



Norma Milton teases Toby with a toy.

HALFWAY HOME

Caribou cats get a second chance

by Shannon Butler

No one would suspect any thing unusual happening in a small house on a quiet, dead end street in Caribou. However, the house on 11 Pioneer Avenue is anything but usual. This is the home of the Halfway

Home Pet Rescue that currently houses homeless cats, all of whom are lucky to have a roof over their heads, food in their dishes and someone who cares for them.

The woman who has not only opened her home but her heart to these cats is Norma Milton. She founded the shelter in March of 2006, but has had a soft spot for cats her entire life.

She recalls capturing kittens from the barn on her father's farm and taming them so they could be pets and not nuisances. She has frequently taken a few cats at a time to her house, and then given them out to permanent homes.

"I admire their resiliency," Norma says, "no matter what goes on they deal with it." Nothing truer can be said about the cats Norma has taken in, many of whom have lived very hard lives. They have been abandoned, hungry and cold. They have been abused and neglected and yet they gratefully accept the care they are given at the Halfway Home and become wonderful and loving animals.

Many of the cats that come into the home are in need of medical care. Through donations and her own personal funds Norma ensures that all her cats receive proper medical attention. From minor care like shots and disease testing to more serious cases she takes care of it all.

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Norma lovingly puts ointment on the eyes of a kitten born with an infection.

HALFWAY HOME

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A kitten born in the Halfway Home named Lily with bowed legs received splints to correct her deformity. Other kittens receive drops in their eyes six times a day to try and prevent blindness due to a herpes infection. The poster boy for the shelter named Toby came in with brain damage due to being poisoned at a young age. These medical problems don't overwhelm Norma. "Because an animal comes in with a problem does not doom them to the needle."

No cat is too sick to be helped. That's Norma's philosophy. She rejects no cat in dire need and she accepts all the help she can get. The Halfway Home Pet Rescue has a full team of volunteers working every day to keep the house

clean and the cats cared for. These volunteers keep the shelter running with kindness that never ceases to surprise Norma.

"We all work well together as a team because we have this higher goal that is more than any personal goal of any one of us. I've met so many good people, and seen so many good souls," she says.

A good soul herself, Norma continues to advocate for those who have no voice of their own. Each year she goes into local elementary schools to educate children about being responsible pet owners. She teaches them how animals should be treated, about spaying and neutering and what they should do if they have stray cats at their house. By doing so she hopes to reduce the number of cats she takes in.

Similar projects have already yielded results for the Halfway

Home. For the first time the local veterinary office says people have been calling in search of kittens—an indication that spaying and neutering all the cats in the shelter and educating the public has helped decrease the cat population.

Norma's house has been outfitted to be as cat-friendly as possible. Cat doors in the basement lead to outdoor pens where the cats can roam and play on sunny days. They come and go as they please, just as they would in a permanent home. Cats are confined to certain areas of the house but no cat is locked up, alone in a cage. In the Halfway Home, cats can run, jump, play and socialize. They are free to just be normal cats.

Despite the expenses, the energy, and the devastation that comes with the loss of a cat too sick to save, Norma says it is all

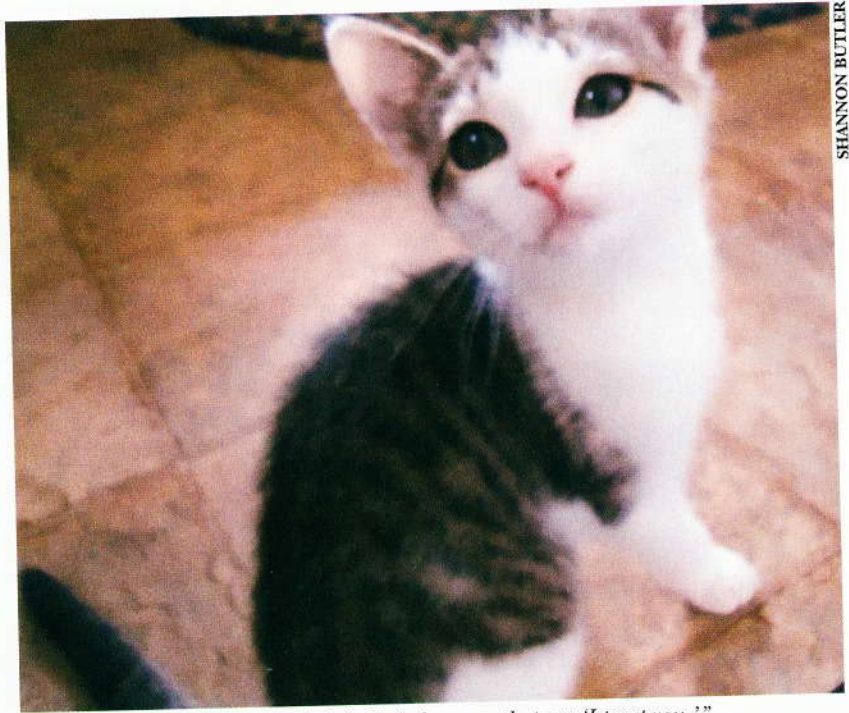


A rainbow of cages donated to the Halfway Home allows the cats to get fresh air.

worth it. "It's their little faces, the rubs, and the looks that say 'I trust you.' It does something in your heart that you can't describe. There is a terrible need for decent animal welfare in Aroostook County and I feel strongly that this is what God intended me to campaign for in my senior years."

With true dedication and a passion for helping the helpless Norma has proven that with a clean home, fresh air, and lots of love any cat can be made into a wonderful and loving pet. ☐

Shannon Butler of Caribou is currently a creative writing major at the University of Maine at Farmington and has been the 2011 summer intern at Echoes.



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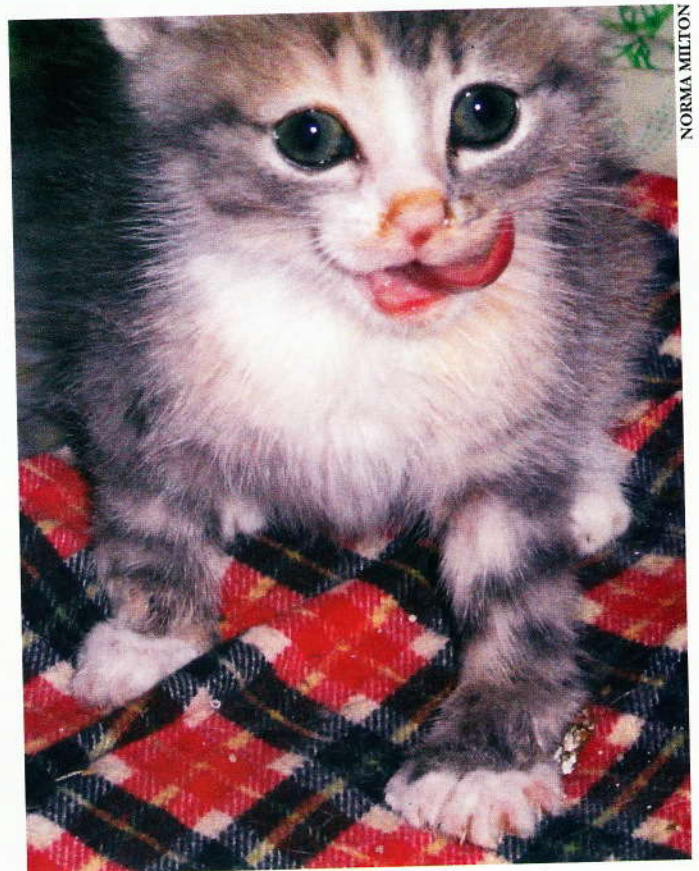
"It's their little faces ... that say 'I trust you.'"

Lily gets her legs fixed



SHANNON BUTLER

Lily, a kitten born with bowed legs, before the corrective braces.



NORMA MILTON

Lily ready to roll, her legs 85% corrected.



NORMA MILTON

Lily with splints to straighten her legs.