

Cats and Dogs

I've had a chequered career with pets. I really liked the hamsters and a low maintenance guinea pig we had.

Growing up, my family had three Siamese cats; not very loving and much more smelly than my liking.

Presently, we have a grand dog, a schnoodle (a mini schnauzer and mini poodle cross) who tolerates me. She visits often and sometimes is an overnight guest. She will jump up in my wife's lap if ever there is an opportunity, but seldom will come to my lap.

My experience with dogs is certainly mixed. After reading Kurt Vonnegut's book, *God Bless You Mr. Rosewater*, I was enamoured with the idea of a dalmation dog. I got a dog from the newspaper pet ads and made a first mistake of acquiring an as yet untrained adult dalmation dog.

In the middle of the winter, I tried to train this female dog by standing with her outside in -30F weather. I would stand for as long as forty minutes, urging her to "do her business" to no avail. Once inside, the dog would proceed to defecate on the kitchen floor. After a month and one half of total failure and frustration, I called the former owner, who took the dog back.

My next dog experience was with a delightful black lab, Henry, in a house we shared with his owner. Henry was very friendly and would meet and greet students headed to the university, down our sidewalk. He had many friends who would give him a pat on their way to class. He also chased the cars that were coming down the avenue on their way to university parking. He would bark at the car's front wheels all the way around the corner. Unfortunately, he had suffered an injury in this pursuit and went to the vet to get stitches in his shoulder. He would chew at the injury and the vet suggested we cut a hole in a bucket and fix it to his collar so he couldn't gnaw at his shoulder stitches.

Unfortunately, some of his sidewalk buddies thought the bucket was a joke and removed it, so we taped a note to the bucket, explaining that it had to stay. Henry was placed at a farm when his owners finished their university degrees. Unfortunately, he took delight in chasing sheep and was put down for his trouble.

We looked after a scrabbly black terrier, Roby (short for Robespierre), who spent his days having the run of the backyard, on a chain attached to the clothesline. His favourite toy was a blue bone that he loved to fetch in the yard.

Roby was tearing back and forth on his chain and a hazard to me carrying fired pots from my kiln in the back yard to the studio. The owners returned from their sabbatical and I would visit Roby at their house.

Now, for the cats..... My first wife, Mikell, wanted a cat to keep her company. I nixed the idea, probably because of my "Siamese experience", but one day when I returned, I met Sarah, a cat who reciprocated my dislike for her right from the start.

By this time, I had abandoned my PhD dissertation to become a potter, making pots in the basement and glazing them in the kitchen near the sink.

Coming home from teaching my class at the university, I discovered one of the glaze buckets tipped over and followed the path of small footprints throughout the house, to find Sarah on the bed, licking the wet glaze off her fur. Next came my experience of washing the poisonous glaze off the cat in the bathroom sink.

Years later, the cat continued to give me the “stink eye”, whenever I would visit her at my ex-wife’s new house. Sarah lived until age 17 and never liked me for a single day.