

Animal Tales

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Ever since Judy's cat Frisky presented her family with a litter of kittens, I had wished for a cat of my own. No amount of begging would soften up my mom. She thought that I was too young to have any pet other than a turtle or goldfish. Believe me I had both. My friends and I used to drop in at the Humane Society on Bayview Avenue just north of Scott Street, and longingly check out the dogs, cats and various other rescued animals. Finally, when I reached grade six, Mom agreed to let me have a cat to my great excitement.

We walked over to the Humane Society and examined every resident in the cat department. A sleek little grey tabby caught my eye, so I opened her cage and took her out. She snuggled into my arms and right away I knew she was the one for me. I named her Smokey. We took her home and she settled in right away.

Soon it was time to have her spayed and I was worried sick about her all day at school. The vet told us to bring her back in a week to have her stitches out. When that time came, my dad was sitting at the dinner table and said "Pass her over here, I'll take the stitches out myself. Bring me some small scissors and the needle nose pliers." Horrified, I ran to get the surgical instruments. Dad cradled the cat on her back on his lap and had all the stitches out in a few minutes. I must explain that my dad was a lineman for Ottawa Hydro, not a veterinarian or a tailor. Eventually my mom and dad grew to love Smokey just as much as I did.

Purebred dogs were seldom seen in my neighbourhood. The Humane Society was close by, and stray dogs or cats were usually taken in by one family or another. My friend Mike's family had two dogs, and his dad used to say "When you need a dog, one just shows up."

Some of the neighbours had more exotic pets than the run-of-the-mill dogs and cats. One summer morning I was awakened by an unfamiliar sound coming through my open window. In our next door neighbour's yard their little daughter Linda stood guard over a large washtub with six ducklings floating around, quacking loudly. They brought the orphaned ducklings from their cottage, where, apparently the mother duck had met with some misadventure. The ducks would be returned to the lake as soon as they were strong enough and able to fend for themselves.

Another family nearby rescued an injured fox kit which stayed with them for some time. To their surprise, the fox got along remarkably well with their elderly beagle, but they eventually returned him to his territory.

By far the most unusual pets were owned by Shelley and Eric, two of the teenagers on my street. These two friends went shopping at Miracle Mart on Carling Avenue and discovered that the pet department sold rats. They couldn't resist, and they each came home with one. Shelley's rat was ginger and white, and she named it Gemini; Eric's was black and white, and called Aquarius. They carried their rats everywhere, usually on their shoulders.

Shelley discovered quickly that her rat was female after Gemini gave birth to five babies. When my mom heard that she said quickly "Don't you get any ideas." But I was very happy with Smokey, who lived for nineteen years.