

Richard Vasey – My animal kingdom

‘Can I have a dog?’ Richard pleaded to his parents.

Mother dear was knitting as usual, feet stretched out on the pouffe and father had his head inside *The Daily Telegraph*, the broadsheet held widely open. Mother dear, unable to make the decision deferred to father who harrumphed. ‘Who’s going to take it for a walk each day?’

Richard continued trying to persuade his parents but ended up with a tortoise called Harry! He spent most afternoons after school searching for Harry, who frequently escaped into the garden, intent on broadening his diet.

Mother dear inherited a blue/grey cat called Smokey, rescued from being put in a dust bin, with seven siblings, to be gassed in the school chemistry lab. Smokey was a wild child who up ended the daily routine by attacking the armrests of the settee and choosing a different location for his toilet each day. Smokey would only eat pre-cooked coley; the fishy smell would transcend the neighbourhood.

Father had no time for pets, he spent his youth shooting rabbits using a 410 shotgun at the family weekender, quaintly called ‘Stoob Muc’. He sometimes rode out to the cottage in winter on an antique sleigh drawn by a Shetland pony, animals you see, had to ‘pay their way’.