

About Max

May 2008 - January 3, 2009

Max came to us from Animal Lovers through our good friend (and Animal Lover volunteer and foster mom) Jan Shannon. Jan rescued him from the Kent County, Maryland Humane Society while on a visit to the second home she shares with husband George in Chestertown.

Early on after Max (then known as "Tig") joined the Shannon clan, Jan announced that he was "George's birthday gift." As happens with so many cats and kittens that pass through the Shannons' and other foster homes, Jan and George fell in love with Max and seriously considered keeping him.

Max had been with Jan and George for about 2 months when we met him for the first time at their home in Albany. It was love at first sight. This wide-eyed little beauty bounced through the house, curled up on my lap and I was a goner. My husband Terry and George came home from an outing. Terry picked up Max, sat down in a comfortable chair and Max proceeded to curl up on his new friend's red-shirted tummy for the next hour or so – clearly knowing where he belonged. Terry too was a goner. That Max joined us in our guestroom bed and slept the night sealed the deal.

For some time, we had been considering bringing another kitty into our fold, largely as a playmate for 2 ½ year old Jake who was driving our older kitty Farley a little nuts with all of his energy. We volunteered to adopt Max if Jan and George were willing to part with him. After all, he was George's birthday present. Both Shannons agreed to let him join our family. They said there was no one else to whom they would entrust him.

He arrived on Halloween night. For the first time, he met his two big brothers, Farley and Jake. Farley is the top-cat in our household. He is 15 ½ years old, has diabetes, recurring corneal ulcers and chronic pancreatitis. We adopted him from the Arlington, Virginia Humane Association. Jake is 2 ½ and came to us through Jan and Animal Lovers. We were all a little surprised that Jake, one of the most laid back cats I have encountered, spent the entire night shadowing Max' every move and hissing in his face with a certain fierceness. Max weighed 5 pounds, Jake about 15. Undaunted, Max held his own.

Over time, Max and Jake became pals, enough that there was mutual grooming and naps together. I realized Jake had taken on the role of his new brother's protector one morning at feeding time. I put Max in our pantry with his food, closed the door and then fed Farley in the kitchen. (Farley's diabetes requires that he eat a certain amount before receiving his twice-daily insulin shots.) Somehow, little tiny Max was getting out of the Pantry. When I investigated how, I discovered Jake just outside the pantry's french doors. When I was out of sight, Jake pushed the doors open and freed the little guy.

I took Max for a vet exam in November. She checked him out thoroughly, took a stool sample, blood, etc. She listened to his heart. With great care and concern, she told me that Max had a heart murmur – on the scale of 1 to 6 with 6 being the worst, his was a 4. We discussed options for his future. Labwork confirmed several other problems – giardia, anemia, some nonspecific low grade infection, among others. She asked me to bring him back in a couple of weeks after he received various medications. Once we got him as healthy as possible, we would take him to a cardiac specialist in Annapolis, MD.

Two weeks later we returned to the vet for a re-check. She was concerned about his bloated belly that had not been so in the prior visit, did an ultrasound and extracted fluid from his belly to examine. Based on the prior lab results, his belly and what was found in the extracted fluid, she concluded that Max had one of two conditions: toxoplasmosis or Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP). FIP, she explained, is particularly difficult to diagnose as there is no specific test for it. If he tested positive for having a corona virus that, in concert with a host of other symptoms, would lead her to a diagnosis of FIP. Sadly, Max was positive.

My research on the virus was quite consistent in its conclusions. A short-term treatment of prednisone could buy a little time, but just that. The disease is always fatal.

We were in shock. We had both adjusted to the idea that Max might not be with us for a long because of his heart murmur. But, he might well be with us some months if not years. This plague of FIP was clearly going to take him from us much sooner than we had hoped. We decided to proceed with the prednisone and give him as much time and love as possible. We knew it would be clear when it was time to let him go.

Little Max – or, as we sometimes called him, Max-a-million. He really was one in a million. He had the sweetest nature of any animal I have ever encountered. For the first time in my life, I had a lap cat. If I was sitting down, Max was on my lap. If I got up during the night, Max greeted me, chirped a hello and insisted that I scratch his head and pet him.

Almost as much as he loved sleeping in my lap, Max loved to eat. He thought canned food was a gift from the gods and was grateful. He meowed in his little meow voice as soon as I came anywhere near the kitchen, day or night. He always got what he wanted.

Max was fond of appliances, particularly the dishwasher. Each night, as Terry cleaned up the kitchen after dinner Max charged into the room, sat **by** the dishwasher (sometimes sat **in** the dishwasher) and watched as Terry unloaded and loaded the dishes. He found the whole process fascinating. Almost as fascinating were the washer and dryer, but not quite as much as they weren't in the kitchen where there was the ever-present possibility that food might be in his near future.

When the Christmas tree went up in our entry hall, Max quickly joined Jake on the plush green velvet tree skirt placed underneath. That the hall's floor is heated with radiant heat made it an instant success. As the holidays progressed and presents were placed under the tree, Max, Jake, or the pair could be found sleeping peacefully in the reserved area left open to them among the wrapped gifts. Many pictures were taken. Thank goodness.

While Farley and Max never became as close as Jake and Max, there was clearly a truce. On occasion, Max could be found lying next to Farley on one of his favorite chairs, the sofa or the daybed in the hall, usually with beams of sunlight shining down upon them.

Christmas and New Year's passed. Max was holding his own. On the first Friday of the new year, I returned home from having lunch with Jan and our friend Laura. Something about Max had changed. He didn't want to be on my lap. He didn't want to be petted. He didn't run to the kitchen to beg for food. I heated up a neck wrap of mine filled with lavender and little beans, put it under the fluffy cushion of one of our big cuddle cups and placed Max on top. This seemed to give him some comfort and he fell asleep straight away. Hours later, he awoke and jumped out, somewhat unsteadily. His walk had changed. His little meow had deepened into one I didn't recognize. He didn't want anything to eat of the six different cans of food I offered, a first. The light in his eyes had faded.

I knew it was time. With tears, I told Terry. We took him the next day and now he is gone. It is tragic, pure and simple. But, a greater tragedy would be if we had never known him. He left a hole in our hearts. Who knew that such a "little bit" could leave such a legacy.