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Advocacy & Rescue

FOREVER HOME

Life-Changing Love

A special kitten inspires thousands of fans and transforms a college student.

WHEN ALLIE O'SULLIVAN FIRST SAW Little Bear at the New Hampshire SPCA, her heart broke. “His legs were so bent,” says the 19-year-old New Hampshire native. “I never knew that was possible, because I've never seen an animal with such a severe problem.” She asked to hold the black kitten, who was around 8 weeks old, and spent some time with him in a visiting room.

“He made me so happy but so sad at the same time. Why couldn't anyone find it in their heart to give him a loving home? Why was he stuck in a shelter? These questions kept running through my head, and it was breaking my heart. He kept looking up at me as if he was saying, ‘Please take me home.’”

Little Bear, also called LB, was born without a radius (the main bone for weight bearing) in both of his front legs, and his hind legs faced backward. But that didn't seem to slow him down. “He would run around the room as fast as he could on those little, bent legs and then he would jump full-speed into my arms to rub his head against my face.”

It really bothered Allie that he was the last in his litter to be adopted. “If it were up to me, all special-needs animals would be the first to have loving homes. Life is hard for them as it is. All they need is someone to push them along the way and provide them with love and care.” That love is what propelled Allie to seek a better quality of life for LB and adopt him into his forever home.

An Unusual Procedure

After some research, Allie discovered a surgery that would cost this college student \$10,000, but that didn't stop her. Through social media, Allie raised the money by selling “Team Little Bear” wristbands and other cat-related items.

Randy J. Boudrieau, DVM, ACVS, and



O'Sullivan and Little Bear

ECVS Diplomate, is a professor of surgery in the department of clinical sciences at the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University in Grafton, Mass. He is also section head of small animal surgery at the Foster Hospital for Small Animals, where Allie took LB. He says that Little Bear's forelimb deformity results from the radius not developing, so essentially there is no support to the wrist.

To remedy this, LB needed an arthrod-esis, which is a fusion of the forearm with the paw. This is a common procedure for trauma, such as a hyperextension injury that results in fractures, in which case the radius is fused to the bones in the paw. However, in Little Bear's case, this procedure would have to be modified. “We fused the remaining bone of the forearm (ulna) with the bones in the paw,” Boudrieau says.

Little Bear had two separate surgeries for each front leg. Once his bandages were removed and he was able to use the limb, he did learn how to use it more appropriately, Boudrieau says.

FreeKibble.com, a website dedicated to providing nutritious food to shelter animals, will donate 5,000 meals of Halo's Spot's Stew to the rescue organization of Allie O'Sullivan's choice.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like to join Little Bear's 31,000+ fans, visit www.facebook.com/reformedlegs.

Adapting to New Legs

After he came home from the second surgery, LB wouldn't eat or drink and he seemed depressed and confused. Even Allie's German Shepherd, Luna, seemed worried about him. "She has always thought that LB is her baby," she says. Allie says Luna watched LB every second.

Allie brought LB back to Tufts, where the veterinarians gave him fluids and medication. After running some tests, they discovered that LB has a deformed heart. "Right now, his heart isn't life threatening, and his backward back feet aren't causing him pain," she says, so she doesn't foresee another surgery any time soon.

A few weeks after his second surgery, LB started to do things that he was never able to do before. "It was an amazing feeling to watch him walk on his two front paws for the first time," Allie says. LB is unable to bend his legs, so his gait is stiff-legged. "However, it is better than walking on bent legs," she says. "When he wants to run fast, he can definitely run fast."

The whole process required patience and a lot of time exercising his legs, which Allie did by playing with toys and having him move around. "He is adapting every day," she says. "Every day, he amazes me even more. I believe that he will have a better quality of life now that he has had the surgery on his legs."

Who Changed Whom?

Before LB came into her life Allie had always wanted to be an animal control officer or a veterinarian. "My whole life, I have always wanted to do something that involved animals," she says. "Now, I am completely set on opening up a rescue and finding special-needs animals a great home, just like Little Bear. So many special-needs animals are put down every day because people consider them worthless. My whole life has changed because of Little Bear."

BY **SUSAN LOGAN-MCCRACKEN**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF **ALLIE O'SULLIVAN**

An animal science major at the University of New Hampshire, Allie herself admits to having a learning disability, which is part of the reason why she is drawn to special-needs animals. "I consider myself equal to Little Bear, because we both have things that we need help with," she says. In her quest to raise awareness for special-needs animals, she plans to share photos on Little Bear's Facebook page until she is able to open up a shelter when she graduates.

In the meantime, she wakes up every morning with Little Bear at her side. "He does everything with Luna and me," she says. "He also loves chasing my two other cats, Smoochie and Boots. He always catches up to them, because he is very quick. Honestly, Little Bear has been babied by me his whole life. I have always been very cautious of him, and I do everything that I possibly can to make sure that he has the best life. He is so important to me. I not only changed his life, but he changed my life, too."

Inspiring Others

Allie's and Little Bear's are not the only lives whose changed. "I get many messages saying that people have adopted an animal in honor of Little Bear," she says.

Shawn-Marie Bridges, a software implementation manager based in Lowell, Mass., was so inspired by Allie's story that she went to the New Hampshire SPCA and adopted a 4-month-old, black female kitten, who is blind in one eye, and named her Allie.

"What she did for LB and her persistence, especially at her age (18 when she started), is amazing," Bridges says. "I work with the Beagle rescue here in New England and see so many animals who miss out just because they weren't perfect, yet I find that most times, the imperfect ones are the ones you fall in love with the most." 🐾

Susan Logan-McCracken has been the editor of CATFANCY for 10 years. She loves all cats, big and small.

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