

Kitten City

By Anna Von Reitz



A man who is not natively a fan of cats in general, not a hater of cats, but not a fan...was recently "gifted", anonymously, with a laundry basket containing eight (8) kittens, five (5) that appear to be about three weeks old, and three (3) that still had umbilical cords attached, indicating that they were less than five days old.

He called the Animal Shelters. They informed him that yes, they would take the kittens in, but on average had less than a 20% survival rate, because they didn't have the staff to provide the round-the-clock care kittens require.

They have to be fed varying amounts of specially formulated "Kitten formula" or cream (which is naturally free of dairy allergens) every two hours at this age. The newborns get 2.5- 3.0 milliliters every two hours and the relatively older kittens get 5.0 milliliters every two hours, and this amount increases gradually every week.

It's a whole mathematical calculation that has to be lined out and followed. The Kitten formula costs \$50 a can for the powdered nutrients that have to be mixed with distilled water; cream, which can be somewhat substituted, doesn't have all the vitamins and minerals needed.

Oh, what a dilemma! He stared at the tiny mewling fur balls.

A 20% or less chance of survival echoed in his ears along with the miniature meows.

And he doesn't even like cats. He sees them as useful on the farm. Good rat-catchers.

Maybe it's the fact that he works for me and has seen my "I'm a good rat-catcher" plaque on display in my office, but this whole situation reminded him of me, and

he showed up with his donated laundry basket, complete with hungry kitten cat cacophony.

The obvious solution, to find the Queen Cat who was the Mother, was not possible. She had already been swept up by the Animal Shelter and even though she was lactating, shoved through the mandatory spaying operation.

No help available there.

Why can't people be responsible with their pets? Why bring kittens into this world and let them be born, only to come to this miserable end, cold and starving in the bottom of a plastic laundry basket, dumped off on someone else's back porch?

The Reluctant --- change that to: Very Reluctant Cat Dad, ran his fingers through his hair in a gesture that more than adequately expressed his complete frustration and wonderment.

How had this weird and inappropriate imposition appeared in his life?

Being told that God has an excellent sense of humor didn't help.

Soon, however, he armed himself with kitten formula, distilled water, syringes, timers, and disposal training pads and a heat lamp of the kind used to keep reptiles alive in cold climates.

He steeled himself to the task ahead and recruited various older children and women to assist, but he had no illusions. This was on him. Every two hours for eight weeks, non-stop, around the clock.

He hadn't yet thought about the kittens having diarrhea and needing baths in general. How, he wondered, do you give a cat a bath? What kind of soap do you use?

All this and more had to be overcome. He brooded over all these questions, with a noble air of Stoicism interspersed with moments of panicked disbelief.

How could this --- THIS --- of all things imaginable, be happening to him? A bachelor with a life to lead? A man who doesn't even like cats?

Mrrrow.....

Being told that he had been honored by The Ancient and Honorable Kingdom of Cat, and would henceforth be recognized as a Good Soul by cats worldwide --- didn't help.

I can't afford this..... I can't afford the time.... he blustered and he sighed. He picked up another little fur ball, turned it, belly-side up, in the palm of his hand, and gently poked the rubber-like tip of the syringe in its mouth.

By now, his dog, a spayed female but a female nonetheless, had sensed his incompetence and had come to help, dutifully picking them up as he fed each kitten and carrying them by the scruff of their tiny necks back to the cat basket.

His elderly male barn cat also invaded the house and took up sentry duty in front of the door leading into the kitten's makeshift nursery, where he proceeded to hiss at the dogs, sporadically make runs at the door, and otherwise evince a determined Will to Participate in the care and upkeep of the orphans.

After only a few days of this, our Hero has assumed the red-rimmed eyes and slumping posture of all new fathers everywhere. He has the telephone lines open and is calling everyone with cat expertise for help and insight. Keeping these kittens alive has become a Mission, a Quest, a Sacred Duty, all in one.

He doesn't quite understand how or why this inexplicable activity has taken on such giant proportions and why he is compelled to literally run out of otherwise sane business meetings at the summons of a cat-feeding bell.

Or what he is going to do after two months of this frenzied effort. After all, what does he get out of it at the end of the day? Weaned kittens on solid food. And what's he going to do then? Turn them over to the same under-staffed and under-funded Animal Shelter that gave them a 20% or less chance to live?

They still don't have good permanent homes on offer. They are still just little sparks of life, mewling fur balls with triangular ears, and little else going for them, besides one Very Reluctant Cat Dad who is doing his best by them, honoring the chain of life that connects us all.

I'll pray for these kittens to have good lives. They deserve it. They deserve love. They deserve care. Only God knows if they will get it, but they deserve it. They are certainly coming into this world on a tough trajectory, having lost their Mother so early in their lives.

Still, there is one great-hearted man in their corner, giving them their chance --- and there may be others, people who are still connected to the natural world, and who can appreciate the self-reliant and dignified nature of cats.

Someone once said that, "Cats are the original Americans and we are all kin to them, independent, quiet -- for the most part, and comfort-loving. Show us a warm window sill or a soft cushion, but don't try to herd us. And don't be surprised if we exercise our sovereignty, because we've always had it in our hearts and always will."

All you cat lovers out there, we will be looking for good homes for these kittens--- really good homes, in about two months, around mid-October. They will be hand-fed and bathed and cuddled by dogs and people, so they will be thoroughly adapted to life in a household, not a barn.

You can depend upon the Very Reluctant Cat Dad to make sure that they get the best nutrition, play toys, and vet care. They may have had a rough start, but they have landed, literally, in the lap of a dedicated, if nonplussed, caregiver.

Being given a headband with cat ears "to make him feel more the part" --- won't help.

Despite the laughter, we are all rooting for him, and in our more sober moments, we are contemplating the divine mystery of life and how --- in our souls --- we value it. Even if it's the life of a cat. And even if we don't like cats.

I have a spot carved out of my overflowing office that's the right size for a kitten tote. They take their baths in my kitchen sink and dry off in front of my fireplace.

If you want to help, please send donations, advice, offers of adoption, prayers, jokes, and what-have-you with a "Cat Care" designation to:

Very Reluctant Cat Dad
In care of: Box 520994
Big Lake, Alaska 99652

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