

PAWPRINTS

The Newsletter of the Lethbridge PAW Society

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The Chance of a Lifetime

On May 21st, 2025, PAW sanctuary-cat Cher died.

There is always sorrow when a cat passes away, especially one who is still in the Society's care. But Cher's departure was particularly sad, as she was just over a year old. She had the viral illness feline leukemia (FeLV).



Beautiful Cher

This article, however, is not about how Cher died, but how she lived, and the hope and kindness that gave her almost eleven months of life that she would not otherwise have had.

It was on July 5th, 2024, that Cher, barely two months old, tested positive for FeLV. The day previous, her young mother, Honey, passed away of the disease, as did her sister, Jade, the week before. Though the illness can be contracted by prolonged contact with a feline leukemia positive cat, Honey was likely infected prior to her pregnancy - receiving the virus from her own mother - and giving it to her kittens in utero.

Immediately upon Cher's positive test, the question arose as to what to do with her. PAW's foster-homes are very limited in quantity, and all are filled. With no place for her to go, euthanasia seemed the only option.

At the time, Cher was living with Teresa and Donovan,

mother-and-son foster care-givers, experienced and compassionate. Living among the general population of foster-cats - and their own adopted cats - made the possibility of spreading the FeLV a strong possibility.

It was then that Donovan took a courageous decision. Though his own cat, Ela - adopted from PAW herself - lived contentedly with him in his room, he volunteered

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A still from a video of Cher running on her exercise wheel



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The Chance of a Lifetime *(continued)*

to take Cher in, after having Ela double-vaccinated against FeLV. This decision gave Cher nearly a year more of happiness.

"All I could think of was 'poor thing'," Donovan recalled of learning about Cher's condition. The kitten was still active, still happy, and certainly didn't look like she had a disease.

Aside from the extraordinary fact of Cher's condition, there was the more usual concern of integration. Ela was accustomed to being the only cat in her little kingdom, and the introduction of a newcomer, a kitten at that, into Donovan's room was an unknown quantity.

"Ela was apprehensive at first," said Donovan, but she became used to Cher, and they became "pretty good buds".

Despite the disparity in their ages - Ela was five at the time - the two, perhaps surprisingly, "played with each other all the time...chasing...wrestling..." Ela clearly came to enjoy herself with her new young friend. They slept together and groomed each other, though in one aspect, Cher had to go alone: the exercise wheel.

"Cher was the only one who used it."

Cher was re-tested for FeLV in October, as it happens sometimes that kittens will remove the virus from their bodies. This, however, did not occur in this case, and as she began to show symptoms, she started to slow down. Ela would try to encourage her little friend to play, but increasingly, Cher did not feel up to it.

Nonetheless, she continued to try to run on her beloved exercise wheel, wanting to use it even as the FeLV began to take her sight.

Even though they could not share fun and games anymore, Ela constantly cleaned Cher, spending a great deal of time with her. Donovan remembered how the pair "remained very good friends."

Though Cher's fate was not to live long, cats with FeLV sometimes live years, and it was that hope that impelled Donovan to offer his room as her sanctuary. There was a risk to Ela, it was true - humans cannot contract FeLV - but with vaccination, she would have as much protection as possible, and that confidence was vindicated.

Cher's world was, it is true, circumscribed by one room, but in it was everything she required for necessity and luxury. Cher would have her toys, her beloved exercise wheel, her foster-guardian, Donovan, and her new friend, almost a surrogate mother-cat. Cher remained there for the rest of her life.

It turned out that the rest of her life was about eleven months, most of them very happy. It was only as the end neared that she began feeling the harder effects of her illness.

But think about what this meant. Cher was only two months old when she was diagnosed with FeLV. If she had passed away then, she would have known almost nothing of the joys of kittenhood, of companionship, of friendship with both cat and human.

Instead, she lived to feel the strength and power of youth, running like a wild animal on her exercise wheel. She wrestled and played with Ela, just like millions of other, healthier kittens. She ate meals and felt full, and slept soundly afterward, the sleep of the contented. She loved her people, Donovan and Teresa; observing them, Audrey Audette, co-founder of PAW stated that Cher was "one of the most loving cats I have ever been around": a tribute not just to Cher but to Donovan and Teresa.

What Donovan gave Cher was the essence of animal-rescue. The opportunity to live, to develop a personality, to present others with memories that they will keep; for others to know that here was a cat, this was who she was, and what she did.

Donovan's compassion is an example of what drives rescue-work. Because of it, Cher lived an extra eleven months. That may not seem long, but to Cher, it was a lifetime.

Thank you, Donovan, and Godspeed, Cher.



**Keep watching for news about
the PAW Society's updated website!**

Duke Turns Seven!

It's hard to believe, but not everyone in PAW knows about the Society's ambassador-at-large. Duke has occupied that honourable position for several years, and in that capacity has attended innumerable events. He has also visited various businesses around town, where he has always been a popular guest, spreading goodwill for PAW and for cat-rescue.

Duke has literally spent his whole life with the Society, having been born on July 25th, 2018, to a young female cat already in PAW's care. Duke's first few weeks were without trouble. However, because of the stress of an unknown event, his mother reacted with violence to her newborn kitten - as sometimes happens with new mother-cats - and Duke was badly injured.

It was an open question in the immediate aftermath whether he would survive, but quick thinking by his foster-parents, Teresa and her son Donovan, and rapid advice from Audrey Audette, co-founder of PAW, saved Duke. Teresa and Donovan couldn't let him go after that, and he became a member of their family.



Subsequently, he became a roving representative of the Society. He has frequently been seen about town dressed in his custom-ordered costumes, which he not only wears without fuss, but enjoys. Whether in casual holiday wear, formal attire or something more specific to the occasion, there really isn't anything in which this birthday boy doesn't look good.

Even when at home, Duke has served the interests of PAW and cat-rescue. He has never failed to give a warm welcome to all new cats who have entered his household to be fostered.

Recently, Duke had to deal with some health issues, including stomatitis, though he has remained the happy and hopeful fellow he was as a kitten.

Duke will be featured in the upcoming 2026 PAW Society calendar, so he may have a bit of bias when it comes to advertising it later this year. But you can bet he will justify that attitude by looking mighty fine in his picture.

Happy birthday, Duke, from all of the PAW Society!

If you would like to inquire about being a foster-guardian for a rescued cat, contact us at 403-328-6700 or email pawsociety@shaw.ca.

Local Business Gives PAW Support

The Bone & Biscuit Lethbridge Crossings at 40 - 14 Aquitania Boulevard West, Lethbridge, celebrated its grand opening on July 12th, and PAW was there. In fact, PAW was rather a guest of honour, as donations to the Society were invited by the store, and one of our adoptable cats made an appearance.

Store owner Jenelle Wensley contacted PAW and asked if we had a cat, available for adoption, whom we wanted to promote at the grand opening. We did! Valkyrie came to spend a couple of hours, along with her foster-guardian.

It turned out that the event was a bit overwhelming for little Valk who was quite nervous through it. There was a great deal of activity and a large number of customers came through the doors, which was pleasurable to see for the store but made Valkyrie a bit uneasy. Nonetheless, she was able to make a good impression on everyone who came to say 'hello' to her. Those who saw her



Valkyrie, the centre of attention



*Jenelle Wensley, owner of the
Bone & Biscuits Lethbridge Crossings*

remarked on her beauty and more than one wished that they could take her home. In particular, a young boy, present with his family, extolled the virtues of cats, of which he knew a lot, impressive for his age; a future animal-rescuer, perhaps.

PAW would like to thank Jenelle and the staff at the Bone & Biscuit, all of whom were friendly and helpful. In addition, the Society extends its gratitude to the store's customers, who made donations totalling \$107.85 - not to mention the regular donation-box that is always on hand which, a week later, was full enough to need emptying.

Even if Valkyrie didn't secure her new home that day, she helped raise awareness of PAW and cat-rescue, which is always helpful. PAW thanks the Bone & Biscuit Lethbridge Crossings for that opportunity.

**The PAW 2026 calendar is 'under construction' right now.
Contact us to reserve your copy.**

Editorial: Of Effort and Inconvenience

The story of Cher in this issue (see page one) made me think of how someone can affect animal-rescue, but also of how animal-rescue can affect someone.

An animal-rescuer is almost always inconvenienced by the rescue, and often inconvenienced in a large way. Rescue-work is inconvenient, disruptive, laborious and time-consuming. It can frequently become the biggest part of a person's life, without that person ever intending it.

This is because such work isn't a matter of finding a lost, abandoned or sick animal and calling an organization for help. Certainly, we need people to do that; we need people to care initially, and set the process in motion. But then the mechanics of the rescue take over.

The animal (I will use cats as an example in PAW's instance, for obvious reasons) needs almost everything provided for its true rescue. It needs to be examined medically, it needs to be comforted spiritually. It needs to be fed and warmed physically, it needs to be entertained emotionally. Rescue becomes not just a full effort not just in time, but in place. It can come to fill a lifetime, in length and in width.

Taking in a cat means providing it with all it needs for a happy, or at least contented, existence. This is constant work. It may not be hard work all the time, but it is nonetheless work, all the time.

There is the cleaning of litter-boxes and, usually, of floors about the litter-box. There is the feeding and the cleaning up afterward. There is play-time and time set aside simply to make the cat feel good. I have often said that what takes up a person's day is not always the one or two big, long chores, but the twenty or thirty five-minute jobs that eat up what employment, family, and every other daily task permits to remain. Rescue-work eats up that time in vast quantities.

Not everyone has that time available. Not everyone has the energy available. That is why rescue-work is not for everyone. That it is not doesn't constitute a failure; it more than not constitutes a simple realization: that one just doesn't have the tools (time, setting, etc.) at one's disposal. This is the 'real' in realization.

If Donovan didn't have his room in which to keep

Cher, her continued rescue would not have been possible. If Donovan had not been able to devote the time to her care, it would not have been possible. Making sure that Ela remained healthy, watching her reactions, was as pressing a need as was watching Cher. Rescue-work is a twenty-four hour a day task.

When PAW receives an offer to foster a cat, one of the first facts - demands, really - that is made clear to the volunteer is that fostering might be indefinite. We cannot have someone agree to take in a cat, with a time limit; to give up that cat, leaving us with nowhere for her to go, at the end of a certain period. That's the first indication that fostering, the ever-operating machinery of rescue, will be inconvenient. From there it only grows tougher.

But rescue-work is like any volunteerism: it provides rewards. The rewards are principally for the animal, the person, the organization for which the volunteer works. Someone decides to help distribute food in a starving country, the rewards are for those being fed. Someone wants to build houses for the homeless, the rewards are for the newly homed. Someone wants to rescue a cat, the rewards are for the cat. For the volunteer, there is inconvenience, frustration, sweat, back-ache and, sometimes, when whatever one does isn't enough, heart-ache.

But, like Hope that flew out of Pandora's box after all the atrocious and horrifying afflictions had escaped to harm mankind, there is usually something left for the rescuers. It's not cash or a comfortable home; it's not an active social life or fame. It's just the knowledge that you've done something good and worthwhile. It's the knowledge that another life is better for your expenditure, your bruises, your vast inconvenience.

There is no device to measure the results of rescue-work; no chart that can accurately determine the benefits provided. It's the memory of purrs and head-bumps, of sound sleeps and full tummies. And when people say 'you can't take it with you', they mean the gold cups on mantelpieces, and the plaques on walls. The memory of a purr really is something you can take with you.

~ James Thorne.