

Aging with Grace

She huddled in the back of her cage, yellowish-green eyes shining like a beacon. We stood mesmerized by the rounded features, the bearded

FROM THE EDITORS

monkey-like whiskers, the football-shaped body perched on stubby legs, the luxurious gray fur. After a moment of lingering, she tentatively stepped forward, and the first forehead-to-hand contact was made.

Her Petfinder.com post had lured us to the shelter as we searched for an older cat likely to be overlooked by the kitten-infatuated masses. "Very nice girl, sweet face, longing to go to her forever home and family. She's about 10 years old—you really can't tell!" An employee shared her story: She'd been found in a town about 30 minutes away, wandering in search of handouts. Shelter staff named her Alma, meaning wise and nourishing. We took her home and the name stuck—she calms us with her healing purrs, kneads our bellies into submission, thoroughly bathes my husband's head, submerges into our laps like a warm blanket, makes us grin at her delight in chin scratching.

Alma was the first of three older pets we've adopted. The second was Tess, a 10-year-old cocker spaniel also found as a stray. In the 10 months before we lost her to cancer, she inspired plenty of joy and laughter. Once my officemates and I saw her running around with a spool of pink ribbon in her mouth—or so we thought. It turned out to be a tub of strawberry vegan cream cheese she'd nabbed from the counter. Now we have Pyper, an 8-year-old cocker fighting her own battle with cancer. She has so captivated us, it's hard to believe we've had her just 2½ years.

In this issue, we honor the special charms of the older set with Arna Cohen's cover story, "When You're Ready for a Mature Relationship," starting on p. 28. You'll read about Buddha-like Karma, who enjoys surfside romps in Malibu; agility master Oliver, who has not so much a face as a cone of wind-blurred fur; and sweetheart Carrie, who boasts a NASCAR-worthy purr. In April, Carrie was waiting for a home in Baltimore; on p. 31, you can read more about what shelter heroes are doing for older animals like her.

As for Alma, it's been almost six years since her adoption, and many thousands of forehead-to-hand encounters have occurred since that first fateful rendezvous. She doesn't bound up the stairs quite like she used to, or stalk the cat dancer toy from dark corners. But she'll stand and paw at it, mouth agape, and special steps help her reach the bed, where she reigns supreme as sentinel of our sleep.

Now, she sprawls in the light, those intense eyes beckoning me. Soon, we're immersed in a beautiful world of soothing sunbeams and shape-shifting shadows. She slows me down, renews me more than any spa treatment ever could, reminds me why I work so hard. I'm honored to be tutored by such a generous mentor.

— Angela Moxley



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