

## **Favorite Animal**

*02-06-2012 by Harry Zirkelbach*

Where to begin.

I guess it is sensible to review the years in sequence.

Little memory exists of the home where my parents had their two children. It was in western Pennsylvania town, Freedom. Then, all moved upstream the Beaver River a few miles, to New Brighton, where memories originate. Then in three years we moved to Marion Hills, on the eastern rim of the valley on which the first two homes nestled.

During these ten years our family possessed a cat, Lindy, a dog, Barney, a canary, Tweedie. At no time in those ten years was any of the three a pet to other than Mom. Dad had no hunting companion; no animal ever followed children to school.

In Marion Hills, Dad's first owned home sat at the west edge of a bit more than an acre. All land to the east were farms.

Some immediate neighbors kept chickens or pigs in addition to dog and cat on their acre, while others planted vegetables on their soil. And in those social moments my sister and I expanded our view of family life, where everyone was a friend.

No animal was neutered. Lesser roosters became Sunday dinner, baby bulls and boars that were surplus became meat for the butcher. And in spring when the mice began leaving barn or house for harvesting in the field, those who were farmers, after conference with wife, would spend part of a morning when the kids weren't around, catching cats and puppies deemed superfluous, placed then in a gunny sack added a few heavy rocks, sew the sack shut, toss the lot into a deep pool of the creek to drown. It was unsentimental.

Pets often disappeared, victim to other wildlife.

The cat Lindy and Mom had a strange closeness. Lindy chased and manhandled all cats in the neighborhood, male or female. When he rested on the porch, dogs would cross the street to pass our house. One day mom was chatting with other ladies on the back porch when Lindy came to her feet, dropped a baby rabbit.

It was mauled but alive. Lindy sat there. He must have expected some complement, but instead Mom swatted him, hard. Lindy was soon back with

another baby bunny, this one dead, dropped it at her feet, ran a distance sat to watch her reaction. A complex and difficult friendship.

When our family left Marion Hill a sunny spring morning, never to return, Lindy, Barney, Tweedie were left behind with friends. They were seldom mentioned again, for at the new home an Aunt gave the family a Pekinese pup, Ming, too large to sold to the wealthy. But for the first time, Mom shared a pet with the children.

Ming Chow, a beautiful delight, died In some obscure moment in WWII.

In the neighborhood I shared while a College student in Detroit, few homes kept a dog or cat. And that continued through three years of WWII.

Well, there was an exception on Pacific Einwetok Island where our DC-4 stopped to refuel late 1946. In walking about to stretch, small animals could be seen racing wildly around and through empty outlying buildings. We learned these were feral cats, abandoned by GIs, having reverted to the wild, no longer responsive to human concern or care, likely doomed to die when residual food disappeared from vacant buildings, for the invasion had killed vegetation and trees.

Barbara and I, wed a number of years, had discussed and rejected getting a pet, just another animal for her to care for. Then one of the children suggested a cat. He became the first of two brothers, Irving then Benji, years apart.

The family all became attached to both for in their temperament and patience, they brought tranquility to our Zoo every year the children called our home theirs.

So, my favorite animal,  
people.

Neither cat, or dog,  
thanked me for a kindness,  
told me off when it was deserved,  
laughed during shared moments of perfection.

Though I admit, they are so much easier to house break.

A final oddity, a friend whose presence annoyed dogs. We could be walking along chatting, and any dog within half a block would start barking at him until the two of us was out of sight.