Episode Title:
Casper: The Littlest, Luckiest Kitten at the Chicago Marathon

Episode Summary:
On our season finale of Daily Paws Presents: Warm Fuzzies, host Karman Hotchkiss sits down with Sarah Bohan of Boston, Massachusetts. Sarah is an avid runner and this year decided to try her hand (er, feet) at running the Chicago Marathon. She had trained for this moment for months and when the big day came on Oct. 8, 2023, the weather conditions couldn’t have been better for the 26.2-mile race. Sarah was determined to clock a personal best, but a funny thing happened on her way to the finish line: she caught sight of a tiny kitten crying on the side of the road. For Sarah, it was a “no brainer” as to what to do next. Listen in as she shares one of the most heartwarming tales we’ve heard all year.

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Episode Transcript:

Music: Daily Paws Theme Music begins

Karman Hotchkiss (VO) INTRO:
Hello there! Welcome to Warm Fuzzies, a podcast from Daily Paws. I’m your host, Karman Hotchkiss. This is the final episode of our season, and we couldn’t think of a better sendoff than sharing with you one of the most heartwarming and unique fuzzy tales that we’ve come across. It features today’s guest, Sarah Bohan of Boston, Massachusetts. Sarah is a runner and this past October she competed in the Chicago Marathon. She had been prepping for this race for a year, and just her luck, it was a near perfect day in Chicago for the 26.2 mile race—sunny and in the low 50s. But something even more special was in store on the course for Sarah and it wasn’t clocking her personal best—although she was on track for that too. Right around mile 20, right when runners are feeling the pain of this long course, and doing all they can to push their body through to the finish line, Sarah spotted a tiny, white and black fur ball off to the side of the road. Just keep running? Or stop? Sarah didn’t have to think twice about what to do next.

Karman Hotchkiss:
Here, we have Sarah Bohan with us today. Hey, Sarah!
**Sarah Bohan:**
Hi, Karman. How are you?

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
I'm great. Where are you today?

**Sarah Bohan:**
I'm in my apartment. I live in Beacon Hill in Boston. I'm very excited.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
We're really pleased to have you. Although you're in Boston-

**Sarah Bohan:**
Mm-hmm.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
... this story that we're going to talk about takes place in Chicago, right? During the Chicago Marathon.

**Sarah Bohan:**
You are correct.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
All right. So, tell us what took you to Chicago? Why are you running a marathon in Chicago?

**Sarah Bohan:**
I've been a runner my whole life. I've always enjoyed it. I've never done marathon distance running though. That is a whole nother animal. And so for me, I started to get a little bit of the marathon itch. And historically, hearing friends who run Chicago, it's one that you can get in pretty easily with a lottery. And so I was like, "Maybe I should just sign up for this one and see how the training goes." So, I put my name in the lottery. I didn't get in. I was like, "Okay, I'm visualizing myself in Chicago. What other ways can I get into this race?" And when I looked on the website, there's so many charities that you can run for and it gives you an entry to run the race. And the one that stood out to me was TEAM PAWS because it's an amazing animal welfare organization that rescues cats and dogs and rehomes them. It's one of the largest in Chicago and their mission just spoke to me. 'cause I have two rescue cats of my own and I've grown up with cats and dogs my whole life. So, I'm like, "Okay, I'm gonna raise money for this charity."
Karman Hotchkiss:
And This is your first marathon?

Sarah Bohan:
This was my second marathon.

Karman Hotchkiss:
Your second marathon. Okay, great.

Sarah Bohan:
But when I signed up for it, I had never run one before.

Karman Hotchkiss:
Got it. Got it.

Sarah Bohan:
Yes, because it's a whole-year process. You have to be really committed to running a marathon when you sign up and raise money for charity over a year (laughs). So I'm like, "All right, I got to do it." So, this ended up being my second. My first was in May of the same year. So, when I got to the start line, "Okay. Perfect weather. I'm ready." And then I find a cat, mile 20 (laughs).

Karman Hotchkiss:
The marathon is 26 miles, right?

Sarah Bohan:
Mm-hmm, yes.

Karman Hotchkiss:
So you're at mile 20-

Sarah Bohan:
Mm-hmm.

Karman Hotchkiss:
... and how are things going up to that point?

Sarah Bohan:
You know, I was feeling great through mile 14., I started to feel really tired three quarters of the way through. So I'm starting to slow down a bit, refreshing my legs. I know that from talking with people who run many marathons, mile 20 is when the race starts. You have a 10k left and that's when you need it, kick it into gear and just start going, right?

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
Really concentrate on the run.

**Sarah Bohan:**
Really concentrate. Exactly, exactly. You have to tune inwards. You have to be really mindful of the fact that your body's hurting. You're not really thinking of a lot of things aside from the pain that your legs are in every step. And you're just like, "Okay, I have X number of minutes left, I have X number of miles left and I'm almost there." And you can hear the crowd getting more excited. And so I started to have that mindset shift of like, "All right, I gotta tune in now."

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
All right, I'm tuned in. I'm all in on this. I'm gonna finish this race. How was your time at this point?

**Sarah Bohan:**
I was hitting my goal pace. Again, it's a world major so the crowd just carries you through this whole race to begin with, which also means that you're pushing pace a little bit. You're starting to get tired more quickly because of how exciting it is. So, I'm hitting mile 20, and because I started to get a little bit more tired trying to refresh my legs for the last 10k, I moved over to the left side of the course where I'm running in the bike lane which allowed me to see this cat on the side (laughs). And then the race completely shifted for me. I n-, would never have expected this.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
So describe, describe the cat as you see it.

**Sarah Bohan:**
You know, it's funny because at this point in the race at mile 20 you're not really able to process a lot of things, because you're starting to have tunnel vision. And I say it's funny because when I saw this little white, fluffy thing, I immediately knew it was a cat. It wasn't (laughs) some kind of something on the side of the course. You see a lot of things. People are throwing water bottles there. There's a lot of trash and garbage. And I think we had gone underneath the highway. So it was darker. It felt like a tunnel, um, as it was just a bridge overhead. So, I don't know how I immediately saw that this was a cat, because it was just this white, little fluffy, tiny, tiny thing.
Karman Hotchkiss:
So it's a kitten even, not a-

Sarah Bohan:
Oh my gosh.

Karman Hotchkiss:
... a cat. What kind of shape was this kitten in? What was he doing?

Sarah Bohan:
From a distance, I was on the left side so I had seen this cat probably from 10 feet away. And he was at this point, I don't even know if it was a boy or girl, but he was just running along the side of the sidewalk, pushed up against the wall. Really looks so scared. And with the volume in the tunnel of people yelling and, and, echoing of the runners, I see this cat cry but it was silent because it was so loud. But he was also so small that he was just looking around seeing how many people there were. I've never seen a cat look so terrified in my life. And it broke my heart (laughs).

Karman Hotchkiss:
Yeah, it's breaking my heart right now-

Sarah Bohan:
I know (laughs).

Karman Hotchkiss:
... just, just thinking about it. And so, what do you do? You're on a race. You're on a mission here.

Sarah Bohan:
Mm-hmm.

Karman Hotchkiss:
But kitten, what happens next?

Sarah Bohan:
I remember slowing down. I didn't fully pivot to pick this little one up because I just was trying to process like, "W- Why is there a cat here?" I tried to look around like, "Is there, is there someone who's, who's lost their cat? Is there a mom here? Like where's the other ... where are
the kittens," 'cuz I know that there's probably a litter. Um, I remember I see this woman who's walking along the sidewalk underneath the tunnel probably cheering on one of her friends or family members and she notices the cat too. And I'm like, "Oh, okay, good, someone's going to help the cat." And she looked at it and walked right past it. And, then I just, at that point, I'm like my, my cat mama instincts kicked in. I was like, "Nope, this, this is my baby now." And so (laughs) while I was walking over I just remember thinking, if I stop now, I am not finishing this race in the way that I intended in terms of prepping and training and visualizing what I need to do to get that time and to cross that enormous beautiful finish line." And I was like, "Sarah, you're gonna give that up if you stop." And it was a no-brainer, like this was bigger than that at that point. The race wasn't about me, it was about this little baby who's hunkering down in a pile of leaves. And, even if I wanted to finish the race, there was no way I could without helping this little one.

Daily Paws Presents: Warm Fuzzies Theme Song Fades In

Karman Hotchkiss (VO): Right now we're going to take a quick break, and when we come back, we'll hear what Sarah did next with that tiny kitten, plus who else came to their aid.

Daily Paws Presents: Warm Fuzzies Theme Song Fades Out

(AD)

Daily Paws Presents: Warm Fuzzies Theme Song Fades In

Karman Hotchkiss (VO): Welcome back to Daily Paws Presents: Warm Fuzzies.

Daily Paws Presents: Warm Fuzzies Theme Song Fades Out

Karman Hotchkiss: 
So, you pick the kitten up?

Sarah Bohan: 
Yeah, I go over. And the closer I got, the smaller I realized he was. Because I've had rescue cats of my own, the adoption age is around 13 weeks or so and they're a couple pounds. I thought he was one pound. So I go over and I'm trying to (laughs) make sure he doesn't run into the crowd or doesn't run away from me. And then this other runner, I still have my headphones and the music's blasting like I'm still partially in race mode. This other runner who I have never met, right (laughs)? She comes over and crouches down with me. And she's like, "Let me help you." So she helps corner the cat so I can pick him up. And at that point, I picked him up very gently. So, I kind of just scooped him up and then I introduced myself to this other runner. And she's
like, "We're, we're gonna rehome this cat. This is what we're gonna do." And I'm like, "But you're sacrificing your time." So, we just start walking along the course and we're both just processing. This cat looked like in rough shape. It was clearly a stray

Karman Hotchkiss:
Yeah, this is not a cat that wandered out, you know, from his warm, safe home somewhere. He's, he's been living on the street. So you're, you're walking the race now. And you've got this cat in your hands. And-

Sarah Bohan:
Mm-hmm.

Karman Hotchkiss:
... you're just saying, "Anybody want a cat (laughs)?"

Sarah Bohan:
(laughs) You know, to put it plainly, yes (laughs). So I'm, I'm walking along the course with Gia, the girl who had stopped with me. "So, she's like, "We're, we're gonna find someone along the side of the course to take this little one."And there's so many people on the course. So, we have asked every single spectator who initially just looked at us and was like, "What's going on?" We're like, "Do you, do you want a cat (laughs)? We asked about 15-plus people. I don't even know. I think everything was blurring at this point. I'm thinking about how he doesn't have food hi- his eardrums must be just so overwhelmed because of the crowd and the noise and now he's in some s-, in a stranger's arms.

Karman Hotchkiss:
He's maybe never been held before.

Sarah Bohan:
Right, exactly. I remember thinking to myself before we actually did find someone to take care of the cat, I was like, "I might just need to drop out of this race and take this cat to a vet in a city that I don't know." I was like, "I think this is it for me (laughs). I think we're done (laughs). We're done. This is our whole ... This is our job. This is our experience now."

Karman Hotchkiss:
But you didn't, you didn't end up dropping out of the race?

Sarah Bohan:
No.
Karman Hotchkiss:
So, what happened next?

Sarah Bohan:
So we're walking along and we continue to ask every spectator and everyone's like, "I don't think we can," or, "I'm not sure how to take care of a cat." And so we ended up walking past Andrea Maldonado. Well, I know her name now. But before knowing her name, she was just a compassionate stranger on the course who was so enthusiastic. She stepped right forward and was like, "I am a pet lover myself. I have two cats of my own. I'm a mom. I will take this baby."

Karman Hotchkiss:
Like she just gave you her resume.

Sarah Bohan:
Immediately (laughs). Immediately. She's like, "Yes, yes." She says, "I will take him." Excited as I was, I started to get very protective. And I've known this cat for all of 11 minutes because that's how long the mi-mile time was (laughs). And I remember asking her about five times. "Do you promise to care for this cat? This cat needs a vet. Do you promise me that you will love and care for him?" Like I don't know this woman and I don't know this cat and now he is my whole heart. I'm not gonna give him to just anyone because I felt like my responsibility was also to give this cat a good home even if it wasn't with me. And she's like, "I promise." And I felt from the way that I handed her the cat, I, I knew just in that handoff, in that exchange, just she picked him up so gentle, like she cradled him in the exact same way I was. And I was like, "Okay, that gives me the security that I needed to be able to feel like she can care for him." So in that moment, that exchange was just so loving. And she just looked me in the eye and was like, "I will take care of him."

Karman Hotchkiss:
And so then you're ready to finish a race.

Sarah Bohan:
"Oh right, I still need to run the rest of the race (laughs)."

Karman Hotchkiss:
What was I here for again?

Sarah Bohan:
I know. I know. And I guess to put this into context a bit too, I was going into this race a little bit injured. And so my physical therapist has told me to never stop, squat, sit down or walk because it will exasperate my injury. And I squatted down to pick him up and I stood back up and I'm like,
"I think my race is over (laughs)." So when we started to run again, Gia and I were both like, "Wow, this is," we were elevated by the joy and the compassion and that whole interaction. We were in awe. We were in shock. We're like, "This just happened. This is such a beautiful experience." And I'm glad that she thought to even grab her phone to take pictures because I was just in crisis mode. So we were talking, "Did we just experience this," as we start to jog again. And we're like, "Wow, our legs really hurt (laughs)," 'cause we just walked for a mile and our body was like, "All right, that's, that's your whole race, you're done. We're done (laughs)." And we ended up walk-running the rest of it because of, because of how hard it was to start back up. We ended up supporting each other throughout the rest of the race.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
So, you get almost to the finish line.

**Sarah Bohan:**
Mm-hmm.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
And, um, maybe you guys had one more, uh, piece of aid to give out before you got there. Uh, tell me about that a little bit.

**Sarah Bohan:**
Yeah. I remember at mile 25, I looked at my watch and I told Gia like, "Gia, if we, if we run the rest of this race, if we just push through, we have one mile left, we could Boston qualify." Just to have that timestamp of going under 3:30, 3 hours and 30 minutes, it's just ... it feels, i- i- it's just such a beautiful feeling. So I'm like, "We can make it."

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
It's an incredible accomplishment.

**Sarah Bohan:**
Right. "We, we can make it. We can make it." And she's like, "Okay, let's, let's go for it. Let's try. And as we're running, I notice this girl who - if you've ever seen anyone run towards the end of the race and their legs give out, it's a scary thing to witness. She was trying to stand up. She was so close to the finish line. I'm looking at the time. I see that we're at.. I think it was 3 hours 29 minutes and 30 seconds. And I'm like, "We can do it. We can make that 30-second mark. And this girl, uh, just start stumbling. And I'm like, again, same experience I had with, grabbing the cat. It was just a no-brainer. And so I went over and put her arm around me. Gia did the same thing. basically same experience as Casper where she just stopped, sacrificed her race. Immediately. No question. Immediately, went over and put her other arm around her. And we walked-ran her through the finish line. And we didn't even think about our time. We ended up connecting with her afterwards and she's like, "I wouldn't have been able to do that without
you." I heard a saying a while ago if you've ever, if you ever feel, any question in humanity, just go and spectate a marathon. And it rings true not only for the spectators but for the runners as well. It's a time where we're all experiencing the same thing together. And it's about that shared experience and that human connection that is bigger than just the time. And it's bigger than hitting that goal.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
That's beautiful. What was your final time?

**Sarah Bohan:**
We did 3:31, three hours and 31 minutes.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
Pretty amazing time. I mean, no matter what, but like with the “and, I stopped to rescue a cat and a human being.”

**Sarah Bohan:**
I know (laughs).

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
You should get, uh, extra medals for that or something.

**Sarah Bohan:**
Well, I get to share this story with you now.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
So, the race is over.

**Sarah Bohan:**
Mm-hmm.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
What, what happens then? like what happens? Your life is kind of changed a little bit on a whole bunch of fronts here.

**Sarah Bohan:**
Yes. And this wasn’t something that I processed immediately after. I was more concerned about getting water, a medal and a banana (laughs). So, that was my focus at that point (laughs). Gia
and I had exchanged a couple of words about the race. And she was going to meet up with her family and..

Karman Hotchkiss:
Yup.

Sarah Bohan:
so I dropped my bag off at the TEAM PAWS check-in. And I'm like, "Okay, I need to go get my bag 'cause I need to grab my clothes and I need to change out of my race shoes." And so, I just walk in and they're like, "Oh, congratulations." I'm like, "You wouldn't understand what I just experienced." Gia had thankfully shared the pictures of the exchange with the cat with me. So, I was like, "This is just what happened. Oh my gosh." And then I ended up walking away and I'm messaging my friends. And then all these people just come over and genuinely like they're like, "We need to know more. Can you share the pictures with us?" I'm like, "Oh, yes, I can." not thinking anything of this. And then after the race, I meet up with my friends and I get a call from TEAM PAWS. And they're like, "Can you get on an interview with CBS tonight?" I'm like, "What's going on (laughs)?" I mean, I'm just trying to process all of this and recover my legs.

Karman Hotchkiss:
Eat my banana.

Sarah Bohan:
Right. And they're like, "We want to share this story." And I'm like, "This is a story to be shared?" And they're like, "It is."

Karman Hotchkiss:
So, You get interviewed by CBS. Um, you know, as you do after you run your second marathon. Um, how did you end up getting reconnected with the woman who accepted your cat in the middle of the race?

Sarah Bohan:
Yes. This is where social media is just this beautiful experience. So, it was posted about with the picture of the handoff of me giving the cat to Andrea. And her cousin commented and was like, "That's my cousin," and tagged her in the post. And I remember just scrolling through because I was getting notifications since I was tagged in the original post on Instagram. And then I looked and it was Andrea. And I recognized her immediately like just by her profile picture on Instagram and I messaged TEAM PAWS. I was like, "I think I found the woman who (laughs), who I gave the cat to." And I remember messaging her and just saying, "Oh, my gosh, I was the crazy cat runner, uh, who gave you this stray cat." And she's like, "Oh, my gosh." And so we start connecting through that. Gia and I were already connected through social media. I ended up
connecting with, um, Alex, the girl that we had helped walk through the finish line. So, we're all connected on social media now because of this shared experience that ended up going global.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
What did you learn about the cat who now has a name?

**Sarah Bohan:**
Oh, yes. His name is Casper. And I was able to connect with her and TEAM PAWS did, too. And so, PAWS Chicago actually had given Casper his first checkup and covered the bill for that. So, this was all this beautiful, interconnected experience. She named him Casper because he has a little ghost face on his head where it looks like he's all-white cat and he has two, um, black or dark gray spots and like a little ghost mouth on his head and she just sent me that photo of him. And that's why they named him Casper. It was also like in October around Halloween. And just seeing the photos of how his personality has just come out in this beautiful way. He's sitting with her, her youngest son. He's sitting on the lap of her husband. He's nuzzled up in the arms of the dog. I think they have a Golden Retriever is what I remember. You can barely see him but you can see him eating food next to their older cat who he looks so small next to (laughs). He's just ... He has been so loved in this family. And is thriving and, and engaging with every single family member, the pets and the humans alike. And just seeing that and seeing just this story unfold of this tiny little cat who was crying and scared and shivering in a tunnel to now (laughs) sitting up on the lap of her husband watching TV with him and sitting on the toy like the toy truck of her son as she's taking a photo and nuzzled up in the, in the arms of this huge Golden Retriever (laughs). To be able to have seen this whole story come full circle has just been amazing.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
He is living his best life. So, what's your what's your next, running, uh, plan?

**Sarah Bohan:**
(laughs) Hopefully I don't have to stop to save any more cats along the way. (laughs). But I will be running Boston in 2024. So in April. And after that, TEAM PAWS, because of how the story has unfolded, they gave me a free entry for Chicago next year. So, I'll be running Chicago 2024. And I'll be able to run for TEAM PAWS again.

**Karman Hotchkiss:**
That's awesome. I would say you, you accomplished quite a lot that day even if it wasn't some of the things you thought you were going to do when you got up that morning. So, thank you for joining us. Thank you for sharing your story. Thank you for saving Casper and making the world a better place for pets and people.
Sarah Bohan:
Thank you.

Karman Hotchkiss:
It was great to have you.

Sarah Bohan:
I'm grateful to have been able to share this story. Thank you for being a platform for that.

Music: Daily Paws Theme Music Fades In

Karman Hotchkiss (VO) Outro: Thanks for joining us for our season finale of Daily Paws Presents: Warm Fuzzies. Be sure to follow us on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen. And we'd love your feedback. If you could rate this podcast and leave us a review, we'd really appreciate it. You can also find us online at dailypaws.com/WarmFuzziesPodcast. We hope you enjoyed this series as much as we did meeting and speaking with each of these fantastic humans and their furry friends.

Music: Daily Paws Theme Music Fades Out