
WHEN ANNIE FOUND THE FERAL CAT CARETAKERS' COALITION

THIS STORY COULD COME TRUE WITH YOUR HELP

Annie, a feral cat caretaker, is 73 years old. She lives alone with several cats she has rescued and nursed back to health. Unable to find homes for them, they have become her permanent charges. Once and sometimes two times a day, carrying sacks of cat food, she waits for a bus to take her to an industrial area several miles from her home, to feed and care for a colony of 23 feral cats.

These ferals cats depend on her and eagerly await her arrival. However, feeding is only part of her chores. With great patience, she sets up her traps to catch the ferals who have not been spayed or neutered. If she cannot find someone to help her, she transports them in traps and carriers on the bus to the local veterinarian or pet clinic.

Annie is not knowledgeable in the ways of the local government and private agencies and lacks the funds, transportation and information to take advantage of the resources available. She has no idea that she is one of a great many feral cat caretakers in communities everywhere and that she is providing a much needed community service.

One morning while Annie was tending to her ferals, an FCCC member walked toward her and introduced himself. Annie at first felt threatened. Who was this confident, authoritative-appearing person wearing an official looking emblem, the logo of the FCCC?

Was he, in fact, a threat? Would her colony be in

Without help, Annie bears the financial burden herself. This is only part of the challenge Annie faces as a caretaker. If she is unable to trap and transport her cats to a clinic, she will be faced with the birth of more kittens, accompanied by the need to devote additional time and money to care for them. The cycle is unbreakable and her colony continues to grow.

There are no days off for Annie. She continues her daily chores, helpless to change her situation for the better. If the landlords of the industrial or private property on which her colony resides decide they want to destroy her cats, Annie has no rights and no way to protect her colony. Annie finds her work with the feral cats to be deeply gratifying, but she is saddened when she realizes that she is viewed by people in her community as an eccentric, troublesome old lady.

Leon began to meet Annie's bus each morning to help her with her first feeding of the day and the care of her colony. After taking several FCCC seminars and workshops Annie benefited both from her added knowledge and the opportunities to share experiences with other caretakers. Because of her long "grass roots" experience, Annie finds that she has a lot to give as a mentor to new caretakers.

Through FCCC Annie now has close links to the resources for controlling her colony's population. A consistently carried out trap, spay and neuter (TNR) program has reduced the birth of kittens.

jeopardy? Would she be threatened in some way? Would she be pressured into making changes that could harm her cats? Was this individual associated with an organization whose beliefs were agreeable to Annie's?

The young man, Leon, seemed genuinely interested in her cats. He was a new arrival in the community and was a graduate student at a local university. Learning that Leon missed his family and their cats, an FCCC member had enlisted his services as a volunteer. Leon had been directed to Annie's area to assess what help was required.

Leon's demeanor and his sincere interest in cats eased Annie's apprehensions. A few days later Leon appeared again. This time he brought a supply of cat food and nutritional supplements, which he gave to Annie. The information he left with her about the FCCC stirred Annie's imagination about the quality of care that might be possible for her ferals. For the first time, Annie privately acknowledged the burden she had been carrying and the guilt she felt when she was too tired to make yet another feeding trip or ran out of money to buy enough food. Her sense of relief was confirmed when she received her FCCC membership kit, a schedule of workshops, information on vouchers available to her, a hotline number to call and additional help that was available to her through FCCC.

Annie can transfer cats that need special care into FCCC transitional facilities, and when Annie's funds cannot stretch to cover the costs, supplemental food and supplies are available.

Annie is always happy to talk about her feral cat colony and her activities with the FCCC. Her neighbors watch her come and go, often waving and giving her encouragement. Annie's commitment to her colony provides her with an inner joy that Annie now couples with her newfound pride as a feral cat caretaker. She knows that the FCCC is there for her, for whatever new challenges arise. And she knows that her work is important.