

SOSIPATER'S LONESOME DUMPSTER DAYS

I'm not sure when we started feeding him. Six months ago... about. Just a sad feral kitty under a dumpster behind Sonic.

We'd go at various times, sometimes catching a glimpse of the shadowy phantom hopping out of a dumpster and skittering for cover, food scraps dangling from his mouth.

I figured that he (we assumed he was a he) would soon move on, a blackish sort-of-fluffy vagabond scrounging for nourishment. But he didn't, and we eventually developed a routine he adapted to.

After dark we ease a bowl of food under the dumpster--and wait. Eventually he'd slip up out of hiding and gobble, furtive eyes darting. Then he'd shrink back if we made the slightest movement toward his hidey-hole.

Tenderhearted, my wife suggested that we begin providing a generous dose of evaporated milk to fatten him up a bit. Most nights thereafter we'd find him already in position, awaiting his "meals on wheels." And he began acknowledging our efforts with low, mournful meows. Like, "Where have you been?"

After noticing the Bible verse where the Apostle Paul greets "Sosipater my kinsman," Mary quickly dubbed the pitiful waif "Sosipater." Though we never figured out whether it's pronounced Sosi-PATER or So-SIP-ater, he didn't mind either. Soon tiring of that long name, Mary began calling him Pookie. I guess that makes his official long-version name Pookie Sosipater My Kinsman.

One night when he didn't show, I wondered if some harm had befallen him or if he had finally migrated. But as I pulled into the heavy traffic, I spotted him dodging vehicles, heading toward our normal rendezvous point. And every evening that he wasn't there, I assumed the inevitable accident. How long could he endure such environmental hostility?

Our next move was obvious: Sosipater must be caught. We borrowed a safe Havahart cage trap and readied ourselves.

Sosipater must have sensed our scheme, for he didn't reveal himself on the appointed night. But just as we had loaded the cage into the truck, I spotted two familiar prickly ears peeking over a clump of weeds.

Surprisingly, though, he was waiting for me on my next attempt. I positioned the cage, set a bit of food inside--and waited. Nothing. I moved away. No response. But when substituted a smellier food, into the cage he went. When the door snapped him, I felt as if I had betrayed a trusting friend.

I delivered a fearful Sosipater to the vet the next morning to be neutered (he was a "he") and vaccinated. A return visit for worming came a couple of days later.

The first time I eased my hand into his cage, I expected pain. He lunged quickly toward my outstretched fingers--butting them with a scruffy head that longed to be scratched. Confined to the bathroom for several days, he slept in the sink. But he'd instantly leap up and demand to be rubbed and scratched whenever I'd come in. Within two days he mastered the litter pan.

At this writing eight days later, he's on his back in my lap, purring and fiddling with my red pen. Since Bruderman and Maudie Nell haven't yet adjusted to our boarder, hisses, spews and squawls regularly punctuate the quiet.

What's next? I know not. Sosipater has two needs: a home without competition for affection and a kind person to give it. These would provide a fitting end to his lonesome dumpster days.