



FERAL CAT HELPS COUPLE FIGHT ILLNESS

BY CHERESE COBB

In 2005, avid bikers Cheryl and Caleb Laughlin cycled down an unmarked, overgrown trail where deer ticks—the size of poppy seeds—burrowed under their skin, resulting in Lyme Disease.

Lyme, dubbed ‘The Great Imitator’ for its ability to mimic other diseases, weaselled its way into Cheryl’s brain, eating away at her hippocampus: the part of the brain where memories are stored. “The brain stuff hit me the biggest. One time, I had gone out for a run and then, all of a sudden, I had stopped and I had no idea where I lived. Here I was running parallel to my street...thinking ‘if I keep... walking down it... maybe I’ll see my house’.

A professional copywriter and self-proclaimed ‘word nerd’, Cheryl lost the ability to recall tons of words and consequently lost her job. The Lyme also devoured her joints. Bending for items on the grocery store’s bottom shelf set her knees on fire, causing her to “practically scream”.

For three years, doctors pumped the Laughlins’ bodies full of heavy-duty antibiotics. Then one summer day, sick and exhausted from their treatments, a “practi-

cally feral cat” showed up on their doorstep.

The couple named the wild, grey tabby with a crimped tail Mavic, after a French bike component maker. “Mavic was sophisticated. We called him our little, international man of intrigue,” Cheryl remembered. The couple began leaving cans of tuna out for him. “We quickly realised that he was working everybody in the entire complex. There were little tuna cans out beside everybody’s door.”

As their bond grew, Mavic began waiting for the couple every day on the sidewalk, walking them to their front door from at least two doors down. He also began popping in and hanging out during rainy and chilly weather with the Laughlins. Two years later, when they decided to move from their sardine-can of an apartment to a spacious house in Sacramento, Cheryl scooped him into her arms and took him with her.

“He was my first adult kitty. We never expected him to be such a

loving cat...He turned really domesticated,” Cheryl said. “He’d jump up and get in your lap. When I’d be on the couch and all my energy was gone for the day, he’d come up and curl on me. He usually had one of those four paw grips of death but when I was sick, he’d let me put my hand around his belly and rub it.”

Mavic was a territorial tomcat. “He did little military corners around our yard. He’d do a little turn and then go to the side of the fence and do another little turn,” Cheryl said. He scared off stray cats and took on giant rats, to let the Laughlins know that “he’s taking care of business.” As a thank you gift, he once brought the couple a tiny, grey field mouse. He pinned the wiggling rodent underneath his front paw. It was as if Mavic was saying, “This is your mouse... (I love you).” The

Laughlins tiptoed out of the house and released the mouse that was playing dead into a nearby field.

“I’d never have suspected that a kitty would keep me sane and loved through all the struggles of

Lyme...We’ve been in remission for seven years now” Cheryl said. After 17 years, in an ironic twist of fate, Mavic contracted stomach cancer. “We tried to repay all of his loyalty and love,” Cheryl said. The couple scraped together one thousand dollars, forgoing Christmas that year, and paid for the cancer surgery, hoping the doctors would get it all. “He rebounded from the surgery great,” Cheryl said. “He didn’t endure chemo. The doctors told us that he’d probably be super, super sick before he died. We wanted to let him go out being the cat that he is. He kept doing his thing until the end, four to five weeks after his surgery.”

Mavic converted the Laughlins into cat-lovers, teetering on ‘crazy cat lady’ territory with their two and a half cats. After he passed away, the neighbouring cat, Cuz, picked up his torch: performing military corners and ushering the Laughlins home. Learning their neighbours were unable to care for the Siamese Pygmy, they took her in and she became the one-half of the Laughlins’ trio. The Laughlins also adopted a long-haired Maine Coon and a Bengal-mix.

