

# Whitey's Christmas Story

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He'd been around at least 4 years - always keeping his distance. They'd never been able to get him neutered & vaccinated. When they offered food, he'd accept it but he'd always shy away from using shelters.

The winter had been a harsh one; he hadn't shown up for such a long time that they feared he hadn't survived. Then, one spring day, there he was - on the doorstep looking for a meal.

He was 7 or 8 - maybe older; it was becoming obvious that the years of living homeless were taking their toll. Every year they had noticed how much more tattered and torn his ears were becoming (from frostbite and fights) and that day he was looking particularly thin and frail. He still wouldn't let them get close to him but they managed to get some deworming meds into him and he'd started putting on some weight.

By the end of summer he'd become something of a regular and there were signs that he was beginning to trust them. One snowy night early in December (2014), he let them pick him up and put him in their garage overnight. But shortly after that he disappeared again. The weather turned bitter cold.

On Christmas Eve they found him collapsed on their doorstep - his eyes infected, his fur matted with tar, his jaw puffy "like mumps," an oozing sore and scabs on his neck, a leg swollen and unable to put any weight on his paw. He let them pick him up and carry him to the garage. They cleaned him up and made him comfortable; he settled in for the night and, on Christmas Day, was sleeping, eating, using his litter box and allowing them to cuddle him.

It was on the 27<sup>th</sup> that we (Rescue Hamilton Cats) received an email entitled: "Helping a local stray with vet care and neutering." It chronicled his history and his condition and explained how, while they weren't in a position to cover all the vet costs, they'd contribute what they could, care for him during his recovery and, if he had no infectious diseases, try to make him part of the family. They explained how integrating him into their household could be really difficult because the resident cats (all rescues themselves) would have trouble accepting him but they'd promised to work at it.

They'd nicknamed him "Whitey" and found out that two neighbours who had also been feeding him also were calling him "Mr. Whitey;" so, the name stuck. On the 28th they sent this photo of him.

Whitey was clearly in rough shape and in urgent need of vet care; his future was looking bleak but maybe, just maybe, he had a chance. It's giving cats like Whitey a chance that rescue is all about but, in this case, it was feeling like we needed a miracle.

At that point, a volunteer, who works with one of the local groups providing some support and access to services for caregivers of Hamilton's many street/community cats, got involved. She called a veterinarian who is very familiar with the plight of desperate cats like Whitey and, in the spirit of the season, she agreed to see him.



On December 31, 2014, Whitey was transported to her and examined, neutered, vaccinated, dewormed, given a flea treatment, provided with the meds he needed and tested for infectious diseases. The blood work looked surprisingly OK and there was a sigh of relief when he tested negative for FIV/FeLuc.

Whitey got to spend New Year's Eve back "home" and remained for the first few weeks in the bathroom but, as this photo, taken in early January, shows, he was starting to recover - and to relax and to appreciate the comforts of indoor life.



Then, gradually, he was introduced to the other cats. As expected, it didn't go smoothly but, as the weeks and months went by, he got to spend more and more time out of the bathroom. Now he shares the upstairs with the females, coming downstairs to spend time with the males only when they can supervise. The guys haven't totally accepted him but they're working it out.

Occasionally, he suns himself on their deck and plays in the fenced-in yard and he has no interest in his former street life. Most days now he lays in front of the fireplace enjoying the warmth and recently he's assumed the role of family ambassador, welcoming

two new rescues with nose sniffing and head licks.

This year, he'll be home with his family for Christmas dinner and on New Year's Eve Whitey will be celebrating a whole year of living the life he'd never dared to dream of - and gratefully looking forward to 2016.

This recent photo of him sums up pretty well this happy ending story - a story that demonstrates what kindness can do.

