



A Tribute to Patch and Her Kittens: The "Patch 4"

PJ, Champ, Pete and Hudson (L to R)

Patch, a feral female cat, hated us trappers. We knew that and couldn't help but love her for it. She beat us at every turn, avoiding - and often helping her kittens avoid - two different kinds of traps, assorted nets, and the ultimate cat trap, the uniquely-designed "Deck Platform Surrounded in Chicken Wire With a Custom Dual Door" trap created especially for Patch. She basically chuckled at our efforts and went about her business as she always did - on her own terms. She knew our cars, our voices and our faces - and made sure that wherever we were, she and her kittens weren't. She made us nuts. She made us respect her. She made us sit in the rain and cold at 7:00 on Sunday mornings trying to catch her. She made some darned nice kittens, despite our attempts to get her to do otherwise.

Since Patch always stayed as far away from us as possible, imagine our surprise one day when she walked from under the deck near her colony and just sat, looking at us, trying to tell us....something. Surprise was replaced by amazement when a tiny kitten followed her out, and Patch led him straight to us. She not only had never brought us a kitten before, she'd never let us see any of them before, moving them any time she thought we were getting too close. We thought she brought us her kitten, whom we named Champ, because he had a deformed front leg and Patch, superb mom that she was, knew he would have an especially tough time surviving in a feral colony. And Champ was a champ, adjusting immediately to being adored and pampered and basically made much of, as was his due.

The amazement continued when we got a call two mornings later saying that Patch had been trapped. We were ready to break out the champagne and celebrate! But, when being honest, we had to admit we had a bad feeling. After three years of masterfully eluding us, Patch's simply walking into a trap was too easy. So I guess we weren't especially surprised when we got a call from the vet: Patch was extremely sick and unlikely to survive spaying; the vets wouldn't even consider putting her under anesthesia in her condition. She had a serious upper respiratory infection, was bleeding from her nose, had severe dental problems and a gum infection that was causing her teeth to fall out, and she clearly hadn't eaten in a very long time.

We spent a lot of time on the phone with the vet and the vet techs and, after talking with the colony caretaker, we jointly made the difficult but appropriate decision to have the vet euthanize Patch to keep her from suffering a lingering death. The colony caretaker was devastated. The other trapper/rescuer was pissed. I made the phone call - and then sat at my desk and cried. But we did what we had to do, for Patch's sake.

Our sadness was mixed with the great joy of knowing Champ. This tiny, sick, deformed kitten, who had known no other humans before, loved everyone immediately. He was so little, he couldn't eat or eliminate on his own, yet he'd look up into your eyes with such love and reach up with his good paw and his stump and hold your face so he could gaze into your eyes longer. We were sure he was a miracle – Patch's last, amazing act.



Well, we *thought* Champ was Patch's last act until two days after her death, when a military veteran involved in the care of the colony walked into the colony caretaker's office with another tiny, black and white kitten wrapped in his sport coat. Of course! That's what Patch was trying to tell us when we were on the deck! Here was yet another miracle kitten: How did a kitten too small to eat by herself survive TWO nights all on her own, without her mother? Such an amazing kitten needed to be named after her amazing mom – Patch Junior became PJ.

One of the young women working at the caretaker's office walked by the deck to return the sport coat to its owner only to see yet another tiny, black and white kitten looking up at her, crying – later aptly named Pete, after the wonderful veteran who helped all the cats and kittens. Stunned, she jumped into action. As soon as Pete was safe, this young woman, dressed up for work, went back to the deck and crawled under it on her belly, through the dirt, garbage, and remains of animals that had been dinner for Patch and her babies over the years, all the way back to the farthest corner to find the fourth and final kitten, Hudson. The Patch 4 were together again, as safe as their mother had hoped they would be.

Ultimately, I think Patch brought Champ to us not because he was deformed but because she knew she was dying. She wanted us, the people who had taken all the kittens that had come before him, to care for him and to find the others, by so clearly telling us where they were. On some level, she knew that, wherever we took her babies, we took good care of them. She may have hated us, but I like to think she respected us as much as we respected her. And when it all finally got too much, and she was too tired, she made her final leap of faith and walked into a trap, trusting we'd do what was best for her. I believe we deserved her trust. I hope she believes we did, too.

The Happy Ending(s)

With the invaluable help of AnimaLovers, the Patch 4 were all adopted to wonderful, caring, forever homes.

Champ now lives with a woman who works with the disabled, and her other cat, who Champ loves dearly. As his new mom says, they were meant to be together.

Hudson went to a fabulous couple who have several cats already but just couldn't resist Hudson's charms. Naturally, he fit in and bonded with his new feline siblings (and his new people) immediately.

Pete was adopted by the colony caretaker, who had such an amazing bond with and attachment to Patch, as her final connection to the mother cat she loved so much and cared for so well. Pete lives with her and her other cat; appropriately, a rehabilitated feral.

PJ, the intrepid little girl who first alerted us to the existence of the additional kittens, has become a beloved member of a family that includes a young dog (who she loves to pieces). PJ's new mom is so taken with PJ that she wants to add another cat to their family.

After hearing the Patch 4 story, PJ's mom kept PJ's name – a loving, fitting and lasting tribute to Patch, the most respected, smartest, most frustrating, best feral mom cat any of us have ever – or will ever – know.