Hans Winky - A Grateful Cat

Tracey and her husband had enjoyed the company of two cats for many years. When the cats passed away at ages 16 and 18, Tracey was, of course, saddened by the loss of companionship and love that her cats provided, but she also recognized that with her and her husband’s busy travel schedules, life might be easier without pets. Still interested in cats, Tracey decided to contact one of the local rescue centers and apply to foster cats when needed.

A foster stint typically involves caring for a cat for about four weeks during a critical time, i.e. helping a momma cat with her kittens, or isolating a cat while waiting for spay or neuter surgery. Back in July of 2020, when the pandemic lockdown had just started in San Diego, the rescue center called looking to place an adult cat. They described the cat as beautiful but somewhat feral and missing one eye.

Shanti’s House, a feral and abandoned cat sanctuary, had made first contact providing food and shelter without containment. Over time, the cat became a regular visitor at Shanti’s House.

The director of Shanti’s House, Kristina Hancock, named the cat Hans Winky. And after caring for him (and singing to him) for many months, she decided Winky was ready for a permanent home.

Winky had other ideas. In fact, in order to conduct a thorough pre-placement exam, Winky had to be tranquilized for capture and transport to the vet. The vet determined that Winky’s missing eye was not due to trauma, but instead due to a condition known as Anophthalmia, a genetic condition where the eyeball and surrounding ocular tissue do not develop normally. Anophthalmia, in Winky’s case, occurred in just one eye, leaving him with one healthy eye and one vacant socket.

With some reservations, Tracey agreed to foster Winky. As expected, at first Winky hid all day and only came out at night to feed and explore. When this behavior continued without any signs of improvement for more than four weeks Tracey became concerned. The rescue center urged patience, explaining that Winky, not Tracey, would set the timetable for socialization.
And then it happened, in the middle of the day during a busy Zoom call with work colleagues, out of the corner of her eye, Tracey noticed Winky walking about exploring the living room as if he had lived in the house for many years and someone had merely rearranged the furniture. He explored with curiosity not fear. Soon after, he came to accept hands-on affection and even belly rubs.

Tracey compares the companionship of a formerly semi-feral cat to that of a fully domesticated cat as one defined by gratitude. Winky is extraordinarily grateful for the food, shelter, and attention that domesticated cats sometimes take for granted.

Winky has an abundance of patience. For example, he does not insist on being fed at exactly the same time each morning, so Tracey can sleep late on occasion.

And, while not completely sure about the need for vacuuming, Winky loves his humans, and seems truly relaxed in his new home, a forever home as fostering gave way to adoption.

A grateful cat,
a grateful human.
Just the way it should be.
For more about Shanti’s House,
visit the website:
watch the KPBS video segment:
or donate: