

Cat, Missing Three Months, Found Alive Inside a Wall

Harley, who was lost after a townhouse fire, was severely malnourished.

Harley, a 3-year-old, black-and-white feline that had gone missing after a fire at a Columbia, Md., townhouse three months ago, was found last week stuck behind one of the homes walls. Harley's ordeal started Feb. 8, when two boys playing with matches behind the row of townhouses set the homes on fire, according to Howard County police. Part of the roof belonging to Harleys owners, the Hoffmans, was destroyed, and most of the structure sustained water damage. Harley disappeared, and the Hoffmans were forced to move out as contractors rebuilt their home. The family held out hope for Harley, one of three Hoffman cats, setting out food and litter for about a month. Eventually, they gave up. The day of the fire was the last anyone saw of Harley until Tuesday, May 16, when a restoration crew was tearing out the walls. The cat who once weighed at least 10 pounds, according to his owners apparently had crawled up into the ruined ceiling and then fell eight feet, landing between a vent and the wood frame behind the kitchen wall. When he emerged, the once-hefty Harley weighed less than 6 pounds. He spent three days at the Baltimore Veterinary Emergency and Referral Center in Catonsville, where doctors diagnosed him with severe malnutrition and nerve damage. Veterinarians are unsure how long Harley had been in the wall, but said he could have survived there for months, especially if he was able to catch rodents. Posted: May 22, 2006, 5:00 a.m. EST