

## Dogs, Cats and Other Folk *by Marilyn Reeves*

How does one choose a favorite animal?

Like most people, I've had my share of pets, including several cats, a canary, a few assorted tropical fish, and my dog Cindy, who was supposed to be my son's dog, but you know pets – they tend to bond with the hand that feeds them.

Most of the cats in my life I adopted as babies. My sister Rosie had a mama cat named Beebee who was a prolific producer of kittens. I adopted a pair of her progeny, thinking the two would be company for each other, then a few years later adopted another pair.

There is really nothing cuter than a baby kitten who takes it upon itself to be your morning wake-up call. This is accomplished by a series of mews (translation: "I'm hungry!") and if that doesn't wake you up, a walk across your face with its tiny paws (and needle-sharp claws) will generally do the trick.

I've always been partial to long-haired critters, which is to say I'm not very smart. Long-haired pets are cute and cuddly, but they have an inherent problem. They have long hair. Which sheds. So you find yourself constantly trying to clean off said hair from your carpet and your seating surfaces, not to mention your clothing. After trying a variety of clothes brushes and rolls of sticky tape, I finally happened on a quick and easy solution to the problem: the lowly sponge. Nothing cleans up pet hair more quickly and easily than a slightly damp kitchen sponge (no extra charge for the tip).

I'm a sucker for animal stories. I try to avoid them at all times unless I'm in the mood for a good cry. Inevitably, the star of the story, be it Lassie, Rin Tin Tin, or even Benji – or perhaps some magnificent horse like Hidalgo or Black Beauty – is either hurt, killed, or abandoned. Please pass the tissue. But what really gets me is when the featured critter does something heroic, like alerting its humans that the house is on fire and then risks its own life to rescue the baby, or jumps into the raging river to save its master. That, folks, is cause for an all-out sob fest, and I miss the next ten minutes of the story due to those aggravating tears flooding my eyes and a preoccupation with excessive nose blowing. So please, spare me those sappy sentimental animal stories, because I'm a sentimental sap!

In trying to determine my favorite animal I have completely overlooked all those wonderful wild creatures. What could be more majestic than a bull elk, unless it's a fearsome tiger stalking the night? What more lovely than a graceful swan or a beautiful snowy egret? How can one choose? What an amazing planet, this Earth, to have such an abundance of life, and how fortunate we are to be a part of it. I'll take the variety.