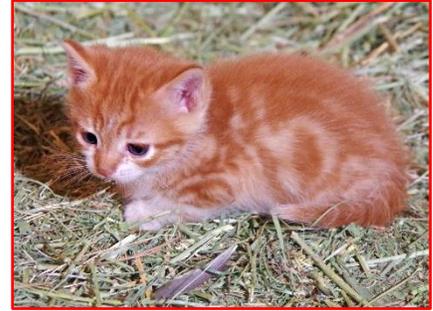


Little Barn Kitten...ranch antidote by Tara

When Mike has a spare moment from ranch work, like when he is at the barn waiting for the cowboys that he works with or at the end of the day, he often goes up into the barn loft to practice roping on a rope dummy that is on a bale of hay – they call it ‘throwing a few loops’.



That is what Mike was up to late last summer when he noticed that the white spotted barn cat had a batch of kittens that were peeking out from a small stack of hay. Several days later they were hanging out near the stack and he saw them scurry back into their hole between the bales when they saw him. Now about every time he went into the loft he would see the kittens and sometimes see them all nursing their mother before they ran and hid.

There were five kittens, two were yellow striped and three were calico. There had been two tom-cats around since winter, one big yellow tabby and one black tiger cat. It appeared as though this batch of kittens were sired by the two different toms. It is strange how one batch can have two different fathers, making some of them half siblings.

Mike noticed that one little yellow kitten was much smaller than all the rest, about half their size. This kitten was always the last one to make it into their hiding spot when surprised by Mike. Then one day he noticed that the little yellow one appeared rather weak and was very slow making it to the hay pile, Mike quickly snuck up and caught him with his bare hands. Usually you do not want to catch a wild kitten without leather gloves on because they can bite and scratch quite fiercely when they are frightened and not yet used to people, but this little one did not put up much of a fight - he was definitely weak and so very small.



Mike went to the house and got a small bit of milk in a syringe that he usually used for doctoring calves and took it up into the barn loft. Sure enough, there were the kittens and as he approached them they ran under the hay, all except the little yellow that seemed too weak to care. Mike held him in his lap and squirted a few drops of milk into his mouth, soon the kitten licked at it and drank a few droplets.

At first Mike easily caught the weak kitten and fed him like this a few times a day, being careful not to feed him too much at a time, knowing that when an animal is weak and short on food you can hurt them by feeding too much at first- they need worked up to bigger meals.

Mike told me about this kitten and how small he was and I went up with him to see the tiny one – yes, he was half the size of the others that were keeping their distance. I sat with Mike while he fed him, he was so cute and I suggested we call him ‘Tiny Tat’, that was alright with Mike. He carefully stroked the kitten with his large fingers and said ‘Tiny Tat’.

After about a week, Mike got him to drinking out of a small pill box. We thought he was getting some milk from his mom but just not enough, maybe the other kittens drank faster and ran her out of milk or maybe he had a hard time sucking. Whatever the case, Mike thought Tiny Tat would have died if he had not helped him out – he had been so weak.



Soon Tiny Tat was growing stronger by the day. He even started getting in Mike's way as the daring little kitten would follow Mike around in the loft, getting under his feet and in the way of the rope. Mike had to put him in an old opened chest while he practiced, then he would take him out and pet him to say goodbye.

As the weeks went by, Mike kept bringing Tiny Tat a bit of milk and also solid food. I would feed him for Mike when he was working away from the ranch. We got to where we felt feeding him twice a day was enough. Sometimes we would find him eating a mouse that his good mother brought him - she is the best ranch cat and catches many mice all around the ranch. Tiny Tat grew very strong but continued to be much smaller than his siblings, his growth must have been stunted from his rocky start.



After a while, the little kitten would look down from the barn loft stairs when he heard someone coming. One day as Tiny Tat heard Mike open the door to the barn loft stairs, he worked his way clear to the bottom of the stairs to meet him; this was not easy because the stairs were as tall as Tiny Tat was long. Tiny Tat was very brave and had a lot of will power, between his will power to live and Mike's will power to help him, Tiny Tat became a very strong kitten with a lot of personality.

Now when Mike feeds the barn cats where he usually does at the bottom of the stairs, Tiny Tat is listening closely and is the first down. He gets the piece of food that he wants and growls at the big kittens and other cats, even the big tom cats, if they come near him. The little fellow is very convincing for the others stay away from him and his chosen fare.

Now when Tiny Tat hears someone in the barn ally he comes out to visit where he is so small among the horses and cowboys. He has even walked right under the horses! We have to lock him back in the grain room so he does not get stepped on while everyone is saddling up. Then from there you hear a little meow, meow. We will be glad when Tiny Tat gets a little bigger so that everyone and the horses will be able to see the fury little fellow better, he is such a Tiny Tat.

