



Catnip Mice Slaves

On February 4, 2013, I went to Charlottetown to pick up supplies to take over the catnip fund raising project for the Cat Action Team. You know how it all got started (*see CAT TALES, July 2011 on CAT web page*) with Francine Labbe doing this for over 12 years. I got to meet her for the first time on that cold winter day in February. What an amazing person she--is getting the catnip mice project started and keeping it running while working full time. She showed Marlyn Gallant and me how to stuff and close with the tail on. She stills orders our catnip so we never run out.

I had been sewing some mice for a year or so: Ron Curtis would drop off some already-cut bodies to me, and I would sew ears and then sew the bodies together. Very simple: then he would pick up and deliver to Francine.

Well, I can assure you it was not that simple. I had bodies cut, and material to cut, yarn to crochet into ears and tail. Then the ears and tails had to match to material because the cats like ears to match the tails.

They had to be stuffed with good organic catnip, making sure we put the right amount into each mouse. Now the tails had to be sewn on and then bagged and tagged, the catnip mice were ready for sale.

At first I was very excited, but it soon wore off when I looked at the yarn--I don't care to crochet. So I had to get some help as this was going to take a lot of time. Called my good friend Norma Brown who, at that time, looked after her husband who had suffered a stroke a few years before. She would come in for coffee on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I showed her a crocheted mouse tail and asked "can you crochet?" From that moment on, she became a mouse slave.

Ron, bless his heart, came in and showed me, my husband Brian, and Anne MacPhee how the cutting was done. Brian started cutting and Norma was doing ears and tails. First bag she brought to me had over 1100 ears and tails all bagged individual and amounts indicating how many were in each bag....awesome.

I did the sewing and another lady, Sandra Arsenault, did sewing too but worked full time. It was a busy time trying to get 300 to 400 mice done each month. Brian and I would stuff and then I would sew tails then bag and tag till the amount was done for that month. Then Brian went to work and I was left again to sew, stuff and bag with no cutter. Again Norma stepped up and said she would stuff. So it was sew bodies, give to her to stuff, and deliver back to me, and so on.

We had quite the production going on and the mice took over our lives. We did this for most of the summer. Then Norma offered to try cutting -- lo and behold she was a natural at it!

Once we got the right material cutter she was off and cutting. I bet she cut and stuffed in her dreams.

You have to always be a month ahead so Paula Connolly can have mice to deliver from, Kensington to Souris--another amazing lady.

I will say that the Cat Action Teams is so lucky to have these two wonderful ladies. They go above and beyond.

In September, we had to start planning for Christmas time. We had to have at least 900 mice. This was our first big order, but it worked great because we were ready for it. We are very pleased with our first year as Slaves to the Catnip Mice. Now we are moving into our second year and we hope to increase our production by about 500 mice.

We have to sneak this into our regular amount and not press the mice slaves too hard. Special thanks to Norma Brown, Brian Williams, Marlyn Gallant, Sandra Arsenault, and Travis Gallant for putting tags in bags for me.

I do know I will miss names of people who still do some sewing for Francine

Francine sent 100 mice to her friend in Quebec (she has done that for several years). Another lady bought 30 mice to send to Fort MacMurray in Alberta.

We made about 3000 mice in 2013.

. *Kathleen Williams*

I was aware of the CAT for quite a while as, years ago, I had trapped some strays and had them neutered and looked after them.

About a year ago, Kathleen asked me over to her home and showed me what she was doing and asked me if I could crochet and gave me a bag of yarn.

Later, she asked me if I would stuff some heads, when I brought those back she gave me a bag of catnip and said “you may as well finish stuffing them”. That bag of mice went back and forth from her house to mine. That started me stuffing. Then I got into cutting and now sewing. When we have extra time we go gather quilt scraps, so I can have something to do in my spare time. Then we do our delivery from Summerside to O’Leary. The catnip mice have taken over my life, and I love doing it.

Norma Brown

