

My Story

Chapter One:

Truth be told, I never knew who was my father. My mother was a wonderful being, so lovingly taking care of me until I was three years old, when on that fateful day, we were separated by freak circumstances, never to meet again. Being only three years old, it was hard enough to beg for a morsel of food, and maybe a warm place to sleep, but I persevered, having no real alternatives. This way of life continued for two more very long, hard years, basically begging for food and looking for a place to sleep. Looking back at these very difficult and challenging times, I do not know how I actually survived. The winters were exceptionally difficult. Many a night I went to sleep trying to curl up in a ball with perhaps a stray piece of blanket or pillow that I was lucky enough to find in an abandoned car in a nearby salvage yard. No one paid much attention to me. It was only through the luck of the stars, and perhaps the watchful eye of my fairy g-d mother, that I did not become deathly sick or die of starvation.

I do believe in miracles. One day in the springtime - I was now five years old and very savvy for that age - while I was walking in a small wooded area where I would sometimes hide, a large woman was walking towards me wearing a portable oxygen breathing apparatus. I could see that this woman was infirm and not a threat, though I was usually quite afraid of strangers. This woman called to me, stooped down to more or less my level, and held out her hand in a friendly gesture. Typically I would have run away and hidden, but I somehow felt different in the presence of this woman. I let her pick me up and she carried me to her house, less than a block away.

To me this was a miracle indeed after fending for myself for two years, sometimes very hungry, and usually very cold in the winter months. Now it appeared that someone was actually going to care for me, give me nutritious meals and a warm place to sleep. I was very grateful. I could see that being an addition to her household was a burden. Sadly, shortly thereafter I was given up for adoption.

I was brought to an agency that specialized in abandoned souls. First, I was sent to be examined by a doctor, given the mandatory health shots, had minor surgery for something, and brought back to the agency. I was given my own little space to live; though I was not allowed to go outside and play with any perspective friends. I should not complain because I had at least something to eat and a place to sleep. Even so, I was depressed and lonely.

The next week prospective families came by the agency to check on the newly arrived orphans. I guess that I did not have too much to show since I was still very thin; and I had a rash in both ears that itched. For the sake of looking good, I tried not to scratch; but sometimes I just could not help myself. I understood why people just looked at me and walked away.

I told you I believe in miracles. One Monday afternoon it was especially quiet at the agency. For some reason I was the only orphan there that day. Not a single visitor had visited the entire day. I was awoken from my nap by the sound of the bells that jingled when someone came in the front door. I looked up and saw a man entering, carrying a box of, I guessed, toys that might be fun for us to play with. He was donating them to the agency. The man looked as if he were in his early fifties, a little pudgy, but a friendly smiling face and kind, blue eyes. I am a very good judge of character. I could feel that this was a good person right away. The woman asked the man if he were interested in adopting. I was hoping for the best, maybe finally someone would adopt me. The man came to me, reached out his arms and gently picked me up quite carefully and held me with a confident and caring caress. We looked into each other's eyes. Neither

of us made a sound. Then he mumbled something to the woman about how he was struggling through a painful divorce and that he did not think he could deal with this. He slowly and reluctantly put me back down. Upon hearing this, my heart sank. I liked the energy and karma I could feel emanating from this kind person. I thought for sure that this would have been a good match for both of us, and that my luck had finally changed.

The man turned and looked at me with his kind blue eyes, said good bye to the woman, and left the agency reluctantly as if he were wondering if he had made the right decision. The next few days for me were very lonely and sad. I had little energy and was not hungry. I felt that my good fortune had been overlooked and that an opportunity was lost. Then late Friday afternoon, the bells jingled again, but this time loudly as if someone were entering in a hurry. It was that same pudgy man again with the gentle blue eyes, but this time he seemed as if he were in a panic. As he entered the door, he called out to the lady, "I am back, and I want to adopt that little guy"! The lady said with a warning to the man that he should be sure what he was doing, since she felt that I was not particularly affectionate or friendly, and that I like to hide a lot. "No!" he said, "I want this little guy." I could see that he was almost crying, and if he looked my way, he would have seen that I was weeping with joy.

The necessary paperwork was executed in record time. Before I knew it, I was being carried off to my new home. What a great place, a condo in the middle of a small town with views of the harbor from each of the two floors. Plenty of room, I was free to roam anywhere I pleased inside the condo, with no exceptions. And what was the first thing that happened when we arrived at my new home? I was given a large assortment of food, my choice of the very best, things I actually had not eaten before like fresh salmon and smoked lox. What a delicacy. However my previous humble upbringing was satisfied with the simplest of ordinary food. I also want to tell you about my own bed, soft, fluffy, and warm. This was heaven. I was so happy and thankful to this man for a new beginning in life that I jumped up on his lap and purred for two days.

I told you there are miracles. I am one lucky cat. And my name is Astro.

Now for more of the story -

Chapter Two:

Yes, Astro jumped on my lap and purred for two days. Though he had his own special little bed on the first floor, when I went to sleep on the second floor, soon I would find Astro next to my pillow cuddled up in a ball just far enough from my head that when he flicked his tail it would so ever lightly touch me to confirm that I was still there. If I were lying on my back with no shirt and no covers, Astro would jump on my chest, start to knead me with his front paws, and begin to clean a small circle below my chin with his tongue. Do you know how rough a cat's tongue is? This was very painful. I did not stop him for this was his way of showing me that he was now looking after me. Nightly, I would grimace during Astro's regular cleaning routine. After a while I developed a callous on my chest when he cleaned me. "Ouch", if he sometimes cleans me outside this little circle.

Now when I go to bed I call to Astro, "Kitty want to visit?" Sure enough, after Astro's standard two-minute delay response, here comes Astro sitting at the foot of the bed. "Up kitty, up kitty." And then Astro jumps onto my bed, finds a comfortable place to curl up until he decides it is time to clean me again. Sometimes Astro just climbs up on my chest and lies down on my stomach, his head toward my feet and his tail just in reach of my face. "Turn around Astro." And Astro turns around, starts his little motor, and begins to purr. If Astro is in the mood, he may begin to clean me before I go to sleep.

Many a time I get up during the middle of the night to either get a snack or use the bathroom. Do not think that I can do this errand alone. Right beside me here comes Astro, for what reason I am not sure. I believe it was over six years ago when I was a victim of a back injury from an overzealous chiropractor. I was left in excruciating pain to the extent that I was on prescribed serious painkillers and I was practically immobile in bed on my back. The only other one in the house was Astro. In order for me to get something to eat I had to crawl out of my bed on my hands and knees, go down the steps to the refrigerator into the kitchen. I could hardly manage one stair at a time. As I began at the top stair, there was Astro, waiting on the second step to be sure that I was okay. Then Astro moved down to the next stair, waiting for me to negotiate the next descent. So it was till we both arrived to the bottom of the stairs. Returning back to my bed upstairs was this same procedure, but in reverse. I would crawl to the first stair, and there was Astro, waiting on the second stair for me to make the ascent. Astro would then repeat the procedure until I eventually managed to get back into my bed.

Remember Astro telling you about the rash and itch in his ears? I discovered it was not a rash, but ear mites, little black dots that like to take refuge and start a family in the comfort of his ears. Poor guy. Astro could not do much about this except try in vain to scratch out the uninvited guests. Three times a day, and sometimes more, I would have Astro sit on my lap. I would take a q-tip and hydrogen peroxide and begin a cleaning process in an attempt to remove these parasites. This routine lasted for almost a month. While swathing in his ears Astro did not move a muscle. He knew I was helping him and trusted my every move. The trust between us went far beyond ear cleaning. Astro lets me clip his claws, brush his teeth, remove the nightly sandman's sand from his eyes every morning, and even give him a bath, though with a bit of reluctance.

Astro is an orange domestic short hair cat, neutered when he was five at the agency. Consequently his male bodily features had a chance to fully develop. Astro has a full, wide façade of a mature male cat, not the dainty little head like most kittens and cats you see running around chasing balls of string. Typically the personality of his breed is very calm and laid back, to such an extent that I almost wanted to change Astro's name to Valium. Astro is patient, or better should I say, very tolerant, especially with little children. They pull his tail, pick him up in some awkward position, and hold him upside down. Yet Astro accepts this without resisting or moving, claws still sheathed, just waiting to be released. When released, "Whoosh", Astro takes cover under a low piece of furniture or finds a little hiding space in a closet, waiting till the coast is clear.

Do you think that you may be able to take advantage of Astro's good nature? I am not so sure. Sometimes I play fight with Astro, roughly rubbing his stomach or gently pulling his leg to a point where he really wants me to stop. Astro has a special way of delivering this message. Astro grabs my hand with his two front paws, claws slightly extended, puts his teeth carefully over the metacarpals below my wrist with just enough pressure to get my full attention, then proceeds to simulate an attack with his rear paws, but ever so lightly as not to do any damage. Astro delivers his point effectively and without misinterpretation. It is time to stop.

Astro has never really scratched me in all the time that we have been together. This is a result of a real strong bond of trust. I know that if Astro holds me with his paws or his teeth I should not pull away, but trust him that he will not hurt me. Pulling away from his grip, gentle as it is, would have negative results for me, not Astro.

Astro has taught me a lot of invaluable life lessons. Probably the most important lesson is how to deal with stress. Now, when I am confronted by a very stressful situation I do what Astro would do, and that is, to take a nap. Works for him, and it works for me.

Do you think all cats like to play with those silly little string and yarn games? Not Astro. Running after a string being dragged on the floor or waived in the air is beneath Astro's dignity. However, sitting up for a piece of lox that costs \$24 a pound is a different story. I would even do that. Just in case I forget to offer this treat in a timely matter, Astro is not shy about sitting in front of the refrigerator until I open the door and give him a piece of lox.

Chapter Three:

Like most of my colleagues and friends, I like to travel, whether it be in a car or private or commercial airplane. Cars were never a problem since I was brought up and lived the early part of my life adjacent to an automobile salvage yard. When under the hood I can find a distributor cap, air filter, or PVC valve even if I were blindfolded.

I started flying in small planes, first in a Mooney, then eventually in a Mooney Rocket which happens to be the fastest single piston engine general aviation airplane in the world. Did you know that the Rocket can fly at 24,000 feet at a speed of about 240 knots? Believe me, compared to the other single engine general aviation airplanes, this is really fast. At first the engine noise used to bother me a bit. Now I wear those little foam earplugs that you squish up in a little wad and stuff in your ears. This really helps reduce the noise a lot, especially the noise in the high frequency range. Next problem was flying above 12,500 feet when one should really be using auxiliary oxygen. I noticed that when flying that high I would get drowsy and want to fall asleep, but kept myself awake because it was the prudent thing to do. Not too long thereafter I got my own oxygen mask that greatly improved the situation when we flew that high.

I got to know many of the New York air traffic controllers since we visited the control towers frequently just to say "hello". The controllers were fairly amazed to find out how much I really liked to fly. Say what you want, being able to fly is really a miracle. Sometimes after a particularly smooth landing, the controllers would ask which one of us did the landing. They really knew in advance that it was I who landed the plane.

Commercial flying is another story. I hate going through the long inspection lines, being examined like I was a terrorist, living under the threat that someone may even put me through the x-ray machine. I have my own frequent flyer number since I travel so much, but the benefits are sparse. I can remember boarding a plane from New York to Tel Aviv. The flight attendant saw me as I was entering the coach section. She approached me and said to me that I was really cute. She then asked me if I wanted a free upgrade to first class in the upper level of the Boeing 747. I had never ridden first class upstairs before. I certainly was not going to say "no". Riding first class upstairs is really a great experience, very quiet, and no vibration. The service is impeccable, lots of attention, but I never did get a headset to watch the movie. I am not going to say which airline this was, but I will give you a hint that they only serve kosher food.

Sitting in my space for twelve hours in an airplane, even in first class, is a bit confining. I did manage to get up with no one noticing and walk to the cockpit door to see if I could visit the pilots. After all, I do fly a Mooney Rocket. Bad idea. I was ushered back to my assigned space after I was discovered trying to open the cockpit door. Upon arrival at Tel Aviv, going through customs and passport control was very easy. Passport control took one look at me, stamped my special passport, and waved me through without incident. I bet that I am one of the very few that have a special passport stamped with an Israeli entry visa.

I love being in Israel. Israel is a very spiritual place. You can feel the spirituality in your entire body. This special force is referred to as the "shchina," or the spirit. I found the doctors in Israel to be very special. Prior to my trip, my left eye had been bothering me a bit for some time. No one in the USA had discovered the problem. After seeing an eye

specialist in Israel who just examined cases like mine, I found out that I had a mild case of anterior uveitis, other known as iritis. It was not serious, but needed attention. Prednisone drops for a month seemed to remedy this problem without further complications.

The flight back to the States, because of the jet stream headwind, is two hours longer than the ten or eleven hour flight to Israel. I do not like to bother anyone during this thirteen-hour flight about going to the bathroom. However, when I arrive back on solid ground I know what I have to do. Luckily jet lag does not usually bother me. My universal remedy for practically everything, as you have read previously, is that if anything starts to bother me, I just take a nap.

Chapter Four:

I like to get up early, usually around sun up. Not unlike many, the first thing on my mind is to relieve the pressure on my bladder. I scratch a few times on the rug at the foot of the bed to get Carl's attention, but he somehow is able to sleep through this disturbance. Even though by comparison my size is little, I am able to grab the mattress at one corner and manage to shake the whole bed. I really have to be very careful not to tear the sheets or the mattress fabric as I did once before when I was visiting in Florida. The vibrating bed and me calling to let me out usually is enough to wake anyone. It does work. Carl will then get out of bed, stumble to and open the porch door. I will be there waiting to go outside, but Carl stands by the door and asks me, "Kitty want to go out?" I never can figure this out. Why else would he think I would wake him up and then for me to run to the door waiting for him to let me out? Best I can do is to acknowledge with a purr that more resembles a chirp. Out I go, down the steps and into the woods to resolve the issue at hand. Cats like privacy, you know.

I look forward to being out-of-doors. I like to chew occasionally on a fresh piece of grass, smell some of the low lying flowers, or even half-heartedly chase a wandering beetle or bug. I see no point in killing these creatures, also part of Gd's creations, just for the sake of killing. After all, that little bug or beetle might be some other little bug or beetle's mother, or worse, little baby. Sometimes though, I just cannot resist giving them just a tiny little swipe, knocking them upside down, then watching them roll back over onto their feet and scurry away.

I have a secret spot located in the woods, a small clearing that receives an abundance of direct sunlight. This spot is covered with low-lying ferns that make a soft, pleasant smelling bed. Here I can stretch out peacefully, lay on my back, feel the warmth of those golden rays on my stomach, and take a little nap. However, I do have to keep one eye open watching for high-flying hawks that could easily scoop me up. Once and a while I am abruptly awakened by a passing black cloud that starts to rain down on me and everything else in site. Like most cats, I do not like getting wet. Off to the house I run. During the day Carl is not usually home. This means taking shelter near a bush that is growing in the garden under the protected eaves of the house. It is dry there, but not ideal.

Carl always returns home before dark. He does not want me to be outside at night because he tells me there are animals out there that would be happy just to eat me as an appetizer. I know he is referring to the local coyotes, bears, and fisher-cats. The fisher-cat is a member of the weasel family. I have heard that many cats in the local neighborhood have ended up as a late evening meal for a hungry, roaming fisher-cat.

I can recognize the sound of Carl's car, a 1996 Ford Taurus, even as it approaches from afar, way down the road. I like to wait and greet him as he drives into the yard. I am always happy to see him upon returning to the house. I am sure that he is happy to see me, too. Even before he opens his door, I am running off toward the house, signaling him that I

want to go into the house and get something to eat. It is not unusual for me to execute this little promenade a few times to emphasize that I want to go into the house NOW. In all fairness, Carl does not make me wait that long. I do this just to keep the priorities in order.

Chapter Five:

Do you want to know some interesting facts about cats? Did you know that I have thirty-six muscles in each ear? That my gluteus maximus is smaller than my gluteus minimus? That my cousins such as tigers, leopards, cheetahs, and lions all purr, and all within the 18-150 cycles per second range? That my roaring cousins can only purr when exhaling? We have no unique anatomical feature that is clearly responsible for the purring sound. No one really knows why we purr and exactly how we do it. Even I do not know why or how I purr. It just happens when I want to purr.

We have a terrific sense of balance and our muscle reactions are lightning-fast. Do not try this please, but if someone were to hold me upside down as little as eight inches above the ground and let me go, somehow I end up landing on my feet. Something else is also strange. When Carl scratches me just under the left side of my chin, a little to the rear, this causes my left rear foot to scratch next to my ear so fast that the image of my left foot is only a blur. Same thing happens to my right foot when he scratches the underside of my right chin as well. I have absolutely no idea why this happens; but it does happen without fail. I really do not mind when Carl does this, but to me, it is purposeless. Maybe Carl gets some benefit from this. I do not know.

Every night before Carl goes to sleep, and after I jump onto his chest, Carl proceeds to gently massage every inch of my body. I think he is checking for ticks, lumps, and bruises. As a special treat he massages my paws, under my paws, and in between my toes. This is so relaxing. I wonder if you can imagine how good this feels. Carl knows I really like this, for as soon as I feel his fingers under my paw, I spread all my toes to be sure he will not miss any spots. Some people think that I am a little weird doing this, but really, if you were I, wouldn't you do the same? Another special treat is when Carl scratches behind my ears. I maneuver my head so that he will also scratch the bridge of my nose. Sometimes I lift my head so that he will scratch just under the front of my chin. I am careful not to move my head in such a way that Carl ends up scratching further back making my rear foot do that crazy thing I told you about.

Sometimes Carl discovers a bump or something inside my ear, whether it is a little piece of dirt or maybe even a rough spot from an external scrape. Just the same, Carl feels that he has to remove this. He starts to push or pull on the foreigner with his fingers. I think he should just leave it alone, at least for a while. I gently push his fingers away with my paw, being very careful not to hurt him. We do this a few times and eventually Carl leaves my ear alone. I think that Carl is a little obsessive. Perhaps, though, we are even. I do the same thing to his chest by cleaning and licking his chest with my tongue. I am not so sure that he likes this, but for me it is a special and meaningful way for me to convey the feelings of trust and affection.

Chapter Six:

We are really more than just friends. In times of need and despair we find it easy to console each other, not through words, but just for the sake of being there, whether it be just a slight touch or just a quiet murmur of acknowledgment. We also share our times of contentment. It seems that knowing that each of us are there for one another under any circumstance is a mighty force that bonds our souls together.