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Siberian husky plays foster mother to kittens

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OAKLAND — When Sarah Kidder adopted a 12-year-old female Siberian husky named Tamerack last year, she knew she was getting a loving, friendly playful dog. But she never suspected that Tamerack had a hidden talent: as a foster kitten raiser.

It all started last month, when Kidder, who lives in the Grand Lake area, was taking Tamerack for a walk.

"About a block away, I saw this beautiful, blue-eyed, chocolate point Siamese adult and two little black kittens playing in a driveway," she said. "I was like, 'Why would those little kittens be there?'"

After talking with the neighbors, Kidder found out that the family who lived there had moved away and abandoned the Siamese — which she assumed was the mom — and the two kittens. So she decided to take them home.

"It wasn't safe for them to be out there. And we don't need any more feral cats in the neighborhood, because they would keep on breeding. Plus, they were just ridiculously cute."

That's when Tamerack unveiled her hidden talent.

"She was like, 'Oooh, kittens!' I was a little concerned at first because she was so excited, but then I realized she was excited because she wanted to mother them. She would follow them around and lick their heads and make sure they were OK. After 24 hours, they started following her around.

Whenever she sat down, they sat down, too."

By the next day, Tamerack was sharing her food with her little feline friends.

"Even when she was gnawing on a bone, she'd let them munch on it, too. I just sat there, slack-jawed, for a week."

Now Tamerack and her kittens are inseparable. They sleep together, eat together and play together.

"She understands that she's a lot bigger than they are, so she's very gentle with them. If they're gone too long, she searches for them and hangs out wherever they are. If I'm looking for them, I just look for her because I know she'll be where they are."

She named the mommy cat Choco Kitty and the kittens Roxana and Stetaria, after Alexander the Great's wives. (Kidder is the product of a classical education.)

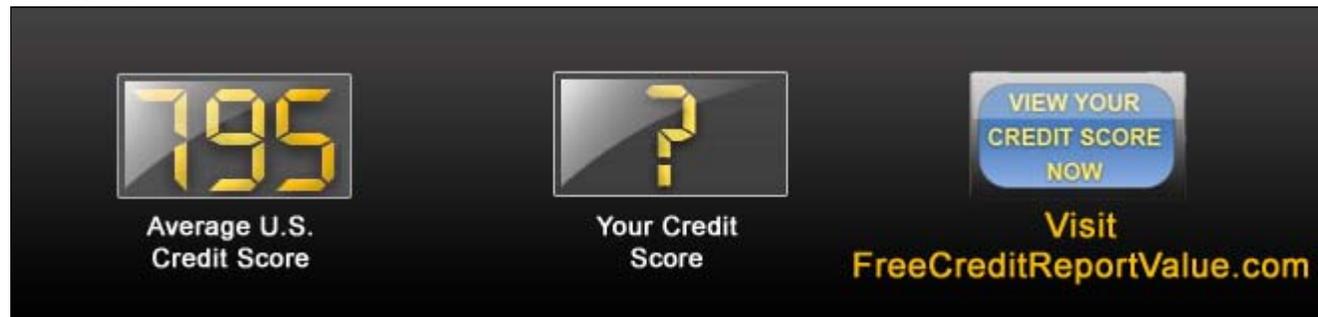
The next order of business was to get Choco Kitty and the kittens fixed, so Kidder called Island Cat Resources and Adoption, which arranged and paid for the surgeries.

That's when Kidder got another surprise: Choco Kitty isn't the kittens' mother. He's their father!

"It's not unusual for adult male cats to be a great guardian for kittens," said ICRA's Gail Churchill. "When his owners moved away, he must have realized the kittens were helpless and took it upon himself to be their guardian."

It's not unusual for large dogs such as Tamerack to be kind to kittens, as Churchill can attest. Her golden retriever, Rosie, was in the news in June for fostering homeless kittens, too.

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"Gentle, sweet dogs will take to anyone," Churchill said, "especially young ones."

Now that they've been spayed or neutered, all three cats are available for adoption.

"They're all incredibly sweet and friendly," Kidder said. "I'd love to adopt them myself, but I can't. It wouldn't be fair to my cat, Enkidu."

But what will Tamerack do when her kittens are adopted?

"I'm going to take her up to the snow as a reward," Kidder said. "If she's still missing them after that, I'll guess I'll have to start fostering more kittens."

To adopt these cats, either singly or in combination, call ICRA at 510-869-2584 or visit www.icraeastbay.org . Reach Martin Snapp at catman@sfo.com .

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