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## Cat starts stay in St. Mary's with weeks-long adventure

*This 'n' that*

Chief Alan Nelson and his wife, Amy, moved up from Jacksonville, Fla., to St. Mary's County at the end of February so that Alan could start his job at Patuxent River Naval Air Station.

Arriving in Lexington Park on Feb. 27, they planned to stay at the Days Inn hotel on Three Notch Road for a week until their home was ready.

"It was late. We were exhausted," Amy said of that first night.

Somehow, as they were getting settled into their hotel room, one of the Nelson's two cats slipped out the door. Sookie, a little black cat that the Nelsons adopted from a foster family at a Petsmart about a year and a half earlier, was lost.

The couple searched and for hours. Nothing.

Looking for Sookie became a daily task for Amy, who, even after the couple moved into their new Lexington Park home, haunted the area around the hotel and nearby businesses, searching for the beloved cat.

"She's all black and very little," Amy said during a phone interview. "She's super sweet ... but tough, too."

For the next six weeks, Amy devoted her time to looking for a job and looking for Sookie. She did research online about



Submitted photo Sookie relaxes at home back in Jacksonville, Fla., before her family moved her to St. Mary's County.

advertisement

An advertisement for McCrea Heating &amp; Air Conditioning Services. It features a blue and yellow banner with the text "Celebrating 76 Years McCREA Heating &amp; Air Conditioning Services". Below the banner, it says "Get a free ten year parts and labor warranty with the purchase of any new Carrier system. Limited time offer! Call now for a free consultation." There are logos for Energy Star, a Carrier air conditioning unit, and the Carrier logo with the tagline "turn to the experts". At the bottom, it says "Serving Maryland for over 75 years (240) 289-2945".

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finding lost cats — learning that they tend to stay close to the area where they are lost. She used an animal control trap nightly in areas around the hotel, but only caught other stray cats and a couple of opossums. When her time with the borrowed trap ran out, she went out and bought her own. She put up fliers, talked to area veterinary offices. She even hired a business from Baltimore, Dogs Finding

Dogs, which sent a track dog down to the area and track the cat. The dog seemed to catch Sookie's path and seemed most interested in an area behind a dental office.

On April 5, she found Sookie in the trap just at the area indicated by the tracker dog. "I just could not believe it," Amy said.

In the cage, Sookie had one of Amy's socks that Amy had left out during an earlier attempt to trap her. Apparently, Sookie had been carrying around the sock that retained the scent of her owner.

Amy took Sookie, still in the cage, straight to VCA St. Mary's Hospital in Lexington Park to get her checked out. "She had lost a lot of weight, but otherwise, she was fine, said Laura Belleavoine, a registered veterinarian technician at the office, who was tickled by the story and contacted The Enterprise.

Sookie weighed about 6½ pounds after her adventure, down from her regular weight of 10 pounds.

Amy took Sookie to the Nelsons' new home and, once they got through a little rocky period when Sammie and Sookie got reacclimated to each other, the whole family is settling in just fine.

"Everybody thought I was completely crazy," Amy said of her quest to find Sookie. "Nobody can believe that I found her. I just knew that I would."

The couple had adopted Sookie to be a friend for their first, much larger cat, Sammie, who during the couple's moves seemed to be becoming a little neurotic. Sookie proved to be the perfect match. "She didn't put up with Sammie bullying her," Amy said.

She thinks about her little cat fending for herself all those weeks and points to Sookie's tough streak as the reason she made it.

"I think she does have some street cred," Amy said, referring to Sookie's unknown past. She said it is fortunate that Sookie is the one who got lost. Left on his own out in the wild, "Sammie wouldn't have known what to do," she said.