cats, SweetPea could be extremely independent at times, insisting on having things her way. She came and went whenever I was there to open the door for her. For the first two weeks of my stay, my schedule worked around her arrivals and departures!

The winter of 2019 in Syros was one of the most brutal in years. There were cold rains, high winds and even snow and hail storms. So SweetPea rarely left the house, choosing instead to spend most of her time inside with me. When she did go out, she returned within a very short time. Her brief trips out and back were a reminder that she was in charge. When she wanted to go outside, I opened the balcony door for her. She walked a few feet around the corner to the kitchen window, where Sparky sometimes sat, and meowed at the top of lungs demanding to come back in through the window. Her little escapades usually lasted no more than a few minutes. Why she couldn't come back in the same door in which she left, I'll never know.

While SweetPea eventually stayed in the house as the colder weather approached, her longing to go outside and then come back in reminded me of a song by the comedian, Garrison Keillor. He was most known for his weekly radio show "Prairie Home Companion." With all due credit to Keillor, "The In and Out Cat Song" is about freedom and cats who aren't sure if they want to be indoors... or outside... then in... then out!

If SweetPea could carry a melody, just like in the song,

she would say: "Well, I wanna go out, open up the door if you love me. I gotta go out... ♪ ... ♪"

After a few minutes, she would be at the window meowing, demanding "♪ ... ♪ Well, I wanna come in! What's the matter, can't you hear me!? I wanna come in... ♪ ... ♪"

Later, when she wanted her freedom or just needed to remind me who was boss, she would once again go to the door: "♪ ... ♪ And now I wanna go out, I'm an independent creature, I am a cat... ♪ ... ♪"

Then as soon the door closed behind her, she'd reappear at the kitchen window: "♪ ... ♪ Okay, I'm back... Open up, let me in, I'm back to stay... ♪ ... ♪"



While I was in Syros, SweetPea was a wonderful companion. It was because of her that I never felt lonely. I talked constantly to her, probably more than she would have liked, but I usually talk to my cats when no one's around! With the exception of her brief in-and-out escapades, SweetPea was always at my side. When I worked at the kitchen table tracking vet appointments, medical treatments, vaccination schedules and finances for the church colony, she sat on the chair beside me; or sometimes, she sprawled out on a bench beside the table. SweetPea was there when I ate my dinner, gliding between my feet, hoping for a hand-out. After I had eaten, she moved to a chair anticipating that I would join her. We usually sat together, cuddled in front of the space heater while watching television. At bedtime, SweetPea would often snuggle under the bedcovers, tightly curled up next to me. On some nights, she slept on my head or wrapped around my neck!

SweetPea's favorite place to be was on someone's lap. While I would like to think that mine was her favorite, when Mitch visited, she managed to find her way onto his lap... and

into his heart as well! Perhaps that made me a little envious... maybe just a little! But I knew that once he returned to Santa Barbara, it would again be back to just SweetPea and me!

SweetPea was a great comfort to me after my foster kittens left for their new adoptive families. Her presence made coming into my Syros house feel more like home. I was never lonesome when SweetPea was around.

I thought about adopting SweetPea and bringing her back to Santa Barbara. But very early in our relationship she made it extremely clear that she wanted to be the only cat! With five cats and nine dogs in my house, she would not have been happy. As hard as it was, I left her behind, knowing it was the best decision for her.

After I returned to America, Joan told me that SweetPea refused to leave the house for weeks! Perhaps it was because it was still cold outside. But I like to think that it was because she missed me!

Months later, I was thrilled to hear that SweetPea had found her very own home. She was adopted by a wonderful couple in the Netherlands... and best of all, she would be the only cat in the house!

SweetPea... she was my Greek cat... my roommate... my sleeping buddy... a kitty that captured a huge piece of my heart. I loved her then... and I always will!

Fostering... An Affair of the Heart



By definition, fostering means to "rear, raise, care for, take care of, look after or nurture." As a rescuer, I approach this noble effort with an open heart and a commitment to give it my all. What I didn't always realize were the deeply felt emotions that go along with fostering.

RESQCATS has several individuals who foster and that I heavily rely on during kitten season. Admittedly, it was four years before I allowed anyone to foster RESQCATS' kittens for me. I don't know why it took me so long to pass on that responsibility; perhaps it was a matter of not trusting a volunteer to do a thorough and caring job. Or maybe it was more about having control and not allowing someone else to take on this huge task. I'm extremely protective of my volunteers and I want their experiences at RESQCATS to be positive and rewarding, sparing them the emotional grief of loss when a cat or kitten passes on. Despite our best efforts and medical care, that sometimes happens. When it does, I have my own grief to face, but I also have my volunteer caregivers to console. I would much rather feel the loss alone than to watch any of my fosters suffer. It is at those times that I remember something my mother told me, "Jeffyne, angels are never on this earth for very long." I find tremendous comfort in her words.

When I finally did permit volunteers to foster, it never occurred to me that they would need consoling when it was time for the foster cats to go to their adoptive homes. It was because the fosters had committed so much time into caring for a litter that letting go emotionally was extremely difficult for them. I have since come to realize that fostering really is "an affair of the heart."

It is a huge undertaking to care for stray and abandoned cats and kittens. Pregnant moms, mothers with young litters and abandoned kittens present numerous challenges. There are newborns that require bottle feeding every two hours, sick kittens that need monitoring 24/7 and others that are frightened, requiring patience and tender loving care. If we're fortunate, the kittens that come to RESQCATS are healthy and simply need a place to grow and become socialized. While it doesn't happen often, the very best circumstance is when a litter has a healthy, friendly mother cat to nurture and raise them!



I recall asking Denny, one of my volunteers, to foster a pregnant mom while I was out of town. The mother cat was close to giving birth and I needed someone to monitor her in my absence. Denny is a longtime volunteer and the first male to join RESQCATS. I had never considered that a man would want to help with cats and kittens. During our first phone interview, I learned that he was quite accomplished in life; he had a PhD in physics and worked as a patent attorney. He had been a successful beekeeper and was also an accomplished pilot. Being such a success in his career and hobbies, I couldn't imagine what RESQCATS could offer to keep him engaged. But because he sounded so pleasant, I thought I would give him a chance.

Initially, Denny socialized with the cats and kittens several afternoons a week. One day, while he was at RESQCATS, a lock on one of the enclosure doors broke and he offered to repair it. When I learned of his handyman skills, I began to save repair projects for him. But I still worried about how to keep him intellectually challenged.

One afternoon while Denny was volunteering, a litter of flea-infested kittens arrived. Not wanting to put them in the

cattery while they were in that unhealthy condition, I asked Denny if he would like to help me bathe them. He was happy to lend a hand. As we worked side-by-side shampooing and drying the kittens, it became clear from his bright smile that he really enjoyed bathing the litter. His gentle manner was heartwarming to watch. After he washed a kitten, he tenderly towel-dried each baby before using a low temperature dryer, leaving the kitten clean and flea-free. Afterwards, he wrapped the kitten in a fresh blanket and presented it to me for a final inspection. It was at this time that I recognized Denny as my official kitten bather!

As I got to know Denny better, I asked him why he had inquired about volunteering at RESQCATS. He told me that he needed time away from his usual routine. Bathing kittens became his way of helping RESQCATS while taking a break from life's everyday responsibilities. Over the last seventeen years, Denny has assisted with literally thousands of kitten baths... and has also become one of my very best friends!

When I asked Denny to foster a pregnant mom, he was excited about the idea. He set up the mother-to-be in his bathroom where it was quiet and comfortable, a perfect place for her to give birth. But just like my experience with Cassie after her kittens were born, this mother too became ferociously hormonal. She lunged at Denny whenever he entered the room, like a wild lioness protecting her cubs. Not wanting to be injured, Denny dressed from head-to-toe in his defensive bee suit: his veiled hat, protective jacket, long pants and thick gloves. He looked more like a man from Mars than a volunteer foster for little kittens! During this confrontational period, he referred to his bathroom as the "war zone!" While he had been a good sport about fostering, Denny decided that from then on, he only wanted to bathe kitties!

I recall one of my volunteers, I'll call her Katy, who was a first-time foster for four kittens. Katy was an extremely

attentive volunteer, an important characteristic when dealing with sick kittens. There were times though when her over-attentiveness created a challenge for me. If there was even the slightest issue: a nasal discharge or cough, a sneeze, diarrhea, or anything out of the ordinary, she would immediately report it to me. Her concerns were sometimes so great that I often had her take kittens to the vet even if I didn't think that their conditions were serious. However, her meticulous manner was appreciated when critically-ill kittens were involved.

To my surprise, when the time came to find homes for her foster kittens, it was agonizingly emotional for Katy. In her mind, no one could live up to the perfection of her kitten-care standards. She cried for weeks after the kittens left and I just couldn't understand why. Isn't that what fostering is about? Isn't the ultimate goal to adopt the kittens to qualified homes? I was at a loss as to how to console Katy. I tried to comfort her as she sobbed, but nothing I said helped. After weeks of listening, I finally said to her, "Katy, if this is how it's going to be every time you care for a litter, you can't foster for RESQCATS." I meant what I said in the most sympathetic and caring way. Since that experience with Katy, I've come to better understand the deep and heartfelt emotions of fostering.

I understand that some caregivers fall in love with their foster kittens and that some of those kittens never leave their foster home! Remember, I've also been guilty of being a foster failure... Pebbles... Paisley... and Twilite!



Since RESQCATS is located in a separate building on my property, I don't often have foster kittens in my home. Of course, I check on litters in the cattery several times a day, but most of the responsibility for socializing the cats falls on the volunteers. Spending time with the kittens is the volunteers' reward for all the cleaning they do in the mornings.

My time and responsibilities are dictated by the numerous administrative tasks that are required to run my organization. There are newsletters to write, social media posts to compose, fundraisers to promote, health records to keep up-to-date, accounting to do, phone calls to return and adoption interviews to conduct; the list seems endless. I don't often have the opportunity to spend as much time with the cats as I would like.

However, occasionally there are cats that need constant monitoring that I become close to. They are usually the critically ill or injured kittens that require special medical care and hands-on attention. Like many of my volunteers, I can become emotionally attached. They are the ones that steal my heart.

In the summer of 2017, an extremely sick and malnourished kitten arrived at RESQCATS. At just six weeks old, she weighed a mere twelve ounces; under normal circumstances, she would have been twice that weight! She was emaciated and severely dehydrated. She was also suffering from a serious respiratory infection. The kitten was so weak that she was barely able to sit up in her crate without falling over; I wasn't sure that she would make it through her first day. But even in her weakened condition, she was terribly frightened and cowered whenever I approached her. I knew I could provide her with the medical care she needed to survive, that is, fluids, good nutrition, antibiotics and a warm place to recover, but she also needed to feel love and comfort from human touch... and her heart needed to mend.

I had recently seen a product advertised on social media; it was a KittyRoo sweatshirt. It was designed with a special compartment in the front for small animals, similar to a kangaroo's pouch. I thought it would be ideal for Opal. I put her in the pocket where she could stay warm and feel secure. And by keeping Opal with me, I could socialize her

and help her become accustomed to my touch. Opal became my personal project! I kept her with me most of the day, just giving her breaks to eat and use the litter box. One time, I even sneaked her into a restaurant when we met friends for dinner; only the couple we dined with knew she was there. Opal went everywhere with me, to the post office, to the bank and while shopping for supplies. With proper medical attention, she grew stronger each day, but just as important, Opal began to trust me. As time passed, she gradually became more confident, boldly poking her little head out of the pouch to peer at her surroundings. I was no longer that scary human; I had become her surrogate mother... and her playmate!

But something else happened to me that I had warned the volunteers against; I grew more and more attached to Opal. When it came time to adopt her to a permanent home, my emotions overwhelmed me. I considered keeping Opal as my own; I cried whenever I thought about putting her up for adoption. But I also realized that Opal deserved a family that could give her much more attention than I could. I told myself that she could be the center of someone's life, not just another RESQCATS resident.

I found a home for Opal with a lovely couple the same day that I put her up for adoption. The couple had been following her story on social media and although they had never contacted me, they were anxiously waiting for Opal to become available. I could not have wished for a better home. They were the perfect adopters, both compassionate and committed. I was so happy for Opal and I knew that I had made the right decision. But I also remember the heart-wrenching feeling of letting her go.



While at God's Little People, I had the opportunity to foster several cats and kittens. Unlike at RESQCATS, these

cats lived in the house with me, so I had the chance to spend a lot of time with them... and become emotionally bonded!

Charmer and Indigo, two kittens from the church colony, were the first to take up residence in my spare bedroom. Both had respiratory infections and I feared that if I left them out in the cold and rain, they would develop pneumonia and possibly die. Charmer and Indigo were about three months old at the time and had very different personalities. Charmer was exceptionally friendly and playful, and he readily interacted with me. He was a good companion for Indigo who was shy and needed a much more patient approach. To help Indigo become more comfortable with humans, I would sit in the bedroom for long periods while she observed me from her hiding place. I was gradually able to entice her towards me, but it took time and perseverance. Although Indigo always remained somewhat cautious, she eventually blossomed into a loving, purring machine. She even came to enjoy lying on my chest while I gave her a full-body massage!

I knew that Charmer and Indigo were going to be adopted once they had recovered from their respiratory conditions. When that day eventually came, I flew with them from Syros to Athens to meet their new adopters. From there, they would be making the final journeys to their forever homes. I knew that seeing them go would be a bittersweet experience, but I reminded myself that they would have wonderful lives with their new families. And meeting the adopters certainly lessened the pain I was feeling. Charmer was adopted by a family in the Netherlands where he immediately adapted to his new home. It took a little longer for Indigo to adjust, but her family in Switzerland also reported that she was doing just fine!

Tumbelina and Violet (written about in a previous chapter) temporarily lived in my bedroom since Charmer and Indigo were in my spare room. They each required a great deal of medical care and Violet needed a lot of hands-on time to

help her become more comfortable with humans. Because they were in my bedroom, the two kittens became part of my daily life; I played with them during the day and slept with them at night. And just like Opal, when the time came for them to leave, I wept.

Tumbelina and Violet went together to a wonderful home in the UK. Their new guardian is a compassionate lady who understands how heart-wrenching it had been for me to let them go. Although we've never met, she and I have stayed in touch through social media... and I get updates on the girls quite often.

Patchouli was another cat that I fostered during my time in Syros. She lived about a mile from God's Little People in a colony on the outskirts of a village called Kini. Sadly, this area had become a dumping ground for many cats. It was my responsibility to feed the Kini cats every afternoon, so I came to recognize many of them. Patchouli was one of my favorites. Since she was extremely friendly, I thought that she must have had a home at some point in her life. She was one of the first cats to show up at feeding time, making sure that she always got her share of kibble... and head rubs!

On one of my afternoon feedings, I saw that the area above Patchouli's eye was raw and bloody. I was horrified to think that she had been in a fight, especially since she was such a sweet cat. Upon closer inspection, I noticed a deep laceration on her eyelid, dangerously close to her eye. Fearing that her eyesight could be affected, I rushed back to God's Little People to share my concerns with Joan. She told me that Patchouli sometimes got severe dermatitis but with treatment, the condition would get better. Realizing that Patchouli needed medical care, Joan and I drove back to Kini, loaded her into a carrier and hurried to the vet. After a complete exam, the vet provided us with antibiotics, eye drops and a special salve to use on the affected area. Patchouli was given an Elizabethan

collar, a specially-designed plastic cone worn around a cat's neck to keep her from scratching and reopening the wound. Thankfully, her eye was not damaged.

Since this was before Charmer, Indigo, Tumbelina and Violet were adopted, both bedrooms in my house were occupied. So I set Patchouli up in a large crate in the laundry room. She seemed to like her quiet area and being away from the colony of cats at Kini. I tended to her several times a day and found myself looking forward to having special time with her. Patchouli loved chin rubs and head butts, although she probably would have preferred having them without the Elizabethan collar! She also enjoyed her access to a consistently full bowl of kibble. In fact, she liked her food so much that she gained more than three pounds during her stay!



After several weeks, Patchouli recovered and we moved her to another house at the sanctuary. We left her in a crate for a few more days to gradually introduce her to the other felines living in the house. When she appeared to have adjusted, we let her out of the crate to roam free. While she tolerated the other house cats, she also let them know that she was the boss!

I walked to that house several times each day, not only to take care of the cats, but also to visit Patchouli. Whenever I sat down, she was the first to claim my lap! We stayed there for long periods; Patchouli and I had our own special bond! Her sweet disposition and gentle manner had captured my heart. It took time, but Patchouli eventually made friends with a sweet kitten. The two of them went to their new home together. And yes, I still stay in touch with their adopter!

Flower and Saffron were another pair we rescued from the church as kittens. Like so many of the cats there, they had goopy, partially-sealed eyes, stuffy noses and compromised

immune systems. We put them both on a strict medical regimen for weeks. When a particular antibiotic didn't seem to be working, we would try another. Flower and Saffron clearly had a nasty virus, which explained why the antibiotics had little effect. I've learned that a virus just needs to run its course. However, antibiotics are often prescribed to help combat secondary bacterial infections.

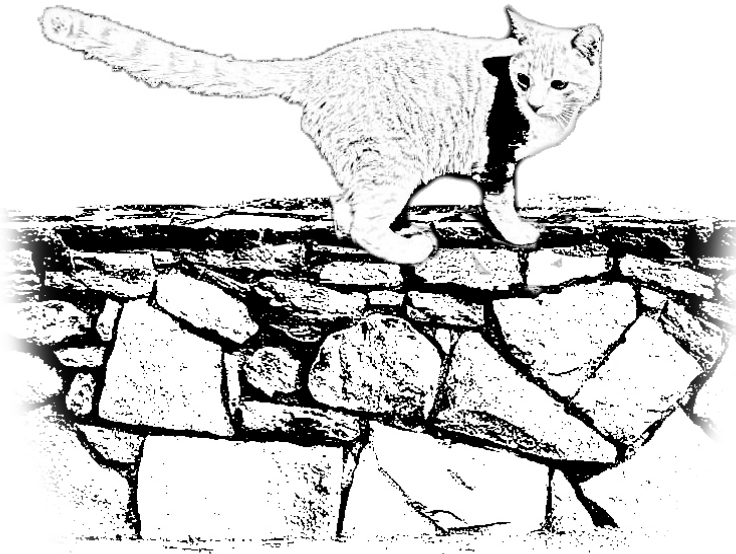
Eventually, both Flower and Saffron recovered fully. I had hoped that they would find a home together but, as it happened, Flower and Patchouli had become the best of friends and they were adopted together! Saffron was adopted separately and became the center of his person's world!

Having spent so much time with my foster cats and kittens, I know that it is always bittersweet when they leave. When my Greek foster cats went to their new homes, I felt like I was left with an empty house... but not an empty heart. It was at those times that I was reminded of what my volunteers had gone through when they gave up their foster kitties. I've learned that nothing I say can soothe their heartache; only time can heal that pain.

And while foster kittens, such as Charmer, Indigo, Tumbelina, Violet, Patchouli, Flower and Saffron will never be forgotten, there is a lesson to be learned by those people who give so much of themselves through fostering. By letting their fosters go, they make room to help others. And yes, there will be others... many others that need help!



My most treasured gift at God's Little People was the hands-on time I had with my foster kittens. Being part of their lives was something that I will cherish forever. And even though parting with them still hurts, that pain is a testament to what I've always said, "The day I don't feel is the day I don't need to be doing rescue anymore."



Life in Syros

Although I've visited many foreign countries, I've never actually lived outside of the United States; that is, unless you count the first thirty years of my life when I was a misplaced resident in Texas! California has been my home ever since Mitch and I got married over thirty-four years ago and that has suited my beliefs and lifestyle much better than Texas ever did. Now don't get me wrong. For those of you who are reading this and who still reside in the Lone Star State, I did have a proper upbringing in Texas. But I never quite fit in with the conservative viewpoints of most Texans. While some refer to California as the land of "fruits, nuts and flakes," the freethinking west-coast lifestyle suits me much better.

Mitch and I have traveled to a lot of countries... China, Singapore, Greece, Spain, Italy, Thailand, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Australia and New Zealand, to name a few, but I have always visited them as a tourist. We have also taken cruises to exotic islands in the Caribbean and the South Seas.

We have never enjoyed guided bus tours with designated stops and allotted times for shopping and eating. We like exploring on our own to avoid the "tourist traps," the places where shopkeepers give a kickback to the tour guide. We want to see the attractions without the strict schedule of someone dictating where and when to go! Mostly, we seek out the family neighborhoods and shops where we can mingle with the local people. We seldom speak the same language, but I have always believed that a smile is the universal language wherever you are.

At the end of the day, we usually return to the comfort of a cruise ship or a nice hotel. The cruise lines serve excellent

gourmet meals that even accommodate my vegan diet. Actually, some of the tastiest vegetarian meals that I have ever had were on ships.

Before we leave on a trip, friends often suggest places to stay, things to see and restaurants to visit. But when Mitch and I travel on our own, we like to eat at no-name local restaurants. And if we can't find one that suits us, there is usually a familiar fast food place. Several years ago when we were traveling in Salzburg and couldn't find a vegetarian restaurant, we ate McDonald's french fries for dinner!



While on Syros, I had my own "villa" at the sanctuary. I loved that! That's very different than visiting a place as a tourist. My house was pristine and comfortably furnished... it truly felt like a home-away-from-home. And of course, my view of the sparkling blue Aegean Sea was incredible. On most mornings as I watched the sun rise over the water, I pinched myself to make sure this was real and that I wasn't dreaming. And most conveniently, it was just a few feet from the many cats that lived on the property.

Much did seem unfamiliar when I first arrived. I have never been a person who likes change, but on Syros, I had no choice but to adapt to a different lifestyle immediately. I was suddenly responsible for my own meals... and grocery shopping! Remember, I don't cook; therefore, I don't shop! Although I did later discover the Greek ladies take-out kitchen for many of my dinners, there were other items I needed to buy: toiletries, bottled water, cereal, granola bars, hummus, pita and more. But somehow I made it all work!

After much practice, I overcame the challenge of driving in a strange place. I learned where all the important destinations were. I was able to run errands for Joan to the pet supply shops, the post office and the vet clinic. I also became accustomed

to where the coffee shop was... the one that made the great orange juice!

I'm sure I must have looked awkward to the Greek people as I learned my new lifestyle. Simple tasks such as counting foreign coins, figuring postage rates and reading labels weren't something I had ever considered as a need-to-know before I left America. Nevertheless, I gave it my best effort and the locals were kind... and very patient with me!



Mitch came to visit for several weeks during my stay. I had missed him terribly, of course, and after he arrived I was spared some of those less familiar chores like food shopping! But our first trip to the supermarket did not go smoothly. Because I had been purchasing only a few items at a time, I had never needed to use more than a handbasket for my groceries. Mitch, however, planned to stock up, so we opted for a larger pushcart. For security reasons, the carts are chained and locked together outside the store and customers are required to deposit euros in a coin box to release a buggy. Since I never fully came to differentiate one Greek coin from another, I had no idea which one to insert in the slot. Thankfully, a nice Greek gentleman saw our confusion and offered to help. Later, when our shopping was done, we were equally challenged when we had to figure out how to get our deposit back.

Inside the market, I watched Mitch and then realized how I must have looked to others when I first arrived. It was well out of the norm for me to go to the supermarket, but it was even more difficult to shop when all the food labels were in Greek!

I craved Mitch's homemade spaghetti sauce, so he needed to buy some necessary ingredients: stewed tomatoes, tomato paste and tomato sauce. I chuckled as I watched him trying to read the labels. He studied one can after another as if,

miraculously, one of them would have a label in English. I knew what was happening to him as I had had the same experience. Once when I had gone to buy lotion, I recognized the brand "Nivea;" it was written in bold letters across the top of the dispenser. But unfortunately, the remainder of the printing was in Greek! I found someone in the store who spoke English and asked, "Does this say bath gel or body lotion or something else?"

After watching Mitch struggle for a while, I let him in on a trick that often worked for me. "Just look at the picture on the label!" I told him, "Sometimes that gives it away!" "Ahhhh!" he said. "That'll work!" It was my hope that he fared better than I had with the Nivea lotion!

Still, there were no guarantees and mistakes would be made! Once I used the last roll of toilet paper in a package, but I wasn't concerned as I thought I was well-stocked. When I opened what looked like the backup toilet paper package, there weren't eight rolls of toilet paper stacked in four rows of two. Instead, to my surprise, there were four rolls of neatly shrink-wrapped paper towels! Paper towels certainly wouldn't work as a substitute, so this shortage obviously required an emergency trip to the supermarket!

Having spent the majority of his career as a retail executive, Mitch felt compelled to vent his opinion about the merchandise layout in the grocery store. He flailed his arms about and said, "This layout makes no sense at all!" He couldn't understand why cereal was displayed on one aisle and then again three aisles over! "So what's up with this?!" "And why is catsup next to the bleach and not with the relish?" "And who's the merchant that put the cookies in the middle of the laundry section?" This is the weirdest layout I've ever seen," he exclaimed in frustration. For me, since I could never find anything in American grocery stores anyway, this aspect of grocery stores didn't bother me at all. I was fine roaming up

and down all the aisles! And more importantly, I was delighted to have my own personal chef cooking for me again! The Greek ladies would have to pick up the slack once more after Mitch returned home.

I noticed that there is a big difference in the Greeks' shopping habits compared to Americans... probably in most Europeans' shopping habits. They more often go to specialty vendors rather than a supermarket: the bakery for bread, the greengrocer for fruits and vegetables and the candy store for chocolates. (Of course, as a vegan, we passed on the butcher shop, the fish market and the cheese stands!) Most locals appeared to buy only enough goods to last them for a day or two. I am not sure exactly why. Perhaps it is because their cupboards and refrigerators are smaller than those in the U.S. Or maybe it is just the European culture. Regardless, Mitch ignored that custom and bought enough groceries to stock the pantry and fridge to the maximum. When his Americanized Costco-style bulk shopping was finished, he had filled every available cupboard in my house. When all those spaces were full, extra items were piled on the oven hood and the kitchen counters. After I told him that it wasn't wise to drink the tap water, he reacted as if there would be an upcoming water shortage. During his entire visit, there were never less than fifteen, two-liter bottles of water stacked beside the kitchen sink!

Of course, one might avoid all this confusion in the grocery store by eating at a restaurant. But for us, that's not always simple either!

Many years ago when we were in Munich, Germany and wanted to find a nice restaurant for dinner, we came upon a charming place with an outdoor patio. Since the weather was nice, we decided to give it a try. The hostess seated us and soon after, the waiter brought menus. Mitch looked at the list of entrees and said, "I can't read this, it's in German. Let's

go somewhere else." When the waitress was out of sight, we quietly left and went looking for another restaurant. After walking for thirty minutes, we spotted a nice cafe. Once again, after the host seated us and we looked at the menu, Mitch said, "I can't read this one either! It's also in German." By this time, I was so hungry I could have fainted and had become quite irritable. I looked at him and snapped, "WE'RE IN GERMANY! THE MENUS ARE ALL GOING TO BE IN GERMAN!" One more time, we meekly slipped out of the restaurant. Fortunately, just across the street, we saw a pizzeria. Ahhhh, pizza... the universal meal! I have since learned to give my husband at least a thirty-minute warning when I am getting hungry... regardless of what country we're in!

When Mitch and I were out doing our errands in Syros, I looked at a few Greek restaurants in Syros. Not surprisingly, all the menus were in Greek... so I didn't dare suggest them! Luckily, when we visited a coffee shop or dined out with Richard and Joan, they knew the places where the waiters spoke English, so it didn't make any difference what language the menus were written in.

The first time I was offered water in a Greek restaurant, the waitress asked, "Would you care for bubble water or still water?" I thought, "Still water? What on earth is still water?" I'm certain I looked baffled, but I quickly figured out that the still water meant that there are no bubbles. I never did get accustomed to someone asking me that question.

The public restrooms in Greece were quite different and took some getting used to. While there were separate stalls, the washing area was for both men and women. I recall going into the bathroom and being surprised when I came out to find a man standing outside the door waiting to go in! Granted the enclosures had floor to ceiling doors that locked, but it felt like a man was in the ladies restroom! I would've been much more comfortable with separate facilities like we have in America.

Mitch never commented about the public bathrooms, but once, when I asked him what took him so long, he replied, "I couldn't figure out how to flush the toilet!" Flushing devices on the toilets in Greece were not all the same. Some had levers on the side while others had buttons on top. I even saw some that had foot pedals. But this particular toilet had a cloth strap that connected the bowl to a flushing mechanism hung from the ceiling! It had taken Mitch several minutes to figure out that he had to pull on the strap in order to flush the toilet. Despite all the differences I observed in public toilets, I never did figure out why they called restrooms water closets! On the other hand, why do we call them restrooms? Certainly no one goes there to rest!

By the time Mitch arrived on the island, I had become accustomed to driving in Syros. I knew which stop signs the locals ignored, as well as the ones where I really did need to come to a complete halt. I had learned the manual shift and could comfortably maneuver the narrow mountain roads. And that once troublesome round-about in the middle of town that had seemed like an out of control merry-go-round? I had mastered that as well.

With the exception of the one time Mitch commented about me parking too far from the curb, he never complained about my driving in Syros. That was strange because he always had plenty to say about it when we were at home in California! However, I did notice that he became very quiet when he was in the car with me. Perhaps he was letting me concentrate... or maybe he recalled that driving incident in New Zealand!

There's a famous saying, "When in Rome, do as the Romans!" That expression also applies to Greece and the Greeks. While Mitch and I tried to adjust to our different environment, we were often amused; we laughed at ourselves and thoroughly enjoyed our time together. I loved having him visit.

While I never completely managed to make all of the Greek lifestyle adjustments, I like to think that I gave it my best effort while keeping my sense of humor.

But there was one important thing that I didn't have to make an adjustment for. I knew how to do it... and do it well... and that was to take care of the cats at God's Little People.

Kini

There is a small community on Syros called Kini, located about a mile away from God's Little People. It is a quaint fishing village nestled in a protected cove with a glorious view of the Aegean Sea. The panorama is as picturesque and colorful as the most vivid postcard.

Whitewashed houses with blue shutters overlook the brilliant cobalt water. Winding cobblestone paths meander up and down the gentle hillsides and connect the residential neighborhoods with the waterfront shops and restaurants.

On sunny days, my hike into that charming village was breathtaking. As I trekked over the hilltop above the little community, I could see gigantic rocks that lay at the bottom of the crystal-clear sea. And every afternoon at five o'clock, without fail, the local church bells pealed their harmonious chimes. On those perfect evenings, when the wind was blowing just right, I even heard their muffled melodic tones over the hill at God's Little People. Kini is certainly one of the loveliest places I've ever visited.

Because I was on Syros during the winter months, a time when tourists are virtually non-existent, Kini was essentially uninhabited. There were no crowds to be found, just a few locals... and the many street cats. Hotel windows were shuttered and latched, restaurant patios were devoid of tables and chairs, shops were closed and beach umbrellas were stowed, leaving only their bare poles protruding from the sand. The village felt like a ghost town with only the small number of year-round residents and a few fishermen to be seen. Just one restaurant remained open during the winter, although even it had much shorter hours.

In contrast to the empty and quiet streets of winter, Kini

bustles with tourists during the summer months. Reservations for accommodations have to be made far in advance if one hopes to secure a room. When the restaurants reopen, they are busy every day from noon until very late into the evening. Brightly colored umbrellas line the beach shading those visitors who aren't basking in the hot sun or swimming in the cool Aegean Sea. It was not difficult for me to imagine that for many tourists, their stay in Kini was a vacation of a lifetime.

I was grateful that my visit to Syros was during its winter months; I welcomed the quieter lifestyle of the off-season, especially after the constant hustle and bustle of my life at RESQCATS.



One of my responsibilities while at God's Little People was to feed a nearby colony known as the "Kini cats." Thirty or more stray cats lived in a large area with tall lush grass just outside of Kini. The field was owned by a man who raised sheep, although whenever I fed this group, I never saw any sheep! Perhaps that's why the grass was so abundant!

Since it was well known that Joan cared for this Kini colony, local people often abandoned their cats there, knowing that they would be fed. It's shameful to discard any animal but sadly, it happens everywhere. Most residents of the cat colony were spayed or neutered but, a few were not. So litters continued to be born. While I was on the island, one of Joan's and my projects was to trap and spay or neuter some of the unaltered cats.

The established feeding area for these cats was on the top of a brick retaining wall that separated the shepherd's field from the street. Occasionally, while feeding the cats, I noticed a stunning calico watching me from afar. At first, when I put down kibble just for her, she darted across the street, hurriedly devoured the food, and then ran away just as quickly as she

had come. Later, as she became more accustomed to seeing me, her pace slowed and she more bravely walked across the street before jumping on the wall to eat. One day I discovered why she was so hungry. As I looked toward where she had come from, I saw three tiny kitten faces staring at me from under an orange tree. After I realized that she had babies, I began leaving small piles of food for both her and her kittens on the stone wall that surrounded the orange grove.

When I shared this story with Joan, she told me that the savvy mother cat had eluded her attempts to trap and spay her for three years; the kittens that I was feeding were at least her third litter!

On some afternoons, kittens that I had not seen before showed up at feeding time. I wondered, "Where did these cats come from?" "Were they born here... or dumped?" "What do they do for shelter?" and "How in the world do they survive?" Although I never got answers to all these questions, Manos, the local vet, told me, "If kittens can endure the harsh Greek winter, then they'll more than likely live a normal life."



My concern for the cats' need for shelter was partially answered as I surveyed the shepherd's land. About thirty feet from the road, a thicket of heavy bamboo ran almost the entire length of the field. In the deepest section, toward the middle, the bamboo created a wall that was more than ten feet tall; it was certainly dense enough to offer protection from the island's inclement winter weather.

Joan had strategically placed several makeshift Styrofoam houses amid the bamboo. She had cut out a small door in each Styrofoam box and sealed its seams with duct tape, creating a cozy house that protected the cats from the rain and wind. There was also a vacant building across the road that provided refuge from the harsh elements.

This was not the kind of life I would have ever dreamed of for a cat. I always imagine them inside someone's home, curled up on a warm bed, with a full bowl of kibble, fresh water... and spoiled with human affection.



In addition to the sheep (that I never saw!), several roosters and hens took up residence in the feeding field. And while these birds didn't appear to bother the cats, they were a terrible nuisance when I tried to feed the kitties!

Having grown up in the city, I had never been up close to a chicken, so being around these feathered creatures was quite the experience! I was intrigued by them. The males were striking with their richly colored feathers, bright red combs and dazzling wattles. I was taken aback and more than a little intimidated by their large size.

Unfortunately, the chickens had learned our routine for feeding the cats. So not only was my job to feed the cats, but I had the added task of doing "rooster patrol;" that is, keeping those annoying birds away so the cats could eat.

The roosters were accustomed to humans so they had no qualms about stealing the cat food we put out... often right out of my hand! I must have been quite the comical sight to passersby. Here was this strange American woman feeding dozens of stray cats while simultaneously, flailing her arms theatrically and shouting to shoo away the pesky chickens. I frequently laughed at myself as I thought, "Oh if my friends could see me now... out here in the middle of a Greek island warding off giant fowl!"

A three-foot-tall stone wall surrounded the one-acre field. The wide stones provided a perfect surface for serving kibble to the cats. At feeding time, I spaced small mounds of food a few inches apart so that each cat could have its own space to eat.

Many of the Kini cats were friendly, probably as a result of earlier human contact. Others were extremely timid and would not allow me anywhere near them. Over the years of working with cats, I've learned to honor whatever an individual cat wants; to be petted, to be left alone or just given their own time to respond. Regardless of the Kini cats' temperaments, it didn't take long for them to recognize that I was their afternoon feeder.

Depending on the weather, I would either drive or walk to feed the Kini cats each day. When they heard my footsteps or they recognized the familiar sound of the car engine, the cats came running and lined up along the wall ready to be fed.

There were three exceptionally sociable cats that became some of my favorites at Kini. They always appeared at feeding time, but they were more interested in garnering my personal attention rather than eating! As I placed food along the thirty-foot-long wall, the members of the colony lined up to eat. Some cats claimed a specific location while others moved on in anticipation of the next feeding spot. But the three "jokesters," as I called them, would leap over the other cats, so they could become first in line again. They weren't aggressive as they competed for their place on the wall; they simply wanted to have their heads rubbed and to be petted! I was amused by their feline antics and often laughed aloud, "Now didn't I just see you over there?" They were really quite entertaining and their constant clowning made me smile.

Besides the three jokesters, I had a few other favorites at Kini. One in particular was an older male who reminded me of one of my past rescues. Most people would not have been attracted to him, but I thought he was a handsome fellow, despite his wide, battle-scarred face. In fact, he even had signs of older wounds that were still clearly visible beneath his fresh injuries! Based on his battle-scarred appearance, I suspected he had lost every fight he had ever engaged in. He kept his

distance as I put down kibble and began to eat only when he felt safe. His eyes were soulful and his meow was hushed. He seemed like a gentle, accommodating old man, always willing to move away if another cat jumped on the wall to eat from his pile of food. Because of his passive demeanor, I doubted that he was ever the instigator of any of his fights. He kept his distance whenever I was near, and I respected his need for space. But this old guy earned a special place in my heart... as most "underdogs" do!



While Mitch was visiting me in Syros, he came along whenever I fed the Kini cats. I loved having his company and he enjoyed helping out. And besides, he was much better at shooing off the roosters than I was. He was so good, in fact, that I appointed him with the title "Head Rooster Patrolman!"

On warm days we enjoyed our pleasant walks to Kini to feed the cat colony. But when it was cold outside, we would opt to drive from the sanctuary to Kini. As the cats heard the familiar sound of our car engine, they magically appeared from all over, behind the walls, across the street, underneath the bamboo and from the abandoned house. Cats jumped out from everywhere running eagerly to the feeding area. With so many cats on the road, it was almost impossible to drive past them; the cats showed no fear of the oncoming car. Oftentimes, Mitch would have to leap out of the car to distract them while I drove past the feeding area to park. It was on those days that he earned his second title of "Cat Crossing Guard!"

On one particular afternoon while getting ready to leave the feeding area, a terrible thing happened. When I turned the key to start the car, I heard an awful noise, as if something was caught in the engine. I immediately turned off the ignition, but it was too late. As I looked up, I saw a black and white kitten dash from under the car and hastily limp across the street into

a nearby field. I knew instantly what had happened. I was horrified and felt my body freeze. For a very long moment, I was unable to move or speak.

The kitten had apparently crawled into the engine compartment to get warm. People who live in colder climates may know more about animals seeking warmth under the hood of their car. But being from temperate Southern California, I wasn't in the habit of banging on the car to scare sleeping critters off of the engine. I was sickened by what had just happened. I can still recall that cat's terrified look as she glared back at me. Tears filled my eyes and I felt as if my heart had stopped beating. I cried, "What have I done? What have I done?" I was absolutely devastated.

Being the wonderful husband that Mitch is, he tried to reassure me, "Jeffyne, she just ran across the street, so she can't be hurt that badly. I think she's going to be okay." But knowing about the fight-or-flight response of animals, I thought that the kitten's adrenaline had probably enabled her sudden burst of energy. There was no way to truly know how injured she might be and I yelled, "You don't know that she's going to be okay!" I cried as I melted into his arms, "Oh no, look what I've done!"

When we returned to God's Little People, I tearfully told Joan what had happened. She was extremely sympathetic and did her best to console me, "You can't blame yourself for something you could never have predicted. This was just an unforeseeable accident."

The next morning Joan and I returned to Kini to look for the injured kitten. To our amazement, we spotted her almost immediately hiding beneath some shrubbery across the street. From her secluded spot, she glared in our direction as if she recognized me. While her eyes were dilated as big as saucers, she still appeared to be bright and alert. I fervently hoped that her injuries were not life-threatening, but I remained wrought

with guilt.

We had hoped that we could simply lure the kitten into a carrier and take her to the vet. But she was probably feral and would have to be trapped. So we returned to God's Little People to formulate our plan.

Although Joan and I searched for her again over several days, we could not locate the kitten. We combed the surrounding fields, trespassing into peoples' yards in our desperate hunt to find her. Every day when I came to feed the Kini cats, I scoured the area for a sighting for her. As the days passed with no success, I began to feel worse and worse. Guilt overwhelmed me. I started to lose sleep. Her well-being totally consumed my thoughts: "How badly is she injured?" "Will we ever find her?" "If we do, will we be able to trap her?" And my most haunting fear "Did she just go somewhere and die?"

Despite Joan and Mitch's reassurances, in my mind, I was entirely to blame for the little kitten's suffering. While I realized that it could have happened to anyone, I kept telling myself that I was in Greece to help the cats... not hurt them. There was no rationale for my negative thoughts, but I couldn't get them out of my mind, regardless of the support I received.

Consequently, I became fearful whenever I drove to feed the cats. I began parking in a very out-of-the-way location and walking several hundred yards to the cats' feeding area.

Every day, as Mitch and I strolled back towards the car, I repeated my continuing mantra of chastising myself. He had heard me say the same thing every day since the incident, "I wonder how the kitty I hurt is doing and what happened to her?" Mitch always offered reassurance, but one day... more than two weeks after the accident he shouted in excitement, "Jeffyne, look over there! Isn't that the kitten?" And sure enough, there she was... sitting in the empty lot on the other side of the road.

When she spotted me, her eyes opened wide in recognition

and I saw that same terror in them that I had seen previously. For the first few seconds, she didn't move, as if frozen in indecision, but she soon dashed away. She was quickly gone from my sight, but as she ran, I noticed her limping off her back leg. She appeared to put weight on it, so I thought that maybe the damage was not as severe as I had imagined... or maybe she'd already begun to heal. I was just grateful that she was alive. Still, I held myself accountable for her injury and I needed to find a way to forgive myself.

As the days passed, I continued to see the kitten lurking at a distance before she raced off. Gradually, she stopped running away and I was able to observe her more closely. Based on her size, I guessed she was about five months old. She was a beautiful cat with long silky black and white fur. The white markings on her face were perfectly symmetrical. She had unusually large yellow-green eyes. But the best news was that they no longer appeared terrified when she looked at me!

The kitten wasn't able to jump up to the usual feeding place so I fed her on a low wall adjacent to the abandoned house. I spoke softly to her in a near whisper... and I sent her messages from my heart. I told her how sorry I was for what had happened. Astonishingly, she seemed to understand what I was saying and came a little closer each day. While she remained cautious, this little kitten seemed willing to give me a second chance.

More days went by and I eventually gained her trust. She allowed me to touch her, stroke her fur, and ultimately, she let me inspect the wound on her inner thigh. While she ate, I gently placed my fingers underneath her body locating the injury site. Thankfully, it had healed; I felt no signs of swelling or oozing, only her smooth skin where the fur was missing. Somehow she had avoided getting an infection. Over time, her limp gradually disappeared and she was once again able to jump up on the wall. She eventually rejoined the other cats

to eat at a regular feeding spot.

Several weeks after the incident, Joan and I managed to trap her and have her spayed. While under anesthesia, the veterinarian inspected the damaged area more closely. One can only imagine my relief when he said, "She's going to be just fine!"



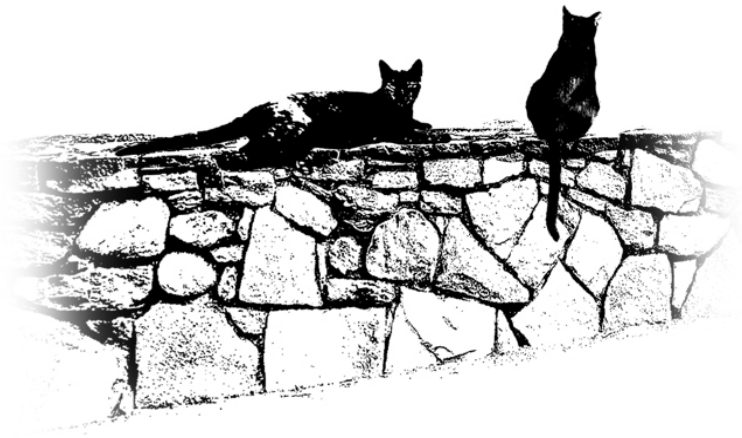
Throughout my stay at God's Little People, I continued to feed the Kini cats every afternoon. But I always parked the car in a remote location and walked the extra distance to the feeding area. I also got into the habit of banging on the hood of the car... even on warm days... just in case!



As time passed, the injured kitten grew more and more comfortable in my presence. Our petting sessions grew longer and she seemed to look forward to my visits... and so did I!

One day, just before I returned to Santa Barbara, as I stroked her soft coat, she paused from eating, and looked up at me. Our eyes met. I saw in her gaze absolute peace... not terror. It was as if she was telling me, "I'm fine now. And I forgive you." I felt tears swell up in my eyes... good tears... tears of relief. Because I felt she had forgiven me, I could now begin to forgive myself.

I thought about what to call this little soul, and while I considered many names, I kept coming back to the same one. It seemed only fitting to name my new friend "Kini."



Some Wonderful Surprises



Being offered the job at God's Little People took me by surprise. I had no doubts that I could do the job... and do it well. But having been selected out of more than 35,000 applicants really astonished me. I was honored to be the chosen candidate and felt it would be a privilege to serve, but I was surprised nevertheless. In fact, most days while I was there, I couldn't believe I was actually at a cat rescue on a Greek island! As I look back on that time, I realize it was certainly one of the most memorable and wonderful experiences of my life.

While there were many challenges along the way, I embraced them as opportunities to improve the lives of stray cats on Syros. I realized early on that I couldn't help all of the 13,000 stray cats on the island. My philosophy, at home as well as in Greece, is that "you cannot save them all, but you can save one at a time." There were a few days when I felt my viewpoint was being tested by a higher power. Having to choose which cats to rescue and which ones to leave behind is a heart-wrenching decision. I told myself on more than one occasion that saving even one cat is a worthwhile effort. By regularly reminding myself of that belief, I was able to gather the emotional strength to rescue only the most vulnerable and the sickest.

Since the Syros job posting had gone viral, followers of God's Little People on social media had increased by thousands. I saw my assignment as more than a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to help the island cats; I also saw it as my rare chance to talk about compassion for animals and to encourage others to be better human beings. I made it my personal mission to capture this unique opportunity and to

share my belief that, if we are kind to animals, we will also be kinder to people.

Unsurprisingly, I felt an obligation to the many people who had applied for the position and I vowed to keep them informed. It was my intent to do well and to live up to their expectations, whether those expectations were real or simply in my own mind. While on the island, I wrote about my experiences daily and communicated many of those feelings through social media.

Over the last several years, I've discovered that writing about my passions and beliefs is a less vulnerable way for me to get my message of having compassion for all living beings out to the public. It's a quite different experience compared to talking face-to-face with a person about my personal convictions. For me, it feels inordinately risky to expose myself in that manner. When I write, I'm not in jeopardy of having to witness someone's quizzical look of misunderstanding. I can't see a person roll their eyes because they don't get it! Rather, reading about my personal point of view gives people a chance to think, ponder and then respond... or not! I feel that the purpose of my writing is to plant seeds of thought, not necessarily to bear witness as to whether that idea nurtures, grows and matures.

In the past, I've often felt isolated because of my deep feelings about animals. I asked myself, "Am I the only person who's this sensitive about animals?" "Why do I dedicate so much of my life to saving them?" "Does anyone else care about them to this degree?" "Am I alone?" And if not, "Why do I so often feel lonely as I tackle this challenge?" In reality, I imagine that every rescuer has experienced these same thoughts at some time during his or her career. But, for reasons sometimes unclear, we simply set these feelings aside and continue to move forward with our mission in life... the call to save animals.

While I recognize that I'm fortunate to have my passion, I don't feel that I had the same choices as other people, such as those in the business world had. Rescuing animals is not a career choice that a person makes expecting to get a promotion for good performance or to ascend the chain of command with an important-sounding job title and a big pay raise. Managing a large group of people and moving up the ranks in an organization while preparing for a rich retirement was never part of my life's plan.

Doing animal rescue work is not what I chose as an occupation... it's what I do with who I am. I'm a sensitive, compassionate human being who is driven to make a difference in the world for animals. My life's path, consciously chosen or not, comes with a desire to influence... and, hopefully, to be understood by others. But finding those "others" sometimes feels like finding a needle in a haystack.



Fortunately, I found one of those haystack needles in my relationship with Joan Bowell at God's Little People. During the relatively short time that we have known each other, we have spent countless hours talking about our shared calling to help stray and abandoned cats. We each share the desire to make the world a better place for them while teaching others about having compassion for all life. Meeting and getting to know Joan has been one of life's precious gifts. I have learned from my time with her that Joan is someone who truly understands the ups and downs of rescue work. We have a mutual respect and understanding of each other that intertwines our very beings... even in our unspoken words. We listen to one another and truly connect in a sense that I have seldom experienced in my life.

From the moment I met her, Joan has proven to be a wonderful teacher, too. Both in her actions and her words, she

exemplifies the best in humility, patience and kindness. I see her as my kindred spirit as well as a good friend. The feelings that I have towards her and her work are unparalleled. Finding the kind of relationship that we share... halfway around the world... has truly been a wonderful surprise!



But there were also some other pleasant surprises. I would have never anticipated the special people who have become part of my life because of my Greek journey. Writing about my experiences there has educated many, but it has also brought several others into my inner circle.

Some people communicated with me, and still do, sharing their stories and kind words. These experiences with compassionate and caring people help validate that there are many people in the world who have a similar passion for the well-being of animals. Others have written privately, opening their hearts about their personal stories of loss and love... and human kindness. One of those special people is the wonderful lady, Christine, who adopted Tumbelina and Violet. We communicate often. I will always feel a special kinship with her.

I have a new friend named Jack, short for Jackie, who was a volunteer worker during my stay on the island. We both have the desire and determination to make life better for cats. Since I left Syros, Jack and I have stayed in touch and I feel certain that our paths will cross again someday.

While I was at God's Little People, Claire, a fellow cat lover who lives in the United Kingdom, and I began communicating through social media. We exchanged communications often and even video messaged on several occasions. Somehow, during our long-distance conversations, our souls inexplicably connected. The first time I actually met Claire in person was several months later when she came to visit me in America;

it instantly felt like we had known each other for years. She and I have remained close, the best of friends, and Claire will always have a special place in my heart.

Developing new lifelong relationships from around the world was not something I ever expected to be part of my Greek island experience. It has certainly been an unforeseen and happy benefit!

My time on Syros has helped me to understand that we are all somehow connected by a single thread of love and compassion for all living creatures.

And I now feel that I am never alone in my calling.

My Last Day at God's Little People

Written as I prepared for my journey home
on February 25, 2019



Today is my last day at God's Little People. I don't know how else to say it. It just is... my very last day on this feline island paradise. The reality suddenly came over me as I began packing my suitcase this morning.

Tomorrow I will begin the long journey back to my home in the United States. My flight from the tiny airport in Syros leaves at 1:20 p.m. Then it's a nine-hour layover in the Athens airport before departing tomorrow evening for London's Heathrow airport where I'll spend the night at a hotel. The following morning I leave for America with two layovers, one in Denver and a second in Phoenix, before finally arriving in Santa Barbara late in the evening, Pacific Coast time, of my third travel day! Who knows what time my body will think it is!

My journey from God's Little People to Santa Barbara will take a total of nearly forty-nine hours. And in exactly forty-nine hours and two seconds I will be once again in Mitch's arms! Following our short drive from the airport, I'll walk into my home to be loudly greeted by my pack of collies and lovingly ignored by my cats! And then, finally, I'll get to sleep in my very own bed... ahhh!

Unlike the clothes, shoes, purchased jewelry, Joan's cards, Greek soap and toiletries that I neatly packed in my suitcase, there is one other thing that I couldn't get to fit. There isn't a bag big enough to hold the wonderful memories that I have gathered during my time on Syros. God's Little People has been my home away from home for the last four months. It has been a beautiful place to live, but there was more than

just beauty to my stay. From the beginning, I knew that I was destined to come here; I had work to do for the cats, a dream to fulfill, a message to communicate and new friends to make.

I have felt honored to be in Syros. I haven't forgotten, not for a single moment, that there were many very qualified people who applied for this position. I realize that having been selected was truly a privilege. The wholehearted support I received from many of the other applicants inspired me to work hard and to do my best. I hope I have lived up to their expectations.

I've learned a great deal since I left home in November 2018 for my adventure on this distant land. Not only have I gained insight into the sad plight of the many cats in Greece, but I have also learned more about myself. I now know that I'm capable of stepping out of my comfort zone and into something out of my ordinary... in fact, into something quite extraordinary! By taking this personal challenge, I have become more self-confident. I recognize that my willingness to seize an opportunity has frequently been the path to making my dreams become reality. It has also given me a chance to educate others and to promote a positive message of kindness towards animals. And equally as important, by staying true to my beliefs, I have been able to set an example for others. These life lessons have given me a new perspective of the world that I will always cherish.

While living here on Syros, I've observed tremendous suffering. And while at times it made me sad, I realized that it was crucial for me to continue to keep a positive outlook so that I could do the work that needed to be done. I came to appreciate how important it is to appreciate all the progress that's being made and not focus on the depressing circumstances. And as I've always known, and was reminded daily... I can't rescue all the needy cats, but I can save one at a time! As a rescuer, I've always wanted to save them all! But

with 13,000 strays on the island, even if I spent the rest of my life here, I couldn't help every cat.

However, I really feel that I've made a difference for the ones that have been in my care. I understand now more than ever that there are limits as to what each of us can accomplish. I've come to realize that for every task I completed, whether it was feeding the colony at the church, caressing the ones that wanted to be petted, sitting and talking to others from my heart, or rescuing the most vulnerable... it did make a difference. Perhaps it's just for a moment... or maybe that day... but sometimes it was for a cat's lifetime. And any of this is better than nothing! It's my sincere hope that others will follow my example. Because I really believe... even doing something very small for the cats is better than doing nothing at all!



Despite the enormity of the challenges on Syros, I am fortunate to have witnessed some changing attitudes towards the Greek cats. These changes will inevitably make their lives (and the lives of future generations) much better. The construction of the Cat Gardens, the spay/neuter campaigns, and the educating of the locals about the value and love of cats are examples of the new mindsets being led by Manos and are slowly being adopted by the island residents. But like anything that requires change for the better, it takes time, persistence and a great deal of patience.

The basis of Manos' motto, "We Live Together" is shifting people's views about the treatment of cats in Greece. His message is laying the groundwork for kindness and acceptance. And best of all, it's working! Positive steps are in fact happening. I believe that Manos' teachings are an important lesson to the world and can reach far beyond the shores of this island. His message of treating animals with kindness can

set the tone for everyone to become better people towards all living creatures.



There are many things that I will miss when I return home. The unique bond and friendship that Joan and I have will remain in my heart. I especially cherish the time we worked together side by side. Those impromptu chats will now be long-distance with a ten-hour time difference. I am taking home a photo of the two of us together so I can be reminded of her gentle eyes and kind smile. And I'll miss the cats at God's Little People: Jasper, Cookie, Sparky, Jessie, Fanta, Wooley and over fifty more! I'll miss feeding the Kini colony cats in the afternoons, especially Kini and the "underdog." And of all the cats, the one I will miss most of all is my feline roommate SweetPea.

I won't forget the new Greek friends I've made; the ever-optimistic veterinarian, Manos, the ladies at the Greek kitchen who prepared almost all my meals, and the always welcoming jewelry shop owner. I will be sad to leave them all. But being sad to leave is actually a side effect of the joy of having had this amazing experience.

As for my time spent at God's Little People, it's been a wonderful opportunity and a once-in-a-lifetime dream come true. I don't have a single regret for having spent four months of my life on this Greek paradise... only sorrow to leave the people and cats I've come to know and love.

So, tomorrow I begin my journey back to my family, my friends and to RESQCATS. I'll be taking with me so much more than I expected... many memorable treasures, cherished lessons and a lifelong dream fulfilled. I feel fortunate and grateful to have been able to take this life's journey.



And, as a last thought (even though my ruby slippers are already safely tucked in my suitcase), I can't help but think about what Dorothy repeated as she departed the incredible Land of Oz, "There's no place like home! There's no place like home!"

About the Author: Jeffyne Telson



Jeffyne Telson grew up in Dallas, Texas but has spent most of the last half of her life in California. Although she has a Bachelor of Arts degree in graphic design from Texas Tech University, she has devoted the last two decades to the pursuit of her real life's passion... caring for stray and abandoned cats and kittens.

In 1997, Jeffyne founded RESQCATS, Inc, as a non-profit organization dedicated to the rescue, care and adoption of stray and abandoned cats and kittens.

In the ensuing 23 years, with the help of a small group of dedicated volunteers, Jeffyne has grown RESQCATS well beyond her dreams, into a highly respected rescue organization that has placed more than 3200 cats and kittens in qualified homes.

Jeffyne released her first book, *Cat Tails: Heart-Warming Stories about the Cats and Kittens of RESQCATS* in 2017. It is an insightful book about her passion for making a difference in the lives of homeless cats. The book is beautifully written and reveals not only the challenges she faced as a rescuer, but also the life-changing lessons she has learned from the animals.

Today, in addition to being the President of RESQCATS, Jeffyne and her husband, Mitch, share their Santa Barbara, California home with 13 unadoptable cats, 9 collies and 15 giant African sulcata tortoises... all rescued of course!

