

## Miracles Can Come Full Circle

### The Story of Sophie, the Skittish Snowshoe Siamese

**I**T WAS THE SUMMER OF 2001, and after a period of deep grieving for the three elderly cats we had lost the previous year, my husband and I felt ready to add a kitten to our remaining family of four. We called Jeffyne to let her know that we were open to adopting any cat she might suggest, and she told us to come on over. "I have one in particular in mind for you," she said, and explained that Timba, as she was then called, had already been adopted once and returned. The reason: She was painfully shy.

When my husband and I arrived at the shelter the next day, we would have been honored to take home any of the cats or kittens we met. I wish I could tell you that we felt an immediate bond with Timba, but the truth is, we loved everyone we saw. However, since Jeffyne had some serious concerns about Timba's adoptability, we said, sure, this one's fine. Shyness didn't seem like an insurmountable problem to us. How shy could she be?



Well, incredibly shy, as it turned out. Sophie, as we had named her, was overwhelmed by the bedroom in which we first placed her, so we put her in the guest bath instead. She was terrified of even that much space, and we ended up creating a mini-nursery inside a cardboard box that we then placed within the bathtub. We thought we were making progress toward acclimating her there, but one day she suddenly tore past us, bolted out of the bathroom, and landed in a foreign country (the den), where she utterly panicked and began trying to dig her way into the side of the den sofa.

**M**y husband simply said, "I think she's showing us where she wants to be," and headed for his toolbox. That very afternoon he created a cubbyhole within the sofa for her, and Sophie gratefully popped inside and began purring. From that point on, the couch was her bassinet – Sophie of the Sofa, we called her – and we tried to socialize her as best we could. Petting her meant stretching your entire arm into the sofa until finally her silky head came forward to meet your fingertips. Naturally, trust so hard-won is all the softer! But we worried about her, of course. How were we ever going to give her some semblance of a normal life?

Luckily, our alpha cat, Joey, decided to rescue us – and Sophie – at that point. A handsome mackerel tabby, he simply commandeered her one day and wouldn't take no for an answer. He reached into her sanctuary and gave her a good grooming, whether she liked it or not. He communed with her by napping outside

her little entrance, so the two of them could purr in unison. And soon it became clear that she was growing to love and trust him. One day, gathering up all her courage, she leaned out to chew on his ears, and later she even jumped on his back for a ride down the hall. With the help of Joey's unique combination of tough and tender love, Sophie was finally, miraculously, prepared to take part in the life of the household.

More than four years have now passed, and Sophie has grown into a beautiful blue-eyed girl. She has remained an extremely high-strung cat – she hides for hours if the doorbell rings, and we have good friends who have never seen her. But she adores her patient big brother Joey, and following his example, she is calm and even playful with all her older siblings.

**T**hose same years have brought our wonderful alpha cat to the threshold of old age. Joey walks more slowly now, and he seems to feel the cold. He has heart and kidney problems, bouts of asthma, and arthritis in his hindquarters. In the face of these challenges, sweet Sophie tends to him faithfully, coaxing him to eat, and, as if sensing his pain, curling up against his back to warm and comfort him.

With grateful hearts, we often watch them dozing together in the winter twilight, and we realize what a tremendous gift Joey and Sophie have been for one another.

He was her first, best love.

She is his last, best love.

And without a doubt, they are each other's finest miracle.

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Adapted from Sophie's story in *The Well-Lettered Cat* by Porter Evans  
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