

Boston and Chicago

This is the story of Boston and Chicago, five-month kittens, who have never lived inside of a house are tricky to socialize, but we did it! These guys were particularly difficult because they were afraid of the wand toys (a typical way to draw out shy kittens) when they were in the shelter.

It was early October when three very under socialized 5 month old kittens were surrendered to the shelter. Two of the kittens were terribly frightened, but could be handled enough to get their vaccinations and flea control upon entry. The third kitten was unable to be handled at all. The two that could be handled were named Boston and Chicago and the hands-off kitten was dubbed Austin. Austin was separated from the other kittens to get more individualized attention and Boston and Chicago were kept together as a pair to socialize together. Unfortunately, Austin continued to act aggressively to people, so he was neutered and went out as a career cat with another feral buddy. Boston and Chicago then embarked on a very slow track to adoption because even though we were able to handle them when they first came in—they were nowhere near ready to be adopted.

During the first at the shelter week both kittens remained hidden under the towel draped chair in their dog run –now cat room. Boston appeared more relaxed than the Chicago who stared at us with big dilated eyes and ears defensively pinned back to her head. Neither kitten would play or take treats from us and would just sit quietly under the chair ever watchful.

During their second week at the shelter both kittens allowed some pets by the cat behavior staff and were comfortable enough to exchange blinks with us although they still hid under their cubby or under the towel draped chair. Boston detected a smell that urged her to overcome some of her fear of us and began licking a Churu treat from our outstretched hand. Chicago though was not convinced and wasn't comfortable enough to lean forward toward us and check the treat out. As the days went on that week, Boston continued to improve and enjoyed ear rubs and full body strokes. She even inched forward some in box toward us! Chicago started to feel more comfortable in her surroundings and began to explore her room while Chicago continued to hunker down in the safe cubby. The kittens were often seen curled up together in their cubby and Boston always retreated back to Chicago whenever someone walked into their room. There was some talk about separating the kittens, but they clearly sought comfort from each other and we knew they should be a bonded pair.

With a little encouragement Boston allowed herself to be picked up and placed on a lap. She would stay for 5 or so minutes purring and then slip off back to Chicago. This was very encouraging so we asked Suzanne to find an experienced foster for the girls. Suzanne ultimately found three different foster homes for Boston and Chicago! In their first foster home the kittens found a very deep hiding spot under a futon where they hunkered down. The futon had to be flipped over, so they could not hide under it. This foster home only lasted one more week because a friend with a dog was coming to visit the home. They did show some improvement and since these kittens had never lived inside before, getting used to the sounds and smells of a house was important. The second foster home worked diligently with the kittens but needed to take a necessary last-minute trip. Luckily one of our most experienced foster homes had an opening and kept the kittens until they were adopted on December 19th. But that's not where the story ends.....

On December 20th we received a frantic call from Boston and Chicago's new guardians. That morning the door to their "safe room" was left open and the pair escaped to the kitchen downstairs. Apparently, there was some construction work going on in the kitchen and the kittens were able to get through a very small hole and behind a very deep cabinet. Since there was no way to reach in and retrieve the frightened

kittens the new guardians cut a hole large enough to pass food and water to them. The frightening sound and vibration of the drill only escalated the fear factor with the kittens so the guardians decided not to make the hole any bigger. We talked by phone and text and discussed the options. First and foremost, we wanted to make sure that the kittens felt safe—and they were safe—just not in the appointed “safe room” upstairs. We didn’t want the kittens to feel threatened and we didn’t want the kittens to be chased down throughout the house (they might not ever forgive them for that!) So, after calming down themselves, the guardians realized that they could take it slow in the kitchen just as they would in the safe room upstairs. They would work on getting the kittens acclimated to their presence, getting to know their voices and then coaxing the kittens to come out of their chosen hiding place with wet food, treats and toy wands with the eventual goal of returning the kittens back to their safe room. Treats and the food were now placed just outside the cut out of the cabinet, litter boxes were brought into the kitchen along with their beds and toys.

The guardians would visit them often in the kitchen for the next few days pairing the food and treats with their presence. They sat in front of the opening with the wand toy and although the kittens did not come out to chase it, they did track the toy with their eyes. In the evening the guardians could hear from the living room the sound of kittens investigating the kitchen. In the morning when the guardians checked on the kittens, they saw evidence of play in the kitchen, food eaten and the litter boxes used. They were happy that Boston and Chicago felt at ease enough to come out of hiding even if it was only when the guardians were upstairs asleep. The guardians set up night cameras and were amused when they saw that the girls had ventured into the living room to play with mice toys, they had left for them. The camera showed the kittens investigating the house, making the trek upstairs to the safe room to find more food at night. After a few days Boston (always the braver one) was returned to the safe room by way of enticement, food and petting. That just left Chicago.

The guardians were worried about Chicago since she was separated from Boston. On Christmas Eve morning we made plans for the guardians to pick up a Trucatch feral trap from the shelter. We specifically wanted them to use a Trucatch as that particular type of trap has a very quiet closing mechanism. Unfortunately, Marin Humane’s Trucatch traps were out so one was brought from home to be used. We sprayed the trap with Drama Trauma and gave instructions on how to set it up in the kitchen. That night Chicago was reunited with Boston in the upstairs safe room. Finally! All was calm with the kittens in their new home.

BTW, Boston is now Eleanor and Chicago is now Michelle (yes-named after First Ladies of the White House). Things have been moving along well at their new home. Their safe room is also an office workroom so they have had a lot of company during the day. They now come running to the door meowing when breakfast is served, they get petted while they eat and Michelle (Chicago—the shyest one), naps on a cushion under the desk by her guardian’s feet. The kittens love chasing the laser beam around and are very happy to lick Churu treats off their fingers at the end of the game. At night the guardians can hear the kittens running around playing with each other and often watch their antics on the security camera videos. The latest update...

Now when one of the guardians sits down on the floor and starts petting, they push the other out of the way so they can get their chins scratched! Purring the whole time.

Next step for the kittens and the guardians? Opening the door of the safe room again. This time though all the nooks and crannies in the entire house have been sealed up and special cubby beds have been strategically placed throughout the house. The kittens will always have the option to retreat to their safe room, but if they feel the need to hide in the new areas—there will be safe and easily assessable places to do it.