

Monica [Signature]

*De lightful to read
Polishing is needed however.
Your writing is like unpolished
GEMS*

My Animals

Thanks

Of the numerous pets my family's owned, the most predominant has been the dog, always loyal and loving, ready to lick your face into a smile. The earliest one in my memory was a Cairn Terrior named Tiffany. We had Tiffany when I was about four and Ashley three, but our happiness was bound to end because, like so many Potts canines, Tiffany was hit by a car. At that tender age, Mom felt that we had to be protected from the truth. So she wove us a tale of a little boy in a wheelchair, who'd always dreamed of having a dog like Tiffany, and drove by our house as Tiffany was playing in the yard. Their eyes met; it was love at first sight. So the little boy came wheeling to our front door to beg mother to sell the dog, but Mom, in a moment of benevolence, gave it to him for nothing, and the dog romped off to a world of love with her new owner. We said we were happy, that it was the right thing to do, but we loved our dog, even to the point that we would rob a little boy in a wheelchair of his happiness. From then until our toddler minds moved on, whenever we drove through town, it was with our little heads leaning out of the window screaming, "Tiffany, Tiffany, come home!" in the hope that the beloved pooch would come bounding from some hidden yard to come home to us.

The first pet I ever bought for myself was a rabbit. The Wal-Mart in Conway, before it became the Supercenter, had a pet center. One Saturday I stumbled upon my true love, a black and white splotted bunny, Dutch rabbits, I think they're called, and set my mind to own it. It's name would be, appropriately, Dutchess. So when I returned home I set about the business of earning my three dollar per week allowance, plus "bonuses" for "helping" my dad, and, after a month or so, begged my parents to return so I could claim my Dutchess. Only a lop-eared albino stood her place, but, after all that hard work I was going to return with a bunny, and her pink eyes and long, droppy lobes grew on me. Unable to choose a better name, I stuck with Dutchess.

Through her youth I kept her in an aquarium in my room that I cleaned out daily, and let her roam through the house for hours. One day I cleaned out my closet, and in the back, among old shoes and fallen shirts, I found millions of perfect brown spheres, and Dutchess was moved outside. Dad bought a huge wire cage that we hung from a tree in the back yard, and we used to lie on the grass together, and I watched her nose twitch as she munched on the cowslips. *Dutchess has no cowslips! Too bad, I think* We bought a pink harness for her so I could walk her along the sidewalk, keeping her nails in check, her strong back legs finding it hard to hop along the smooth surface. Later, we moved the cage to a spot under the ~~the~~ Magnolia tree, and Dad built a stand and connecting wood hutch, where Dutchess was joined by Poochie, Ashley's white rabbit (since she always had to match me,) and Ginny, Ashley's guinea pig, (since she always had to outdo me.) *I like this line!* The two rabbits became very protective of Ginny, but they were ^{too} large for her, and one day they hopped too strongly and poor Ginny was flipped over and broke her back. But my interest in rabbits waned, as my interests in all things do, so one day we sold them to a very eager little boy, who thought our rabbits the most beautiful bunnies in the world.

It's been a coincidence in our family that most our pets have been female, and Dad has always been hopelessly outnumbered. But Grandma, working in the garden one day, heard a foreign chirping sound, and looked up to discover a cockateil ^{ie!} sitting on her gate. Grandma ^{was} afraid that the poor thing, whom she surmised to have escaped from some domestic cage, ~~was afraid it would~~ wouldn't survive in the wild. Armed with a laundry basket and piece of plyboard she trapped it, and called Mom to ask whether she was in the market for a cockateil. We bought a nice, big cage, went over and got it, and upon having it inspected were told that it was most likely a male. Daddy, being overjoyed at this new ally, decided to endeavor to find his name himself, and informed us all a week later that it would be Alfred. But once christened, a pet's name cannot be changed, and, though we grimaced at first, it grew on us. In vain we tried to teach Al how to talk, even read a book on how to do it, but I guess we weren't determined

enough. It did imitate the Whippoorwill and a few other birds, lessons from it's little foray into the wild, so we decided to teach it to whistle songs. Courtney set her keyboard by his cage, programed it to play "Happy Birthday" at the touch of a button, and it was everyone's job to hit it as they went by. ~~The lesson also required that we covered the his cage with a towel, so it could concentrate, which probably lent to it's stubbornness not to learn.~~ Together we watched the "America's Funniest Home Videos" in which a cockateil was taped whistling the Andy Griffith theme and Alfred was caught, so he learned the "good looking" whistle, which was success enough for us. Not much later we found Alfred writhing on the floor of his cage, very painful and sad to watch, but with tears in our eyes we watched him till the end, which came mercifully soon.

He was choked, we believe, by a sunflower seed, Alfred's untimely death was heartbreaking to us all, and he has a little piece of ~~consecrated~~ ground in our backyard, one of the first to be buried at our new house.

But the prevalent pet in our household has been the cat, and though the *permanent* members have numbered less than the dogs, millions of kittens have passed through here. When Ashley and I were little Mom and Dad bought a cat and had her *spayed* spayed. Less than a week later she was hit by a car. The second attempt ended with the same result. So they became superstitious, very detrimental ~~to~~ the health of the Potts cats, and every one that has made their home here has been very, ah, fruitful. I've never really liked cats, although kittens are some of the cutest creatures on earth. When they get older, though, I think they aquire a great deal of independence and coolness. I think they must be far more intelligent than any one of us really suspect. From lofty perches they seem to stare down and laugh at the follies of humanity, calmly waiting for the *- great line!* preordained Felinarchy to evolve into being. I have never had a cat cuddle up to me and purr, save the kittens who mistake me for their mother. The closest our long occupant, Mittens, ever came to me was one night when she crawled onto my chest, and I awoke staring into her green eyes, her wet nose pressed against

mine. I scared her away, and she didn't come near again. The late Mittens was the mother of most of our kittens, including our current cat, Pipi. She's a beauty; white with smoky gray on the tips of her tail and ears, and booties on her feet. Her tail, by the way, is blunt instead of pointed, ^{thanks to} one of the many tortures Ashley has put our animals through, but that is another story. Pipi is currently entertaining a black and white spotted ~~tom~~, a Dutch I guess, ^{Maybe} that's what I should call it since it seems to be sticking around, and, if I don't take control, Pips will meet the same fate as her mother.

At this point my life is fairly ^{devoid} void of pets, save Pipi and my neighbor's little pekin~~g~~ese that comes to visit me every now and then. I asked for a soft, buttery yellow lovebird that I saw at the pet store in Conway (for Christmas,) but being pretty expensive, Dad got me a paint by number sun catcher instead, picturing a dove holding an olive branch in it's beak, and that, and my car, will do for now.

Sounds as if Dad's expensive - perhaps you were thinking of those golfing sprees.