

Technically Speaking - Purrfectly Abled

by by Lyn T. Garson, CVT

It happened 27 years ago, within the first month I worked as a technician in a veterinary hospital. Someone found eight tiny kittens, inside a brown paper bag, thrown in the middle of the road. All of the kittens found new homes—except one—the orange kitten who had only three legs and a deformed foot. He innocently played with his tail, rolling himself upside down in his cage, unaware he would be euthanized simply because of abnormalities which would make him nearly impossible to place. No one would want him. After all, there weren't even enough homes for "normal" animals. Without hesitation, I immediately adopted him.

Over the years my partner, Tara, and I, adopted other "disabled" pets, including a blind cat, Max, who zoomed through our two-story house like a roadrunner without ever crashing into anything. Like most blind animals, Max utilized his remarkable capacity for memory—commonly referred to as mental mapping—to navigate his surroundings. In addition, his sense of smell, touch and hearing all compensated for his lack of vision.

Then, there was a beautiful two-year-old gray calico. While seeking shelter in a car's engine, during a summer rainstorm, a tragic fan belt accident left her near death. Her owners rushed her to the hospital for life-saving treatment and surgery, which involved amputation of her mutilated left front leg, left ear, her tail and eventually removal of her left eye. But three days after going home she was returned to the hospital and given up for adoption—by her own family. This sweet, gentle cat spent many months in the hospital's adoption program, repeatedly rejected solely because of her appearance and perceived disability. It was heartbreaking.

With no one willing to give her a chance, and all possibilities for a forever home exhausted, we decided to make room for one more in our family. Monst was a loving cat who easily cruised up and down stairs, had the ability to balance herself on her hind legs while grooming with her single front paw, and acted as a seeing-eye cat to Max, always accompanying him to the food bowl. Monst lived a happy, active, normal life and was a special gift to us for 15 years.

Today, Tara and I share our lives with six cats, four of whom are what we call "differently-abled." Shane and Brady are both three-legged; Noodle is cross-eyed with limited vision; and then there is Piggie, born with a cleft palate which eventually healed but left her with no upper lip and a nose split down the middle. In addition, Piggie has a mild form of Cerebellar Hypoplasia (CH), which causes her to be uncoordinated yet does not stop her from wrestling with her siblings or running full speed to launch herself on and off the kitchen counters and dining room table.

Each of these special cats continues to amaze us with their abilities. "Anyone who thinks differently-abled animals can't function normally should come and live here for a day," said Tara one day, as she peeled three-legged Shane from the top of the living room curtains.

If you are adopting a forever friend to add to your family, why not consider opening your heart and home to a differently-abled pet. You may find—just like we did—they aren't so different after all.

