

Pet Blessing
Sunday, July 17, 2022
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I grew up with animals. We had cats, dogs, rabbits, a skunk, a pony, chickens, turtles, and goldfish as I was growing up. Only at rare times in my life have I lived without a pet.

The first dog I remember was Teddy. All my childhood dogs were collies. Teddy developed hip dysplasia and had to pull his rear end behind him towards the end of his life. He loved to sit with us on a porch swing that hung at the bottom of our yard. He would put his front paws on the swing and wait for us to lift his hind end up and get him on the swing beside us. One of our chickens, Snickerdoodle, was especially fond of Teddy. She would regularly sleep next to him, nestled against his belly. We knew Teddy was getting old and wouldn't be with us much longer. One day my father got home late having taken my brother and sister to a baseball game. Before going to bed he went to check on Teddy. He had died in his sleep and Snickerdoodle was still sleeping next to him.

My father built and painted holiday plywood decorations. At Christmastime in our yard there was a Santa, sleigh and reindeer, a snowperson family, an organist and choirboys and in the fenced part of the yard where the pony, dogs and chickens were a nativity set. The stable and figures were plywood, but the manger was metal and filled with hay. Regularly the pony became part of the scene, eating from the manger. For inside the house my father had built a smaller nativity set that went on a table in a corner between two sofa beds in the family room. That nativity too attracted a living animal. Our cat could regularly be found sleeping curled up inside that nativity.

I got a cat soon after I was serving my first congregation. The organist's neighbor had found a mother cat who had kittens under their porch. The kittens were found homes, and I claimed momma, a beautiful calico. I named her Bathsheba, because one of my neighbors had a cat named David.

It was only after I bought a townhouse that I claimed a dog. I went to the local shelter looking for a small dog. I saw one I liked, but he wasn't fixed so I asked about another. That one was already claimed. A shelter volunteer asked me to consider the one I had passed over. He had only one eye and she was afraid he would not get a home. One-eyed did not matter to me. He came home with me. He had been a year and a half old when his previous owner had given him up and already had a name, Ewok.

A few years later I began the process of adopting a daughter. Shraé was 12 years old when she came to me. One day when we were out, we ran into one of her aunts. Shraé began telling her about her new home. Shraé had asked for a home with pets, and she told her aunt about her cat and about her dog, Ewok. The aunt was surprised. She told Shraé that another aunt of hers had had two dogs, Peewee and Ewok. They had run out into the road, and Peewee was killed, and Ewok lost an eye. That aunt had given up Ewok. Apparently, my dog and daughter were meant to be together.

My daughter had cats, a dog and hamsters as she grew. Her first hamster, Peaches, was especially friendly. She could sit with it cuddled into a bandana on her lap as she watched television.

I give thanks for all the pets that have blessed my life and for those who might still bless me in years to come. The American writer, Louis Sabin said, "No matter how little money and how few possessions you own, having a dog makes you rich," and the French poet and writer, Jean Cocteau said, "I love cats because I enjoy my home; and little by little, they become its visible soul." Dogs, cats, hamsters, goldfish, turtles, horses, ponies, all creatures great and small, they are a blessing to us. May we return their kindness and bless them.