

OK Corrals!

Disclosures on enclosures

► **By Faith Maloney**

Sue Strunk has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. But for the time being, she's still able to stay at home, where she lives with her beloved cat, Max, a big, fluffy, former stray.

Sue's daughter, Gigi, is a veterinary pharmacologist, and on one of her regular visits to her mother, she noticed that all was not well. Max had stopped using the litter box, and her mom didn't seem to notice or care that much. Gigi, however, knew that this would only get worse – and that even if Sue didn't notice, the landlord most certainly would!

Gigi called Best Friends for advice, and spoke with staffer Julie Coon. She wanted to know whether we could take Max here at the sanctuary. She'd thought of trying to find him a new home, she explained, but there was another thing, too: Max, a former stray, had tested positive for FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus), and a lot of people are nervous about adopting an FIV cat. (Their fears are greatly exaggerated, but that's another story ...)

Julie suggested another option – building a special cat enclosure for Max, where he could spend most of his time and where Sue would be able to spend time with him whenever she wanted to.

Gigi thought this was a splendid idea, and set about persuading her mother's landlord that this could be a solution for all concerned.

Gigi studied the cattery information and designs we sent her, saw some ideas she liked, and decided to adapt one of them so that it would be suitable for North Carolina weather. The final design took two days to build, during which time Max went to the veterinarian for a medical checkup – dental cleaning, blood work and his vaccinations.

"I built most of it by myself. And believe me, if I could do it, anyone can!" Gigi laughed. "My husband Mike helped me with the tall parts. He's 6' 3" and could reach the roof.

"Because we are prone to ice storms where we live, I made a solid plywood wall on the side where the prevailing winds blow. I also made half of the flooring into a raised wooden deck so that Max can keep dry in all weather if he wants to be outside. And now that it's warming up, I've put a roll-up bamboo shade on the sunny side, so that we can give Max and my mom more shade if we need to.

"We don't know how long it will be before my mother has to go into a supervised nursing home, so I made sure that I can move Max and his cattery to our home, when that time comes. I secured the framework against the wall by the bathroom window, so that he can come and go whenever he chooses. I put a mouse toy hanging from the ceiling of the habitat, and my mother tells me he plays with it ferociously. Mom said he hasn't played this much in years, so he seems to be really enjoying his house.

"We put a chair out there, too, so that on nice warm days my mother can sit out there and cuddle with Max and enjoy the fresh air. The house is clean, the landlord is happy, and my mom gets to

share her life with Max for a while longer."

And a note from me: If Gigi ever wants a change of pace from her veterinary work, she'll be able to moonlight as a cattery designer and builder!



A special enclosure also proved to be a godsend for Deanna. When her husband was stationed in Hawaii, she took in a stray that tested positive for FIV, and was extremely aggressive toward other cats. Being cat savvy, Deanna knew that FIV is hard to transmit if the cat is gentle, but a cat who picked fights can be a potential danger to her other cats, since FIV is transmitted mostly through bite wounds. (That's why it's more common in unaltered stray toms.)

When she called Best Friends for help (asking if we could take the cat!), we suggested a cattery, and Deanna loved the idea. It worked so well that when her husband was re-assigned to a base in California, she built another one at her new home. Indeed, Deanna was so inspired by the whole situation that she now volunteers in cat rescue and helps other people solve their cat problems, too!

One more story. Eugene and Stacey inherited three older semi-feral cats from a relative. They knew their chance of finding a new home was limited, but Eugene was deathly allergic to cats. Taking the cats to be put down was not an option, so building a cat enclosure was a great solution for them, too. Because the cats couldn't ever be let in the house, their cattery was more of a stand-alone setup.

They bought a standard 10' x 12' utility shed, with good-sized windows, from one of the home improvement chains, making sure that the floor was well insulated while the store was putting the shed together. Once in place in a nice section of the backyard, they insulated the inside themselves, and ran power and water in so that Stacey could do all the cleaning of litter pans and bowls in the building and not have to bring any of that into the house.

To create the outside area, they went back to the home store for some of the standard kind of panels that they sell for dog kennels, and used a gate for an entrance, some security fencing along the bottom to keep other critters out and the cats in, and finished it all off with a chicken-wire roof.

"It's such a fun place," said Stacey. "I decorated the inside with shelves and fun stuff for the cats. And I often just pop in and sit with the cats and catch up on my reading. It's become a little sanctuary for me, too."

If a cattery might help solve a problem at your house, too, we offer some guidance and links to websites that have plans or ideas on how to put one together. Contact bfnetwork@bestfriends.org for further information. 🐾