



The Saga of Rat Mama of San Juan Capistrano

The Saga of Rat Mama begins in August 2019. It all began when The Ark was notified that there was a cat in the parking lot of Ralph's Market (now Target) in downtown San Juan Capistrano. We were very worried because we knew that Ralph's was closing down soon to become a Target store and there would soon be a lot of heavy construction going on. Several calls came to The Ark from people who often saw a mostly white cat running around in the Ralph's plaza area (many times carrying a rat in her mouth). We originally starting referring to her as Ratatouille, but then one evening when two Ark volunteers saw her outside VMSG (a veterinary group) with a large rat hanging from her mouth, we "officially" named her Rat Mama! And so, began The Ark's quest to capture Rat Mama and save her from the dangerous outdoor life on the streets.

The Search for Rat Mama began in earnest starting September 2019. We found out that Rat Mama had a litter of kittens that she was keeping in the Ralph's gated storage area. A devoted Ark volunteer began stopping by every evening after work to leave cat food for her and begin what would become many, many attempts at trapping her and her babies. Also during this time, Ark volunteers found and successfully trapped another homeless kitty, a beautiful Russian Blue, who had been living in the plaza bushes for two years and was being fed by various plaza people. That lucky fur-baby was happily adopted by a wonderful family, thanks to The Ark.

The nightly feeding and Search for Rat Mama continued on unsuccessfully through November 2019. On several occasions Rat Mama and some of her kittens were spotted but they were always too fast and impossible to catch. A volunteer even climbed over Ralph's wire storage fence in pursuit of them, but all attempts continued to fail!

In late February 2020, The Ark got a call from Denault's Hardware store, in the same plaza, letting us know that there were some cats in back behind the store. We managed to capture two older kittens there which we were certain were from Rat Mama's litter during the previous 2019 Fall because they looked like their Mama. Those two lucky kittens were also adopted out by The Ark.

Then, in March 2020 Rat Mama was sighted in the plaza area and she appeared to be pregnant again! A trap was set for her and we waited and hoped this time she could finally be captured. A few days passed and, lo and behold, Rat Mama was trapped by an Ark volunteer and taken to the volunteer's home! But then it was discovered that she was no longer pregnant which meant that her newborn kittens were now hidden back in the plaza area without a mother to feed and care for them. We knew that they would surely quickly die without her! So we immediately decided to release Rat Mama back to where she was trapped so she could go back to her kittens. On March 12th she was released back with the hope that she would lead us to her litter.

Thankfully on April 9th we found all 6 of her kittens ("The Hardware Litter") hiding behind Denault's and fortunately were able to catch them all. But no luck again in catching the elusive Rat Mama! A few days



-continued on next page



later, on Easter, we put two of the kittens in a trap and used them “as bait” to hopefully lure Rat Mama back inside the trap. It worked! She was caught a second time and moved to a cage in the garage of a volunteer in the San Juan neighborhood of Marbella. The Ark was overjoyed and immediately booked a vet appointment for her to be spayed. Alas, Rat Mama managed to escape the garage before her vet appointment! We were sure we had now lost her forever.

Two months later, in June 2020, a kitten was brought to the local shelter after having bitten the person who had found her. Our longtime devoted Ark volunteer saw her at the shelter and knew by the look of her that she had to be one of Rat Mama’s kittens. Rat Mama had to still be in the area so the Search for Rat Mama began AGAIN!

Summer 2020 came and went with no Rat Mama in sight, and then in November 2020 we received a call about a cat with a litter of kittens that were living outside on La Calera Street in San Juan (this street is located under the bridge between Marbella and downtown San Juan). The cat was Rat Mama!! We were able to get the kittens but, again not Rat Mama. Good homes were found for the kittens (“The Rat Litter”), but the Search for Rat Mama continued on. Again, a trap was set on La Calera Street, and on November 23rd we unexpectedly captured Rat Daddy, the father of Rat Mama’s many babies. Rat Daddy, who looks almost identical to Rat Mama, was then taken to the vet and neutered. Because he is a feral cat and not socialized to people, we released him back into the neighborhood to enjoy the rest of his life. But we still needed to catch Rat Mama!

And then a miracle happened on New Year’s Eve, December 31st 2020. Rat Mama was caught again in a trap we had set for her, and she was very pregnant, ready to give birth any day in fact! She was taken to a longtime Ark foster’s home garage in San Clemente and put in a special “double cage” in the hopes that she couldn’t escape and also have enough room for the new litter to be born and for her to be comfortable. On January 5th Rat Mama gave birth to 5 kittens, but sadly one was stillborn. Her four healthy babies, known now as “The Final Four Litter,” will be going to their new adopters when they are 8 weeks old.



On January 31st 2021 the elusive Rat Mama, mother to many beautiful kittens over the years, was finally spayed and released back into her La Calera Street neighborhood, to live happily ever after with her boyfriend Rat Daddy.

And so The Search for Rat Mama has come to a happy ending, and now The Saga of Rat Mama & Rat Daddy will continue on in San Juan Capistrano, thanks to the many devoted Ark volunteers who gave of their time and love for these special feral felines!

