

From Shelter to Show Biz: A Meowmoir

I'll never forget the first day I saw Betsy and Burnell at the pet shelter in a place called Cherry Hill, New Jersey - my birth mother was a humble stray cat. Anyway, my soon-to-be mom and dad were out shopping for cat food for their five cats, and Betsy always liked to look at the cats in the shelter who were waiting for new homes. And there were a lot of us scampering about that day. We were all out of our cages, playing with wild abandon. In the middle of this chaos, Betsy saw me playing all by myself. That was because I didn't like to play with the other kittens, but, fortunately, Betsy didn't realize this at the time.

The next thing I knew, I was being scooped up in Betsy's arms. Immediately, I began playing with her long braid. It was love at first sight.



A few days later, after the shelter called her vet and some friends to make sure I would have a good home, Betsy and Burnell returned to pick me up. This time none of the kittens were out playing. We were all in our cages with cards on the front describing our personalities. The cards on the other kitten's cages said things like, "Get's along well with children," or "Like's other animals." You know, stuff like that, which made me a little nervous cause my card just said "BOSSY!" It didn't say anything about how smart I was, or how friendly I was to humans, or how cute I was, or how soft I was, and how pretty I was. Just "BOSSY!" It was humiliating. And I was pretty worried that Burnell and Betsy would change their minds about adopting me when they saw the card. Fortunately, they were so completely in love with me they didn't care what the humans at the shelter thought. Betsy and Burnell - I mean mom and dad - were excited to take me home to meet my new brothers and sisters.



When I got to their house, I was pleased to see it was filled with art and musical instruments, including two giant grand pianos. I had never seen a piano before, but they looked wonderful to me. The other cats, however, were another story. For some reason, they thought they were in charge, particularly this small old grey cat named Gabby. Of course they were wrong. I was in charge now. Why not? I had always been in charge before. It's just who I am.

Right away, I taught all of the other cats how to growl, hiss, and scream. Can you believe it? Apparently, they didn't even know how to fight! They had such dull, peaceful lives and they all got along with each

other. Did you ever hear of anything so ridiculous in your life? It was about time mom and dad had some excitement in their boring cat household.



Gabby, the small grey cat I told you about, would attack me while I was sleeping and take mouthfuls of my beautiful soft grey fur. How dare she! "What did they see in this cat?" I thought to myself. "Why did they ever adopt her?" But mom always came to my rescue.

Then there was Max, a big orange bulls-eye tabby. I just never liked him and it was so easy to get him in trouble. I simply screamed at the top of my lungs when he would get anywhere near me. Then he would poof up like a big ball. Then mom and dad would come running to see if I was okay and they would see Max all poofed up and me crouching in the corner. They would think he had been attacking me and then they would yell at him. It was so much fun to do this and so easy. Unfortunately, I made the mistake of doing this once when mom and dad were in the room, and they suddenly realized that Max was just tiptoeing around me, and that he wasn't actually bothering me at all. When they realized that I just enjoyed getting him in trouble, they stopped coming to my rescue every time I screamed, so I just stopped screaming. After all, what was the point? It wasn't fun anymore if Max didn't get in trouble.



As a young kitten, I did many silly things to pass the time. I loved to chase the tail of my reflection on top of my mom's shiny brand new Yamaha grand piano. So it scratched the finish - big deal. I ran in furious circles until I got dizzy and fell off. Then I jumped back up and started all over again. Everyone thought this was hilarious. One day, mom and dad brought me a rod

with a string on the end. Attached to the end of the string was a giant yellow feather. It reminded me of the birds I liked to watch outside the window. To this day, it is still my very favorite toy. I would also rest on top of a big wooden sculpture of a mother cat and her kittens. I was completely in charge when I lay on top of these statue cats - just the perfect way a cat family should be.



I also loved to get tangled in the blankets on the sofa, and to dive into piles of laundry. I got inside of the students' music bags and they carried me around. I climbed into



their guitar cases and refused to get out when they wanted to put their guitars away. While I didn't like my brother and sister cats, I always loved mom's students. I watched their lessons carefully every day, and I saw how much attention mom paid to each student. I especially liked the sound of the big, new, shiny Yamaha grand and would sit under it during lessons so I could hear the music even louder. Have you ever sat under a piano when someone is playing it? The music is really loud!

After about six months or so, the other cats finally got used to me being in charge. They realized things were better this way. They let me be all by myself in mom's computer chair when they were together in the other room on her bed. They learned not to walk by me while I was sleeping next to mom so I wouldn't have to hit them on the head when they passed by. Though it took a while, they eventually understood I liked to eat all by myself, and they no longer tried to share a food bowl with me. Life was good.

Then one day after about a year, I thought to myself - maybe if I jump up on the bench and put my paws on the keys like my mom's students, I could play the piano, too. I jumped up on the bench of the big black piano and put my paws on the keys. "Plink, plink, plunk, plink." I discovered I could make beautiful music, just like the humans. It was easy. And it was fun, too.

The next thing I knew, mom and dad were standing next to me with surprised looks on their faces, and they kept telling me how special I was. I didn't know what the big fuss was? Of course I'm special. Didn't they already know that? "Lots of cats must play the piano," I thought. Then I noticed that none of the other cats were the least bit curious about or interested in playing the piano, except for Gabby, my nemesis. She liked to walk on the keys. Big deal. You call that playing? She is still very jealous of me. Although mom got her to stop attacking me by giving her a treat when I play. I still don't think she deserves it, but I am happy not to be attacked.



Soon I was playing every day. Although mom has two pianos, I like the Yamaha the best. The only time I play on the other piano is if someone else is playing the Yamaha. I also learned that I like the way the high notes sound much better than the low ones. I can play soft and loud sounds, too, and I can play more than one note at a time or just a single note. The black notes really sound cool! Before too long, I began playing duets with the students during their lessons. I like to practice every day because "Practice Makes Purr-fect!"



Soon, my mom's students were bringing their friends to meet me. Everyone wanted to take my picture with their cell phones, and I was happy to oblige. I have always loved having my picture taken. My dad says I am a real ham. Now this was what I had wanted all along - attention and recognition for being the smart, talented cat that I am. It was never about being "BOSSY!". It's just that I was born to be a star. And a movie star, too!

My mom's students asked my dad to make a video of me playing the piano and to put it on YouTube so they could show it to their friends. Mom and dad decided it would be a good thing to do so their niece in Wyoming could show it to her friends, too. Although they had never heard of Youtube, they decided to do it. They already had an online store so the students could get magnets or piano bags with my picture on it, and the students liked this very much. So if they wanted a Youtube video, why not? Little did they know, that my little video would get over 4,000,000 views. They also get letters all the time telling them how happy I have made the people who have seen me play. I wonder sometimes how many cats are in shelters who could learn to play the piano, and maybe they never get the chance because there are not enough homes for all of us. This makes me real sad.

You also might like to know that I actually made a cat friend. Who would have ever thought it was possible? You see, one day, mom and dad brought home a new kitten. His name is Rennie, after the artist Rene Magrite. I am named after the artist Leonora Carrington. Anyway, Rennie wasn't the least bit interested in being the boss. He just wanted to have fun. Everyone loved him the minute he came in the door, including me. In fact, he is my very best friend. We play and wrestle, and snuggle together. I never knew I would enjoy playing with another cat, but I do! Mom and dad seem very pleased.

Rennie doesn't seem to care about playing the piano like me. But he does like to climb inside the piano. My mom doesn't seem to like it when Rennie crawls inside, but it makes my dad and me laugh. Personally, I think Rennie is brilliant. I mean, we can't all be stars - someone has to keep the piano tuned!

I hope this has answered some of your questions.

Love, Nora

