



Buzz had been missing since the family evacuated due to a fire in October 2019.

Photos courtesy of Susan Sullivan

Finding their Feline

Sullivan Family Reunites with Lost Cat after 22-Month Search

By STEVE GALLUZZO
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Pets bring happiness to so many people's lives. They become an integral part of one's family, and losing them can cause grief and anguish for months, if not years.

When a pet disappears, though, do not despair. Do not lose hope, for you may find them if you know where—and how—to look.

That was the case for the Sullivan family, who found their missing cat after almost two years.

"If you see a cat or dog wandering around your neighborhood, it may be lost, so don't hesitate to post something on PawBoost, Petfinder or especially Nextdoor—it can make a difference," Susan Sullivan shared. "If someone hadn't posted something about our cat, we may never have gotten him back."

Susan, her husband Brian and their sons, Ian and Finn, all grew quite attached to their cats Buzz and Woody. That is, until one of the two got skittish in unfamiliar surroundings and found a way to escape.

Susan, who often works late hours as a script supervisor in the film industry, described in vivid detail the day Buzz disappeared on either the evening of October 30 or Halloween morning in 2019.

"We evacuated the Palisades that October when the fires were threatening the area," she shared. "We took our two cats to a friend's house [in Mar Vista] who had a spare bedroom for them to stay in while we were at a hotel. The night before we were picking them up, my friend thought the room was too warm and cracked a window open. When she came to feed them the next morning, the screen was popped out. Woody was still there but Buzz was gone. She called me right away and felt awful."

Susan said from there, a broad search began.

"He was lost in the Mar Vis-

ta Hills, so we ended up meeting neighbors of my friend and posted through them on Nextdoor and the Ring neighborhood app," she said. "We had lots of leads and possible sightings, but we never could find Buzz. There's a big community garden near where my friend lives and there are strays there, so we figured he'd show up eventually but he never did."

The family called Voice For The Animals, which is the rescue they got their two cats from, to tell them that they lost the cat and to also get Buzz's microchip information so that if someone found him, they could get him scanned. Susan said she then met a woman named Lauren from Feral Cat Caretakers who started to help.

"She lent me a cat trap (a spring-loaded mechanism with a gate that closes when the cat walks in) and along the way, we caught a possum and another cat in areas where there were sightings, but still no Buzz," Susan shared. "There was discouragement along the way to be sure, but we always had hope. To be honest, we hadn't really looked for him physically for a year but I met a lady named Morgan who, along with her sister, was a big animal advocate, and they monitored Nextdoor in their area and sent us photos and videos, some of which looked like they could be him. Needless to say, we never left a stone unturned."

About one month ago, Susan said she got a text on a Sunday morning from Morgan, whose sister had forwarded her a post from Nextdoor about a cat that looked like Buzz from a woman named Helen who lived in Mar Vista Hills. She posted that he'd been coming around her house for the last month, eating leftover food she had for her cats in the backyard.

"Morgan put me in touch with her and we talked," Susan said. "I asked, 'Can I put a cat trap in your yard?' and she said 'Absolutely!' So I went over there and put the trap out that Sunday. Nothing. On

Monday morning I got a text that he'd walked right by the trap. She sent me a picture of him eating and it looked exactly like Buzz."

Helen then sent Susan a video in which she called his name from several feet away, and he sat down and started meowing.

"I knew it was him," Susan shared. "The trap was still out, so I told her I'd come by Tuesday morning and do a stakeout to see if he'd come. Well, I got a text from her Monday night. I called her right away and at 8 o'clock that night, we piled into the car, drove right over and it was him."

"We left him in the trap until we got home, and as soon as we were in the house, he started rubbing up against us. He remembered us right away. I cried tears of joy. So, long story short, we finally got our Buzz back 669 days after he went missing. It's been such a miracle, and we'll always be grateful to the Mar Vista community."

Buzz and Woody are now 11, and while the golden tabbies get

along well with each other and with the family dog Murphy, initially his brother was not exactly congenial upon Buzz's return.

"I thought it might take Buzz awhile to acclimate," Susan said. "I brought him to the vet in the morning and was relieved to discover all he had was fleas, so they treated him. He's been back for about a month now. Woody wasn't very welcoming at first and he'd hiss at him because cats in the wild have a different smell. It only took two or three days and things were back to normal."

Brian and Susan recently celebrated their 17th wedding anniversary. Originally from the East Coast, in late 1999 the couple moved to the Palisades, where they have enjoyed raising their two boys, both of whom have grown up playing in Pacific Palisades Baseball Association.

Ian helped Pali White win the Pony Division championship in June (his dad was one of the coaches) and is now a freshman on the JV team at Palisades Char-

ter High School. Finn, 13, goes to Corpus Christi School and, besides PPBA, plays for Pali Riptide Baseball Club.

"We were new to California, living in Hollywood and Brian said he'd found a place over by Marquez," Susan recalled. "We thought the Palisades was so far but he said if the pizza is good at the place we can walk to [Vittorio] we should get it. So he met the old owner John who was from New York like me. He was a Mets fan and Brian was a Red Sox fan. They hit it off right away."

They eventually moved to Via De La Paz and for the last six years have lived in the Alphabet Streets. Susan and Finn got Buzz and Woody after going to an animal adoption at U.S. Bank in the Village.

"Brian and Ian were away on a fishing trip in Cape Cod, so I asked Finn, 'Do you want to get your dad kittens for Father's Day?'" Susan remembered. "They were rescued from the same litter and were 15 or 16 weeks old. We

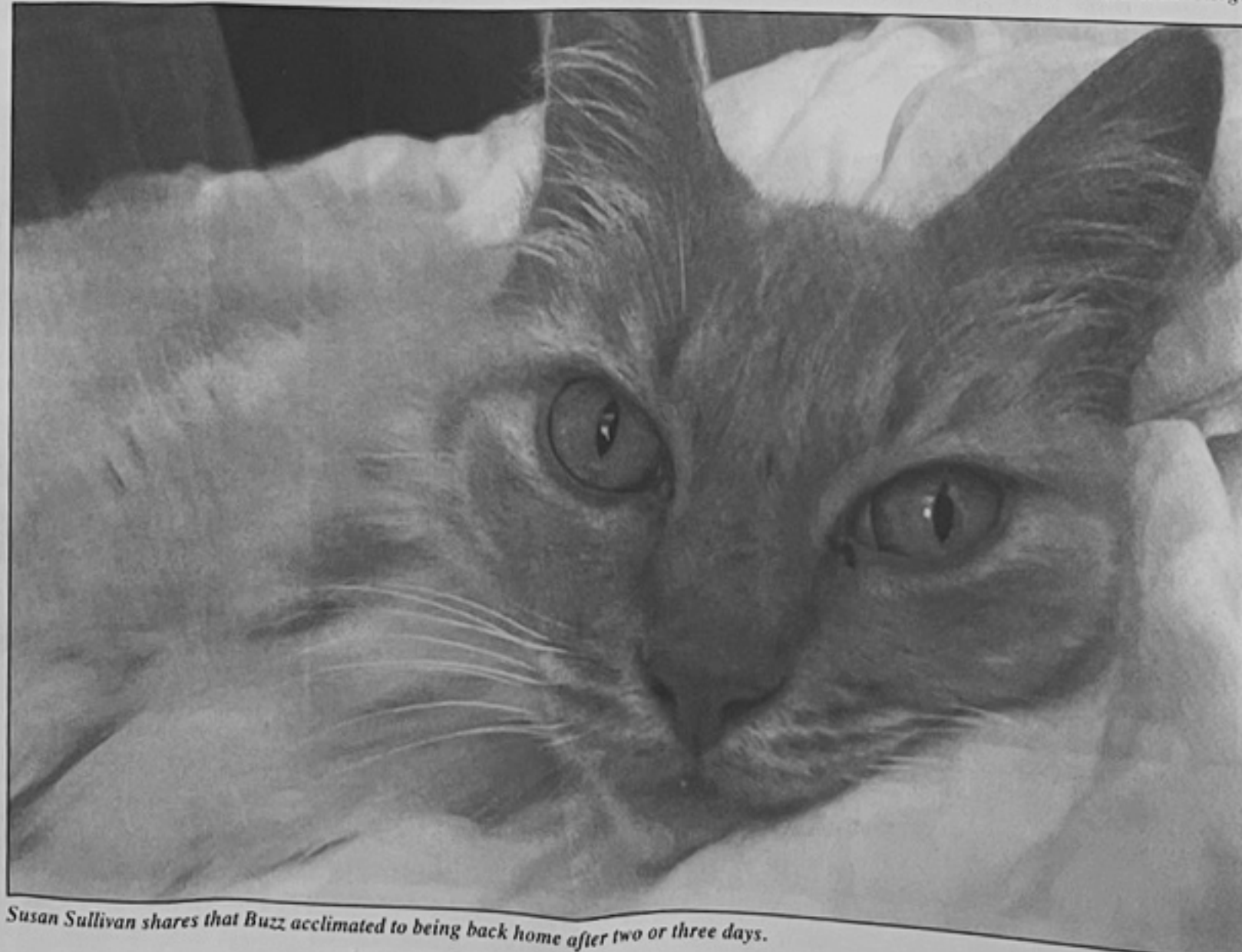
were living on Via at the time and coincidentally, when we put in the application we found out my neighbor ... was fostering them, which was very convenient."

The kittens' original names were Luke and Duke, but Susan said her boys renamed them "Buzz" and "Woody" after characters from the "Toy Story" movies.

The lesson to be learned from the Sullivans' ordeal? When the cat's away, it is no time to play.

"We've learned a lot on our journey, and we wanted to share our story so others in the same situation can take a proactive approach," Susan concluded. "There are so many resources available—and we used all of them. It's about creating awareness with neighbors that they can help by posting pictures of animals they may think belong to a neighbor but could actually be lost."

To learn more about Feral Cat Caretakers' Coalition, visit the website at feralcatcaretakers.org.



Susan Sullivan shares that Buzz acclimated to being back home after two or three days.