

All the cats of my life

by Yasmin Donlon

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My husband, Michael and I are owned at this moment in time by three cats - Aimee, a female blue Burmese, Darbia Tangutica (Tangye for short) after the author, Derek Tangye who inspired me to write in the first place, who is a stumpy red tabby and white Manx cat, and Darbia Bling Bling, a proper Manx - no tail at all. He is classed as a Rumpie Riser. In a few weeks time we will be taking ownership of a blue Cornish Rex. Fell in love with one of these at a cat show. It was asleep in a hammock and had chiselled angular features.

We show our cats up and down the country. When initially I made enquiries about showing Tangye I met with the bureaucracy of the complicated forms to fill in. I discovered Tangye was not allowed in G.C.C.F. shows and had to instead put him in a relatively new formed set up, Fife (a bit like the football). I was advised that once we had been to our first show we would meet like-minded people and be hooked – hook, line and sinker. I asked if there were many men who went, as I did not want Michael sticking out like a sore thumb amongst a load of women talking cats. I was reassured that men singly and as half of couples regularly attended all the cat shows.

The forms which I had to complete required the names of the sire and dam – Tangye's dad and mum, his G.C.C.F. number, date of birth and his E.M.S. code. I had to make a number of 'phone calls to find this out. It actually means Easy Mind System.

Anyhow I showed Tangye and he got a Premier certificate. He needed three to get in the Premier League and I could then register his Premier status with his Aristocats Club, which we joined. There are five cat clubs which belong to Fife and two Associates.

When showing Tangye – who had really exceptional markings and lovely coloured eyes, and the judges liked him as no other Manx (another one got barred as it spread fleas to a Cornish Rex in the next pen) we found ourselves becoming gradually addicted to showing. We had to travel vast distances to be there for the vetting in at 7.30 a.m. , have all day until 5 p.m. or 6 p.m. at the show, then travel back home. As Tangye was new to showing we did not investigate staying at a “Cat friendly Travel Lodge”, as we were led to believe they did not start on breakfast until 7.30 a.m. which was too late for us (thus we would have been paying for a bed with no breakfast). Michael only needs about five and a half hours sleep at night, so we opted to travel instead. (Michael was the driver).

Anyhow, early morning there wasn't much traffic. We were expecting to be stopped by the police due to all the revellers leaving night clubs and parties, but alas we never were. Who else would be mad enough to be on the roads at such an unearthly hour?

Being confident on showing show-quality Tangye we decided to show Aimee in a G.C.C.F. Show. The trouble was she was dirty. I have never known a cat who never washes herself and at times she really stinks, so much so that Michael has to spray her with deodorant which lasts about three weeks. She loves the feel of human skin which she has to get near even on a red hot day. (I have her on my back which invigorates my hot flushes) As she smells so much she gets B.O. or in her case C.B.O. Tangye has a go at her face, but she takes so much then returns the compliment by licking Tangye's head. Bling Bling is more determined. You can see where he has been as he leaves a square of sticking up fur (he'll do the next square the next day). He has got himself a big undertaking as Aimee is a large, fat, solid cat. Press her and her flesh won't give.

Aimee's first show was not very far away from home. She did well – got two firsts, a fourth and a bag of goodies for the Burmese with the best eyes.

Michael did not know why I had put her in that class as Aimee sleeps her life away. In fact, she sleeps twenty two hours a day. He said that the judges would not see her eyes.

Aimee is a lazy cat. Tangye has to cover over her business in the litter tray. That is laziness.

When we looked at Aimee's results we saw that she had got a P.C. Michael asked me what a P.C. was. I said "Pongy Cat!" Actually, a P.C. was a Premier Certificate. She needs three before she can go to the National Cat Show at the N.E.C., which is equivalent to Crufts.

At her second show I made a boob! The show schedule had to be filled in before Christmas and I was all fazed up with the preparations for Christmas, so she didn't get her second P.C. – I entered her as a male instead of a female. I won't make this mistake again.

When showing Bling Bling he stole the show. First show he got an Excellent 1. His second show he and a Sphynx were both nominated when only one cat can be nominated. The choice fell to the Sphynx.

Michael does not like this breed. He thinks they look like little piglets. Naked cats! He asked me what would I feel with that next to my skin. Ugh!

Well, at Bling Bling's third show, he was nominated, then became best Junior in show. He won a rosette donating this and a cup bigger than him. When he was placed in a cage for judging he arranged himself with his head in the air as if to say "Aren't I beautiful?" He was a right little poser! He is a small Manx, smaller than Tangye although they are brothers from different litters. When we brought Bling Bling home we were intending keeping him with litter tray, water and the thick box from the computer printer locked in the downstairs bathroom, but Tangye was having none of it. He let him out three times and they greeted each other with their Manx trill and Tangye put his paw on Bling Bling's head (who we called little one). Their first night together there was no mews from Bling Bling. Tangye had shown him both litter trays (an enclosed one) and an open one insisting you go in there.

It was a different story for Tangye. We didn't see him for six months. He used to go into spaces (his holes we called them) between cupboards and do his stinking business there. I was going to return him to his breeder, but Michael said that he would grow out of it. He did literally. He got too big to go into his holes, then he took to sleeping , but never in a ball, in the washing machine. It must have been cool for him. We noted that at cat shows Tangye panted and we had to buy him a fan. He was a hot cat.

Aimee was just the start of my love affair with this breed.

Three Burmese

I was working at a sausage factory taking the skins off skinless sausages and packing them onto conveyor belts. This employment offered overtime and better wages than the salaried position I used to be in. I needed as much money as I could get, having to pay a mortgage and rates, plus utility bills and I was by myself. Salaried positions did offer status, but they were then equivalent to a wife's pin money while her husband paid all the big bills.

Most evenings, while I was at the factory, I went to the local art school. My workmates could not relate to that activity. Their recreation was Bingo. I went along on a couple of occasions to see what the attraction was, but I was bored with it, probably because I never won anything – not a sausage! I'd go back to my lonely house to a black and white moggy whom I'd been given by a workmate. Could not think of a name to give him – was never any good at naming cats as you will see later... Tommy was a faithful cat and was always on top of the entry gate whenever I finished work. A friend with a border collie visited and Tommy would fly onto the top of the living room door, then he decided to sleep on the same door. There he was in a perfect circle. He never fell off except when the nearby town hall clock struck eleven or twelve.

At this time I was on the committee for the local Cats' Protection League, which every month had a one page newsletter. One month there was an advert for an eighteen month old male blue Burmese for sale for £20. The contact was a Mr Weston, so I contacted him and became the new owner of a very sturdy cat called Leo. Mr Weston wanted another breed of cat – I cannot remember what, so a home was required for Leo. I don't know

how people can swap cats just when the mood takes them. Anyhow, Leo was very friendly with Tommy. They went out together and came back together and at night they slept together near me. Around this time a friend of mine from the Art School was showing her Burmese cats and I went with her to see what showing entailed. Leo, I thought, was show quality and I sent off the paperwork to have him officially transferred to me. My friend said that I would have to get G.C.C.F. regulation blanket, litter tray, water dish and food dish, which were all in white. Don't know why this law still stands. Maybe it is so that they do not detract from the cat and every cat is equal.

I had to go to hospital for an operation to remove a lump from my breast and my mum was to feed the two cats. She did not realise that there was also a black and white sleek entire tom who often came to visit to sleep on my coat. I called him Puss. My mother said she fed and let out and in, two cats. Little did she realise that she was feeding Puss, while Leo had a night on the town unfed.

Tommy and Leo had each other's company outside while I was at work. They were always there to greet me on my homecoming until one evening there was Tommy, but no Leo. I called and called him and went onto the road outside my terraced house. There was not much traffic then (today there is a one way system with it being the main road to get into town) and there are more cars nowadays. Everyone has to have at least one car. You can never park outside the house). I went across the road and also down the entries of neighbours' houses. No sign. Tommy was beside himself. If only he could have talked. He kept running at the door, crying out in distress. I pleaded with him to tell me where Leo was.

There used to be cats disappearing in the vicinity without trace, at dawn and dusk, and it said in the local newspaper that these cats were being stolen for their fur to make coats. I thought that Leo had a lovely coat, unlike Tommy whose fur had a red hue, due to it having ovarid for a hormone imbalance.

I thought he might have gone back to his old home, so when I placed an advert in the local newspaper I mentioned he might be returning there, so I used Mr Weston's telephone number. Also, the finder could contact Mr Weston, due to my being at work all day and the Art School most evenings.

I did the usual enquiries – the C.P.L., the R.S.P.C.A. and local vets. I made and photocopied notices for all around the square (the gardens around all the houses, businesses and shops – a cat had loads of hunting grounds without having to cross the road). On my notice I asked people to look in their outhouses and gardens to see if there was a grey cat locked in. Not many people around here I'm afraid, would know what a blue cat is.

All my enquiries came to zilch. I even contacted the police as Leo was a pedigree cat and as a last resort, contacted Environmental Health (it was not contracted out then) to see if they had picked him up dead off the road. It is the not knowing where he was which was worse than knowing his fate. I was always looking out for him. Did he become a chinese takeaway, as a Chinese takeaway in the town was prosecuted for having alsatians in their fridge? I accused some elderly neighbours of keeping him shut in their house and a particularly unpleasant Asian I asked him, had he eaten my cat?

Evidently I was very distraught and without Leo I felt more lonely than previously.

A few years later, while in the garden I thought I spotted him in a window of a house adjacent in the square. This was wishful thinking of course. As I could not show him when I went with my friend to cat shows I could not bear to see the pens of Burmese cats, so instead saw the household moggies.

Burmese cat No. 2 was Sleekine Shikari (same prefix as Aimee as the same breeder). She was sold to me as a pet and I had to sign that I would have her spayed. Little did I know that she was already calling!

I had to introduce her to Tommy, so I kept Shikari in her cage and let Tommy sniff her through the bars of the cage. Sometimes I lifted the cage roof and put my fingers on her forehead and transferred her scent to Tommy's forehead.

At night I kept Shikari upstairs with me and she kept rolling, crouching, swishing her tail and presenting her back end to me in the bathroom. As well as this she was squatting low down. I think she would have walked across the ceiling, the mood she was in!

Due to work my cat show friend and I had picked her up on a Saturday, so I could not get her neutered until the Monday, so I did not get much sleep that weekend.

Shikari means hunter. I dared not let her out due to the traffic. (I was then living with John whom I eventually married) and Burmese, like Siamese (more about Siamese later)

have no sense of direction. They just keep on going and forget where they are until they are lost. I kept her confined to the upstairs (shut the stairs door) and Tommy downstairs and outside for his pleasure. John said that I should not keep her hidden as he was there.

John and my first Christmas together, Kath, who was Tommy's former owner, gave us a turkey carcass for the cats, so we sliced the meat off and threw the remainder in a black plastic bin liner in the front room – away from the cats, we thought. While watching TV we heard a strange noise coming from the front room. On investigation we saw the bin liner move! Shikari was having a Christmas scavenge. John mocked, "You would not get an ordinary moggy to do such bad things".

Shikari was always hiding when she had the run of the house to herself. I thought of course she had got out. She would never come to our call. She would carry on sleeping. Often we would be calling and she would be on a shelf somewhere we would not think of looking.

One night, though, she did escape. John went looking for her in all the jungles in the square. He did not know the area at all, so Tommy was his landmark in our bedroom window. He said that if Tommy moved he'd be lost. I asked him did he see many cats on his travels. He replied that he had seen plenty of cats' eyes staring at him and he called them some names which you wouldn't put on a collar round their necks! He'd fallen into a bucket which he brought home!

Our next Burmese was many years after Shikari. The same breeder as both Shikari and Aimee. She had a litter of kittens and would I like one? My mother said that they were too

expensive and that I should get out of having one due to the expense incurred, but she never knew about Leo or Shikari. (My mother only thinks about herself and lives in her own world). In reality, and in her mind, however, she is very dominant and interfering, trying to organise my finances and my life. If she can manage on 'x' amount of money so should I, she maintains. When I had the house painted outside and a new carpet in the living room, she (nor my father) would come and look at it. I felt very hurt.

Anyhow, the new Burmese kitten, a female, whom I had given a name to – Cassandra – was not to be. She was allergic to the inoculations and consequently died. It was obviously not meant to be.

Cats in my childhood

All of my life my parents have had cats. There was Mini (mark one), a Siamese while they lived in Stretton waiting for their house to be built in Bretby Lane. My parents called each other Min and when I was a baby I didn't say Yes, but Yas, hence my name Yasmin came about. I invented my own language – “pepin” for handkerchief, “lobbs” for sleeves and “dockets” for knickers, and I was fascinated by the coloured wires at the back of a TV set (my father was a television engineer) and I kept on saying “wire”.

From an early age I was drawing cats like

and cutting out round the outlines and stitching them onto small pieces of material. My grandparents, on my father's side, had a pot dog and cat with red ribbons round their necks and I was always picking up this cat. I can remember my grandfather's shed full of stacks of newspapers tied up with string and miscellaneous odds and ends, and nuts and bolts. There would be a need of them one day. Nothing would ever be thrown away.

I was a sensitive child and to pacify my grandparents, to ensure I had a good Roman Catholic schooling, I at four and a half years went to a convent school where I made my first holy communion. I remember that I was bashed with a ruler on my knuckles if I read

a word wrong when reading. The nuns did give me reading homework which I did not do, for I would sooner do some art. Impatient to get my colouring in of a big drawing finished, my colours ran.

Around this time we had Mini (mark two). I don't know what happened to Mini (mark one). I expect she was run over, as we lived on Stapenhill Road, on the main road to London.

Somehow Skiffle came into our lives as Skiffle was the music of the day. She was more my brother's cat than mine. He could do anything with her and dressed her up. She had kittens and our daily at the time - before she started work - would clean their eyes, as Skiffle was a rotten mother.

I started at the local art school Saturday morning classes at nine, and I learnt to read through a Mrs Venables at nine and a half at Edge Hill Primary School in Stapenhill.

We had a Siamese high quality pedigree, whom I named Tai Tai, but he kept defecating all over the house. My parents took him to a horse doctor's assistant (there weren't so many vets in those days – late 50s). She said that he had vitamin deficiency and that she would cure him if she had him for a weekend. We never saw Tai Tai again.

Sopers, our neighbours, moved and we inherited their cat Peter Soper, a Jellicoe cat. He would not come to our house at all and insisted in being fed at his old family home. He had his freedom to roam, so he did not last long, and was consequently run over on Stapenhill Road.

For my tenth birthday in 1960 my parents gave me my very own seal point Siamese who had such beautiful blue eyes. My parents called him Dr Bartilow, after the singer, or Bartie for short. I bought him a blue collar and lead and trained him to walk beside me, and I also bought him a gold toilet chain from Woolworths that he liked to play with.

Often I would try and sneak him up to bed, which was easy to do as Stapenhill Road was a large rambling Victorian house and my brother, Julian, would bring into his bed, Skiffle. Skiffle was a clean cat and she would let Julian know when she wanted to go out, while Bartie was often naughty, so he was banished to the kitchen. We did, however, go and bring both cats to either Julian's or my bed on a Saturday morning.

At eleven I failed my eleven plus exam. The local secondary modern school, Hillside, was considered too rowdy and big for me, so it was arranged for me to go to a small private school called Salisbury Memorial School, which according to its highly glossy prospectus boasted small classes with highly trained staff. It was a Church of England School, so R.E. Assemblies, prayers and singing hymns were a big part of the curriculum.

I was attending, at this time, a drama school where I did elocution, reciting poems and acting. On my way back from there one evening, on alighting from my bus, found a grey scrawny ball of fluff that was supposed to be a cat. After a few good meals and a few contented washings later there appeared a pure black cat whom we called Henrietta, only to become Henry, once she had been to the vet. He got on well with both Bartie and Mini and I remember them all on the Rayburn, partaking of the heat from the back boiler. Our house was not centrally heated (it was only when my parents were selling it!) The

Rayburn heated the water which was used for cooking and for drying clothes on rails you pulled down. The sitting room had a fire inn it with glass doors, and all downstairs and the upstairs bathroom had storage heaters. There was no heating in our rooms. My brother and I were only allowed an electric fire when we had friends round. My best friend, Susan Holmes, I was jealous of because she had lots of clothes and best of all, she had a record player and records.

Using this Rayburn I nearly blew up the house, as I was letting hot cross buns to “prove” in the oven and I had to finally cook them I had to have a very high oven. I think I added too much air as all the hot water pipes started jangling and we turned the hot taps on all the sinks and the bath, then we and all the cats evacuated into the garden to wait for the explosion.... We were spared. The hot cross buns were black and rock hard! My parents ate one each so as not to hurt my feelings.

When my parents went out socialising we had a baby sitter called Mrs Fitzgerald. We used to share secrets with her that we couldn't tell our parents. She bought us some orangey striped sucking sweets, but we were naughty kids – we had hidden a stock of different coloured sized balls that we stored on the sun lounge roof and we used to bombard her with them.

My brother and I were playing ball – throwing it to each other and when it was my time to retrieve it, I had to go to the side of the garage. I stood on something soft which was covered with flies. I somehow knew it was Mini, whom I hadn't seen for a couple of days, but my mother said that it was a rabbit and that I must be content that I still had Bartie.

This experience deeply affected me (had nightmares of cats without their heads) plus seeing a cat flat on Stapenhill Road, that got more unrecognisable every day, contributed eventually by being accepted to do a B.A. degree course in sculpture at Leicester, for at Derby, where I did my Foundation Course, I made a heap of fibre glass dead cats. Why a heap, was because once I had seen a heap of dead sheep.

Skiffle was having the occasional night away. She came back after her meanderings, very replete and content. Evidently she stayed out for longer until the people she had adopted moved and took her with them. We could not do a thing about it, and no one can really own a cat.

At thirteen I wasn't learning anything at Salisbury Memorial School. (I learned plenty when I was in Mrs Jordan's class, but then I moved up to a class of about six to eight students, which was in charge of a vicar who wanted us to learn the Catechism (for confirmation). I remember writing on a board the word transubstantiation and its meaning. This vicar only seemed to know religion and no other subject.

My parents were very involved in good works for the town and one of the projects they were involved with was LEPRA – aid against leprosy. We had an American student staying with us, who sang for the Michigan Youth Chorale and one of his concerts was at the local Town Hall where there was a huge painting called Lepra, by an artist called David Ffoulkes, standing at the right hand corner of the main hall. I made a drawing of it to paint it. It was of two elongated men wearing blue pantaloons, suffering from leprosy, standing in a cage, and a black witch doctor dancing in the foreground. I was spellbound

seeing such a masterpiece and I resolved that one day I would meet the artist (I did come quite close to him when I was at Leicester). I thought that if I could paint half as well as him I would be satisfied.

My parents, with their involvements with good works, went to several school plays (at Salisbury Memorial School we never had any plays – the hall upstairs was only used for the yearly Speech Days and ballroom dance classes to music provided by a wind-up gramophone. I still cringe whenever I hear the Blue Danube).

They, my parents, often took me to these plays and I was very impressed so much so that I asked them to get me into a big secondary modern school.

Plans were in motion for this to come about. On my thirteenth birthday, as a teenager I was given a transistor radio which did not get Radio Luxemburg. Each and every night I tried to see if it had arrived by magic. When my parents held a dinner party I volunteered to do the washing up – all the glasses with drops of booze in them, which I would mix in one glass, drink and go to bed pissed listening to my radio under my pillow.

Henry and Bartie were always in the kitchen sleeping. It was the warmest place. Various cats came a-visiting our garden including a white Manx cat who just came to sleep under the bushes.

At last I started at the William Allitt School, where I progressed steadily in Art, English and Social Studies. I was there until I was fifteen, then I took an exam at the local Tech College to do G.C.S.E. 'O' and 'A' levels which William Allitt didn't do.

Mitzie

My second year at University I did a midnight flit from the Halls of Residence to stay with my friends, Maria, Helga and Sheila at 409 Abbey Lane, Leicester which was at the back of the Jolly Fryers' Fish Shop. The aroma of this establishment was very alluring to us poor students. Domestically, we had a good arrangement – one of us paid the rent, another one paid the electric and two bought the food. We alternated this every week and we also put up a rota for chores.

Away from home which we called “home home” we felt independent and independence meant getting pets for ourselves. Sheila was first – she got a canary, then Helga got a rabbit and she thought it was bored, so she got another rabbit and it was really bored (breeding like rabbits). Maria wasn't really into pets, but asked me what pet I was going to get. She suggested that I got a crocodile to keep in the bath. No – nothing so exotic. I was going to get a kitten, pure and simple. The market at Leicester, I was informed, had a pet stall. I tried there – no kittens, so I traipsed up to a pet shop in Hinckley Road and paid seven shillings and six pence for a minute white and black works cat. Obviously I did not know what a works cat was. She was so tiny I fed her with Farex and small tins of baby food.

Anyway, the first night I had her in bed with me in one of the two bedrooms I shared with Helga. She warned me that I would roll on her in my sleep, but Mitzie didn't mind.

I did not have any qualms about letting Mitzie into the cottage garden but was told off because she made the chip shop's owner's dog bark and she would have to go. She often used to do her ones in the house. She liked some Christmas wrapping paper I had bought (I am always early in my preparations for Christmas – it being late October). I washed the wrapping paper and hung it on the line next to the chip shop owner's towels that were more hole than towel. I don't know why they bothered to wash their holes.

Sheila's canary was not upset by Mitzie. Sheila would let it have its freedom in the bathroom where it would perch on a yellow towel to match itself.

One night I came home to find Sheila sitting by the canary cage. The canary was on the bottom of the cage and could not get up onto a perch. She was very concerned about it until she remembered an old fashioned remedy – brandy, so she opened the cage, clutched the canary in her hand and poured some brandy into its beak. It gained a new lease of life, flew round the cage a couple of times then crashed out on the bottom of the cage, its two legs sticking out. What a way to go!

On a Friday I invariably went to see my parents at Burton on Trent. This involved a two hour journey on a bus from St Margaret's bus station to Wetmore Road bus park in Burton, then a walk to my father's shop about one and a half miles away. I had to invest in a harness and lead for Mitzie. She enjoyed herself, for before setting off we called at a pub called the "Pineapple". She was perched on my shoulder as I drank a Guinness and if I dipped my finger in the Guinness, she would lick it.

Invariably on a Friday morning I had an appointment with the student doctor whose cure for everything was red meat and paracetamol. On waiting in the waiting room where I had Mitzie in her harness and lead, the other students would inform me that I was in the wrong place for the vet!

Until my bus went at around two o'clock, I had Mitzie loose in my studio space on the tenth floor of the Fletcher building, where there was a revolving set of cubicles called the Paternosta to take us there (the tenth floor Fletcher building was famous for Fine Art students to throw themselves off and go splat below). Arthur Warmesley, the Fine Art caretaker loved her and sometimes bought her tins of cat food which she vanished. I had some cod liver oil for her and the bottle burst and made a stench. Arthur was a character with a picture of Leicester City Football Club on his door. I bought a loaf of bread to college and it was there for weeks. Arthur fed it to the birds and he told me that the birds weren't happy with me as they had bent beaks!

Mostly Mitzie was good on the bus, but she did have one mishap – she yowled to let me know she wanted to do a stinky poo, so I let her down and it was all systems go and didn't it reek! You could smoke on the bus in those days and all the smokers immediately lit up. (I think even the non-smokers lit up!) Imagine the embarrassment! I chucked a piece of newspaper over it to hide the evidence.

In my parents garden she did not wander off. She thought it was there just for her, so she explored and reaped the benefits of mousing expeditions. This did not put her in good books with my mother who is afraid of mice and shut herself in if there was a present of one outside the back door.

My three college friends were thinking of leaving the cottage. Helga was leaving the course and most weekends she took her rabbits to stay at her boyfriend's at Stoke, so she did not see why she should pay a full contribution to our upkeep in the cottage, and both Maria and Sheila had steady boyfriends and Sheila wanted to move into a bedsitter that she had been told about, with her boyfriend.

Thus, we had to give in our notice to the landlady who would want to look at the inventory that we signed on becoming tenants, which included a free TV licence that stood in pride of place on top of the TV.

During the time of our notice the cottage seemed to become jinxed – we found it hard to get up in the mornings. The electric fire blew up, likewise the TV, the vacuum cleaner would not work and you would get shocks from the taps in the bath, the fridge and some light switches.

When the landlady came we were expecting a bill for all the faulty electrical appliances to be repaired but oh no, she came with a collection of photographs of her millionaire house in Oadby, with a posh car outside, but she had come to see us on a pushbike. (That cottage eventually burnt down with the next four students still in their beds, so God was looking after us).

I had a very small six foot by eight foot bedsit with a sloping ceiling opposite Sheila whose bedsitter was much bigger than mine and had its own kitchenette. All I had was a sink and a contraption older than a Baby Belling, but the rent was the same for both of us. Mitzie used to do her courting by sticking her paw under the door to play with a cat who was allowed to roam on the dusty stairs which no tenant got around to cleaning. Inside my room I had an Eubank for the tatty bit of carpet. What most annoyed me about this room was the bulky wardrobe (ex hotel) that would not hold anything and the door would not shut.

I had a friend who observed that my food cupboard only stored tins of cat food.

There was a pub across the road called the Dirty Duck and to deter ardent male admirers I used to say that they could not come and visit as I had one hundred cats. Well, she behaved like a hundred cats, so I used to call her one hundred. Naughty cat – she would help herself to Marvel milk and be alert at night when I wanted sleep. I used to take her turds for Arthur to put on the paternosta. When I announced what was in all these “Woollies” brown paper bags, he exclaimed, “You beauty!”

I asked a student in the year below me to have a weekend with me, and then I and Mitzie were to have a weekend with her in Northampton. We caught the bus to Northampton from Leicester and Mitzie behaved herself. My friend’s father brought us back and Mitzie mewed a couple of times for him to stop the car so she could do both things. In this strange garden she thought she was in heaven.

A friend from “home home” came to stay with me. She could not sleep in her sleeping bag as Mitzie was dive bombing her from the top of the wardrobe.

Being in such a small room I had started to paint very large paintings. I don't know if there was any psychological reason for this.

It was time to have Mitzie spayed for I did not want one hundred and nine little Mitzies. I collected her in the evening and witnessed the vet's handiwork. It was a student vet who had closed her underside up with neat bows! That night she undid her stitches so all her guts were hanging out. I tried to flag down passing cars to hurry me – all bloodied up, and bleeding Mitzie back to the vet, but no takers.

I had to collect her from another branch of the Practice in another part of Leicester. She was all drugged up and unconscious. As I did not want to see her die, I rang my mother for her to collect her. She stayed at my mothers until I graduated, for I left the bedsitter to go instead for four terms to brand new halls where you only had to clean your room and had no utility bills. Cats were not allowed!

A Traumatic Time

For the last four terms of my degree course I had transferred from sculpture to Fine Art on the tenth floor of the Fletcher Building, so I had to work like stink making paintings instead of sculptures. I was still painting large pictures as they were more dynamic. My working area was three quarters of the tenth floor. I had painted portraits of my parents and paintings of my childhood inspiration David Ffoulkes (the artist of Lepra) and his family, who was not on a pedestal any more. He was house painting which in my view wasn't being a proper artist. In my Foundation Course I had to be innovative – produce something new which had not been done before and I was to dedicate myself one hundred per cent to my work to do it one hundred percently. David Ffoulkes did not seem, from my visit to his house, to be at all productive.

There was a student who had a working area across from me and this was where all the tutors would be found in a growing huddle, saying he was a genius. He did not look like an art student, coming to college in a collar and tie and a briefcase. He was very proficient doing hundreds of drawings then painlessly making the finished painting until the paint was smooth. He had no intercourse with other students or used the clothed model which I had to myself (no takers). The subjects of his paintings were from a very fertile imagination.

One evening I was in the print making workshop – I felt I had to use another medium to express my ideas when there was a message for me to see Pont, head of studies. It appeared that this very gifted student had flipped and slashed some of my paintings, chucked red paint around the studio and threw some of his unfinished paintings from the

tenth floor window. I could see the damage as the person involved had been carted off to a psychiatric hospital. When I observed the damage I could see it was deliberate – a series of coal miners heads I had painted were cut out and a life size self portrait of me half naked had a square cut out.

Naturally, when I had a problem I rang my mother. She remonstrated that all famous artists had their paintings slashed at some time in their lives. It was my mother who encouraged me and tried to broaden my naivety having led such a sheltered life – not allowed a boyfriend or to go out dancing with girls when at Tech college. She wrote to me each week about Bartie's poos (just what I wanted to know!) At the beginning of my third year the new students, the Freshers were inviting older students to a piss up and I did not know what such a thing was.

Pont asked me did I want to change studio space and work at Lower Brown Street – an extension of the Fine Art department. No, I was not moving for I thought the student would be treated and cured. Thus a psychological battle occurred between us in our work. I even incorporated him in my paintings so much so that other students thought he had become my tormentor.

Back at my halls called Mary Gee, a person above me – had innumerable boyfriends and I was always hearing the bed creak. She had a hamster that she called Rory, after the singer Rory Gallagher, which was always high on pot which she smoked in her room. And I had a cat that visited me, plus a good looking guy called Tony who came to listen to my records and tapes, but I let the cat out early morning, with Tony. Arthur, the caretaker, called this cat my visiting Pud.

Like all students we placed photos and posters on our walls and I had a sculpture in fibreglass of what I called my 3D Nude. We had to have a party and my tormentor was invited, but my bedroom door was kept locked. One student asked if it was all right if he smoked. I thought how polite. I did not realise that he meant smoking pot. He was advised not to smoke near a window as the police did a patrol due to houses full of women.

We, my tormentor and I never had an actual relationship despite my chasing him at various parties – he always dressed as a devil. He was much more naive than me, but we did exchange paintings, the sign of true artists.

The degree on the horizon was walking back to Mary Gee and a voice came out of the clouds saying not to be afraid – my Granny had died at 1.04 a.m. on a Tuesday and I was to be happy (felt closer to my Granny than my mother as I could talk to her about ordinary things). My mother, instead, moved in higher social circles – solicitors, doctors, clergy and other professionals.

I rang my mother who expressed I was psychic, and was on a low ebb, so move in Harry Burnett, who offered me life after University. He would buy me an art shop. We staged a mock wedding with ring and photographs. My tenancy at Mary Gee terminated at the end of the academic year and I was not going to move with no grandmother. Harry said to come and live in his bedsit and I could go and get Mitzie and he would make enquiries to get his champion whippet racing bitch called Sweetheart.

Sweetheart, Mitzie and Mr Magic

Harry's bedsit was at Sandown Road, near the railway station. It was a bay windowed room boasting a grimy gas stove and a gas fire, surrounded by hundreds of spent matches. Harry said he called it the Ashtray, but it was a roof over our heads. I refused point blank to tackle the grease on the cooker. Harry understood. He said we'd eat out, as he was travelling to work each day to Oxford, painting and decorating houses. With all my paintings, books and clothes, there was no room in the Ashtray to swing a cat, so Mitzie and Sweetheart were out of the question until we were more respectable. What had happened to my art shop, I wondered? Harry said that I would get it one day. Meantime, I became very depressed. Was this what it meant to be a starving artist?

To spare me from the boredom of the Ashtray, Harry drove me to Oxford where he worked. While he worked I found the book and music shops and found exhibitions to see. I still had some money left over from college. Soon Harry was to lose his job and he borrowed money from a friend to buy a static caravan. I bought the cooking ring and kettle, as Harry could not get H.P. The caravan was sited at the side of a station near a builder's, where we connected to their electric and could use their loo and get water. Actually, Harry was a gypsy so he settled into this type of life readily. He did manage to obtain his white and black whippet, Sweetheart, and I went home to fetch Mitzie. Both animals slept together on our bed under the blanket.

Meanwhile, my mother was pressurising me from a distance. She told her posh friends that I was working away as a secretary and she sent certain of her friends to try and get me to come home, as she considered this way of life was a waste of my talent.

Needless to say, I was young and stupid (Harry was twenty two years my senior) and I went with Harry to all his drinking holes to meet his cronies. We went about selling dolls and chocolates and Harry informed me that I would be good at “on the knock” which meant knocking on peoples’ doors for money. Often we would not have enough for the first pint so I was sent to tap people up.

Animal food and human food was procured by Harry’s expert shoplifting which I refused to eat. If I had to eat because I was starving I was immediately sick in disgust. I never cooked in the caravan either.

One Sunday lunch I refused to go to the pub. I had spent my time drawing the old station. Harry was not amused, telling me he could not eat that.

Harry certainly lived by his wits, so when he was in money, he gave me money to take the bus to nearby Oadby, so I could see an old couple Harry knew, and go shopping for provisions. Clever Sweetheart walked into the supermarket. She had dug her way out of the caravan to track me down. What devotion!

The light eventually dawned – there was no future in my life with Harry so I asked him if he knew of any bedsitters about. One of his friends was a landlord and he gave Harry the rent book.

It was a lovely bedsitter at Clarendon Park Road and I had taken Sweetheart with me and arranged to bring Mitzie the following week. My mother was on the scene again

rearranging the bedsitter furniture and telling me what to eat for cheapness (I remember Vespa meals were very important). With her I had gone to the dole office, but they could not give me my full entitlement without the rent book.

With new independence I went back to the University Art Department to see if I could get any work. Nothing! I did not see any of my old student friends – long gone with a new life. All ex Fine Art students were to be found talking about the great masterpiece that never got done in Yates Wine Lodge. I did try and see if they wanted any help in a newly opened art shop. Nothing doing!

In the evening I went to see my friend, Tony. He did not want to be involved with me.

I was lonely, unloved, unwanted and extremely depressed and felt like ending it all. Voices were in my head. I called at the student welfare officer who was a friend, for I recognised I needed help big time. It was decided that I was to be sectioned at a psychiatric hospital on two accounts – danger to others and a danger to myself. The student welfare officer in my anguish discovered I had left Sweetheart alone and she needed to be taken to Harry at his caravan.

The rest is a blank, except I was in hospital for nine months and the hospital would not recognise that Harry was my next of kin, since we had only had a make believe wedding. The hospital notified my mother and I wrecked the ward and had to be sedated.

When discharge was imminent, I was allowed weekends out to see how I got on. In hospital I was looking at the world through a goldfish bowl. Everything was in slow

motion. On my first weekend I could not see Mitzie about and was told that I could see her in a cat hospital. I did not know that such things existed. She had been hit by a train, it was thought. Her right back foot was in plaster.

I was finally discharged. All seemed happy on the home front. Both animals were glad to see me, but Harry was taking me to all the pubs and clubs. I became obsessive about his past. One night we were in a pub called The Greyhound and he knocked me unconscious and left me for dead.

On coming round I rang my father and he collected me and Mitzie. The rest of my things were brought later on by one of my father's friends.

I tried hard to make a new life for myself. I joined the 18 plus, got a job at the Town Planning Office and got myself a council flat in Stapenhill, but I was very lonely. I could not live without Harry and I was missing my pretty Sweetheart.

Being naive I thought marriage would change Harry and I had to go to another psychiatric hospital, as my depression was manic. Harry came to see me there. He looked changed – more handsome, more suave. He arranged a special licence wedding at Pocklington's Registry Office, Leicester. I discharged myself to marry him.

We were to live at my flat in Stapenhill. As I was council employed I got Harry a job painting all the council houses and anything council owned. One would have thought life would run smoothly after that, but it didn't. I got Mitzie back from my parents and went to a pet shop in the town and bought a grey and white long haired tom, with a full tummy for

75p. I did not know what to call him until he went to the bath and did his business, so he was called Mr Magic. Harry started to become infuriatingly flat bound, while I wanted to go out, so I would go to the pub straight from work. I was bored. Harry would not take me anywhere except to see my uncle at Kew Gardens and to see his mother and sister at Kelvin Hall, Glasgow. This was a meeting of all the show folk who lived in caravans.

I had started to attend the local art school, but Harry was jealous of the students, he was jealous of the men at 18 plus and he was jealous of my workmates.

The marriage was doomed and had no future. One night we had an almighty fight when my face was all smashed. I rang my father who collected me, Mitzie and Mr Magic and my journal, which I called my infamous writings. I had to have a police escort to retrieve the rest of my stuff.

Knowing Harry, the battle was not over. In one of the boxes was Sweetheart's ball and he tried to ring me at work (his calls were intercepted) and he hung around Art School and 18 plus. He even used my hero David Ffoulkes to try to get me to go home. He was grinding me down with emotional blackmail.

Once when leaving the 18 plus my father was there to collect me and Harry ran out in front of my father's car. My father was in first gear instead of reverse, thus Harry accused my father of trying to murder him. The police were involved but the case was dropped due to lack of evidence.

Harry would not leave the flat, maintaining it was the marital home, so in order to get him out with the bailiffs, I had to stop paying the rent which was a standing order from my salary, and I also had to sign a form saying I would no longer require council property.

Mitzie, Magic and I could not stay at my parents' indefinitely, besides I did not want to, as once one has left home there is no going back, so through my employment I obtained a mortgage for Byrkley Street, which needed quite a bit of work doing to it and it had not been lived in for six months.

In April 1975 the contract was exchanged and my mother and I were allowed to work on it. The telephone was in before I moved on 1st September.

There was a big grey cat – the church verger's cat, who got into the shed through broken glass in a window. I resolved I must get the cats. Mitzie would not leave the shed so she went back to my Mum's. She loved it there as mice were plenty. As she lived on an unmade road, Mitzie got some grit in her eye, so she became a one-eyed cat. Whenever I visited my parents I asked where she was, only to be told that she was out catching her pudding. My parents eventually moved to Commonside which was surrounded by fields teeming with mice. All Mitzie's birthdays had come at once! (She used to go to the neighbours for a sleep in the middle of their big bed under the covers. They thought her marvellous and extremely clever as she rid their house of vermin, so when my parents went to live in Stafford in the urban streets, they left Mitzie with her doting neighbours.

Magic seemed to like the freedom to go out instead of being kept in to use a litter tray which he had at the flat in Stapenhill.

Once when living at Byrkley Street, I was then Assistant Librarian at the local Tech College, I was sent home. I rang a friend who came round immediately. I was too ill to make a drink or even ring the doctor as I was shivering. My friend, after she had made me some soup, rang the doctor and asked her grand daughter round while I waited for the doctor. Magic jumped onto the typewriter and typed his name amjok.... The grand daughter typed some words herself. When the doctor came he rang my mother at work and insisted I go home to be looked after. I had got Scarlatina. My father came at night, after his work, to feed Magic. He did not want to stay in.

Well, Magic became very difficult to get in at night and if I did manage to get him in he made a big smelly mess. My neighbours warned me that he would be run over. True to their word he was run over by a taxi driver who did stop and try and find out whose cat he had hit. He knocked at the neighbour whose entry I share, and they took possession of the corpse.

I was out with a friend who was staying with me. My neighbour heard us come back and knocked the door telling me my cat was in a white plastic carrier bag hanging over my back gate.

Magic was still warm. I asked these neighbours to dig a hole for me while I said goodbye to him.

In the morning I asked my friend did Magic really die. It was as if this incident had not happened.

After a few months I could not handle the fact that Magic was buried in the garden. If it rained I thought that his body would come back up and I dreaded next door's dog digging when he came into my garden. I really got myself into a state and consequently became too scared to go into the garden.

A solution had to be found for my peace of mind. I wanted Magic's body out and away from my garden as I was having more than enough nightmares of dead cats again. My father came and dug him up and took him to the tip.

We have Eight Cats and Two Dogs

To start with we had Tommy and Shikari. Tommy liked jumping on anyone's shoulders. When a psychiatric nurse came on a home visit to interview me, Tommy jumped on her. This was the only time she was paid as much attention by a cat, even her own.

Tommy liked raw meat and before John moved in with me, he used to get his supplies from the sausage factory I worked at. There was a butcher next door but one to home, which slaughtered its own pigs and cattle (many neighbours had left our next door house because of the squeals of the pigs before slaughter late at night) and Tommy was known to bring me the odd pigs ear – just what I wanted! The current neighbour next door was pegging out her washing and she spied Tommy with something strange in his mouth. Thinking it a mouse she screamed, dropped the linen basket and ran indoors. I saw Tommy's trophy, this time a cow's ear. If he had brought me a tail as well, I could have made oxtail soup!

Tommy and Shikari were good pals, sleeping together at night on our bed. alas, Tommy's kidneys packed up due to so much ovarid in his life and two encounters with poison. Shikari also sampled this poison and she was convulsing when I took her to the vet. All the people in the waiting room allowed me to go first to see the vet. It turned out where the poison came from was not rat killer put down at the rear of the shops, for I was told that a cat would have to eat several mice or a large rat for it to take effect, but very strong weed killer put down by new neighbours next door, who were never there. He was on the Canberra, but he employed two men to eliminate the weeds quickly (my father once had

big weeds at the back of his TV shop and the council informed him that he had “injurious” weeds. Imagine them coming out and attacking the unsuspecting!)

We therefore lost poor old Tommy who really was not that old – only nine. I wanted immediately to get another Tommy – a black and white Jellicoe cat, as we and Shikari were missing him. I tried the CPL who brought a right vicious feral cat that had six claws on the end of its front paws, and we could not handle it. All it did was hiss and growl at us. John called it Spitting Image. We sent it back.

Some friends of ours, Okey and Pearl Popper always had kittens. Their white cat they said always produced one of itself and a Jellicoe, as she seemed always to mate with the same tom. They were expecting kittens.

I was too impatient to wait for Okey’s kittens. As well, John said that he would get me a Tommy 2 as his work’s cat, which went on his crane down tunnels had got a set of kittens that were ready for re-homing. His workmates had a kitty to pay for cat food and milk.

When John brought Tommy 2 home, he (Tommy) was not at all like Tommy 1. He was sturdier, his black was shiny, his whites really were white and he was the proud owner of a very long tail.

Meanwhile Okey’s white cat produced two kittens – a white female and a ginger and white male. I had to have the ginger as we had promised. We called him Ging.

I saw an advert in the local rag – Whippets for sale £5. I had to have one of these, for I would never see Sweetheart again (Harry had finally stopped his emotional blackmail – his parting shot was that the people looking after her in Leicester could no longer keep her and she was going to be put down).

I went to see the whippet puppies in the dark when John had finished work and had to see them by torchlight as they were in a shed with their mother. One came towards me – a male fawn one, which I said we'd have.

I did not know what to call him until he ate a nearly full packet of John's Woodbine cigarettes, thus he was named Woody Woodbine (Woody for short). He was a good puppy, never chewing up or wetting. We took him to the pub where he would bark for his beer, which we gave him in an empty crisp packet (Woody had had the crisps himself and he never left any on the floor. He would Hoover them up).

Yes, Woody lived for the pub. He would never pass one. He would even cross the road, when off his lead, and dart into a pub. Once, when I had difficulty walking (I had left the sausage factory due to ill health which involved me having back pain, upper thigh pain and extreme tiredness). We took Woody into town to have a drink there and had to have a taxi back (John said that was an expensive way to walk a dog!!) If Woody ever got out he'd shoot to the pub on the corner of our street. He did not understand then about pubs closing at 3 p.m., so he was sitting there outside the shut pub looking all pathetic. Once we had some builders in and he escaped and went straight for the pub where he found us

and his tail was wagging excessively, his thoughts were “aren’t I a clever dog?” Ever seen a dog with a hangover? He put his paws over his head prior to walking lopsidedly.

Shikari, Tommy 2 and Ging were best mates. Shikari became foster mum to both Tommy 2 and Ging and she suckled them both.

Then we saw Okey, who said their white cat had at last produced a black and white male cat. We jumped at the chance as Tommy 2, being a works cat, was not very affectionate. Meanwhile a friend from further down the street said that his daughter had found a kitten dumped in a plastic bag when she was out riding, and they could not keep it, as they already had a cat. Would we like it? It was all white.

John took it with him to meet me out of Evensong to ask my opinion. I said that a white cat would complete the family as we had got all the colours – brown Shikari, Tommy, black and white, Okey’s new kitten, black and white and Ging (ginger).

The white kitten we first called Persil then changed it to Whitey, and as I was very involved in church Okey’s kitten we called Ecclesiastipuss.

Enter Dog No.2, Buddy, a whippet cross from a friend whose son had gone into the licensed trade. He was untrainable and once on a long walk while off his lead he made a run for it round all the fields – he had a hey day! A memorable event to mention is that I made John a cooked breakfast and Buddy, while I was not looking, helped himself by scoffing the lot except for half a slice of toast. I did not tell him off, saying to John, “Well,

he is a whip...pet.” Alas, Buddy was unteachable. It got to the stage that he would not let me into the kitchen – he’d snarl at me, so we had to part company with him.

We used to have a CPL sticker in the window and it amused me how many knocks we used to get re housing cats. One person knocked with a small tabby kitten. We took it in and called it Stripey, which meant that as we had given it a name, we were going to keep it. Stripey put his little ball of himself onto sleeping Woody and they looked ever so cute.

It was time to have Ecclesiastipuss and Whitey castrated and inoculated. When I picked them up, the vet informed me the bill was going to be big since Ecclesiastipuss was a female and I was lucky she wasn’t in kitten. Shikari had her work cut out. All five cats would suckle from her and John remarked that her nipples would soon be reaching the floor!

Occasionally, Ecclesiastipuss would suckle Tommy 2. You could hear suck, suck, suck over the noise from the TV.

A chap we knew had left his wife and was hoping to eventually remarry and could we have his black whippet, Sally, until, when and if he remarried? I said pretty please to John and we had Woody castrated on the strength of it. Sally was a very friendly little dog and I called her Salina. She took to Woody and the six cats immediately.

John thought it a good idea to enclose our yard, so Shikari could have her freedom, but she found exits out of it – no problem. Shikari, we thought, was an ex show cat, since she liked to be admired in any pub. We did not need her lead and harness, not even to the

vet, where I could take her on my shoulder. She would stay wherever we put her, where she was stroked by her admirers. She sometimes wore a dickie bow to the Angling Club, where she was made an honorary member, and while I was working on a CPL stall, at the Beer Festival at the Town Hall, John took Shikari, who got more attention than the beers.

It was decided to make a cat pen, taking up one third of the garden in width and three quarters of it in length. There was in it miscellaneous junk from John's travels – he picked up all manner of things, including car lights, mirrors and bits of old wardrobes and cupboards. He had rough cut circles for cats to climb through,. Wire netting enclosed it all. At first the cats basked in the sun in it, but Ecclesiastipuss kept finding a way out, so John was sure she carried a pair of cutters. Shikari meantime discovered the front door. Once I opened the front door and she trotted in quite nonchalantly. She had obviously gone to the pub by herself to see all her doting fans. We gave her a necklace which enhanced her beauty, which she lost on her journeying after escaping the pen. Of course, she had to go back to look for it.

Woody, meanwhile, would show disapproval if we went to the pub without him. We would make him empty himself before we went out, only to find he had something to press out by the fridge door. John would never pick up Woody's twos – that was my job, as they made him puke. He asked me why did he always do them eighteen inches apart, in a line. I said that he would do one, his length, sniff it, then be inspired to do another. Once a line was full, he'd start on another line, so all his twos were equitably placed.

We had the builders in and our bedroom window was out awaiting replacement and the builders had smashed the kitchen window. All the cats were in paradise, going outside and visiting us all through the night.

Whitey always left a residue of himself wherever he went. He was always moulting. He would supervise John whenever he was working outside. John would stretch out his tape measure and ask him was it all right and Whitey would mew “yes”.

Ecclesiastipuss went chasing pigeons on all the neighbours' roofs. Stripey was a very large cat. He went and sprayed an amaryllis I had in the window. John said that I need not water that plant.

Tommy 2 was soon to be known as Sunday Tommy, for he would go off on Monday morning and not return until early Sunday morning. We think he went to a garage nearby which had a fire on, so the cars in for repair would start first time.

We were seeing a friend, in a pub, in a nearby village and John had drunk too much. He was one of those who maintained he could drive better after a drink. Anyhow, a police car followed us and stopped us. John was breathalysed and taken to the police station, which left me and the car which I couldn't drive (not a driver). Another problem was that Shikari was in a cage in the car (she had been to the vets at Stapenhill), It was decided the police drive John;s car, me and Shikari home. Once home, I got a telephone call from the cop station to take the car keys, so I had to have a taxi there and back to the local cop shop, while John was sleeping off his beer!

Okey's white cat had two more kittens and I came back with them both. Charlie (after my mother's cat in Spain) and Ambrosia, as he was the colour of Ambrosia rice pudding and I was greatly enamoured by Ambrose who was one of Derek Tangye's the author's cats). St Ambrose as well, said animals have souls. John was irate. Not two more cats he fumed. I insisted that Ambrosia was for him, a second Whitey and Charlie was for me. As well, I felt sad at splitting up two brothers.

Our home was complete. The dog, Woody and Sally and the cats, Shikari, Tommy 2, Ging, Ecclesiastipuss, Whitey, Stripey, Charlie and Ambrosia.

Charlie

Charlie was my own special cat. I felt for him in his every illness and he had plenty of run-ins with the vet in his long life, mainly due to having his freedom, as he got into cat fights and ate things he shouldn't. I tried to supervise him, but Charlie was Charlie and would disappear when the mood took him.

Sally's owner claimed her back when he remarried, but the marriage was a disaster, so she was re-homed with the bride's sister who had plenty of land. Woody was not particularly put out as he had us to himself again. John often told me off when I brought him to the local, maintaining he, Woody, should have a long walk to a recreation area as there were no pubs en route. He slept at night under the duvet and if I disturbed him at night with my feet he would do a "grrr". We sometimes heard him whimpering in his sleep if he was having a nightmare.

Tommy 2 was still Sunday Tommy, but if there was a holiday time, he'd install himself in front of the fire as if he hadn't been away. He came for the last week in July and the first week in August, and he also came for the Christmas and New Year holidays as if it was expected of him.

Whitey still left evidence of himself on newly clean laundry. He liked anything black the best as he could really leave his mark. John was not at all happy with Whitey's tufts of white hair all over the place.

The other white cat, Ambrosia, had decided to move on. I was on holiday with my parents, who were now living in Spain, and told me how him and a mate went looking down the street for Ambrosia who had vanished. They found him some distance away under a car. Not able to pick him up they made a trail of cat biscuits to our house. I asked John were they “go cat”? He said they were! Well, Ambrosia decided his new home was going to be the Town Hall, where he was fed and looked after. We thought if that was his decision of where to live then it was up to him.

A friend had two cats and they both came when he shouted Charlie. My parents, when they came to England on holiday, put their cat, Charlie, into a cattery. On arriving back to Spain, my father collected Charlie and he brought home the wrong cat. He brought back a nice natured cat, while the other people brought back a bad tempered one.

Shikari was getting very elderly (I found out she was older than I thought she was when I asked her breeder for her pedigree), She was subdued and had an inflammation in her chest. I took her to be cured at the vet and she had a new lease of life, running about. John said that Shikari was giving me a run for my money literally. Moreover, Shikari had not long for this world, for she had convulsions and I had to send for the vet. It was an Easter Saturday night and he came promptly. I was informed that it was kindest to put her to sleep, as she would most likely die in her sleep. Poor little Shikie we lit a candle for her in the pub.

Meantime, John was having problems with the circulation in his left leg – the beer was not going round – and it was decided by the medical profession that he was to have this leg

amputated. Charlie had started to sleep with me upstairs while John suffered his pain downstairs. How comforting he was sleeping under my chin and giving me his paws to hold. Charlie seemed a hot cat while he slept on my knee – he liked me in a skirt the best, because he could blend into it. I informed John that he would have to wear a skirt whenever I was on holiday or out. He wasn't amused, saying that he would look a right Charlie!

Well, John had his leg amputated. Charlie and I became very close while John was in hospital recovering. We were due to have our house modernised, but now the improvements had to include access for a wheelchair and a downstairs bathroom and loo. John henceforth was to sleep permanently downstairs.

While waiting for all the paperwork for the modernisation/disabled facilities to come through, John developed depression and he would not get out of bed until after 2 p.m. He had his night cat, Ecclesiastipuss and his day cat, Ging, on his bed, but he lacked any motivation for enjoying life, for without his leg he could not find work to keep him out of the pub. Eventually, he did not see any need to get up at all.

I had a holiday booked at my parents in Spain. Whilst I was away John forced himself to pack up all my books, records, CDs and videos. There were plenty of these as I am an avid collector. I came home on the Saturday to a house full of boxes and the cats enjoying themselves! In black plastic bin liners John had put several mementos of Charlie. My precious boy, who was indeed my own little baby boy.

The move was on the horizon – on the Monday after I had returned on the Saturday. It had to be a quick move to enable the builders to have the house.

We were moving a couple of streets away to a rented house. We were going to take Woody and Charlie with us and feed the remaining cats at home en situ. These cats were then Whitey, Stripey, Ging and Ecclesiastipuss, Well, on the Sunday John had a heart attack and was rushed into hospital which left me to experience the move on my own.

I had a few helpers from church who ensured the boxes went into the right rooms, the big stuff and all my paintings went in the builder's lorry. The vicar finally brought Woody, Charlie and me.

There was nowhere – no shelves to put anything, no TV aerial and no light bulbs. I had to wait for the electricity to be switched on, so I hunted for candles, but could not find a clock. The vicar had said that I could get the time from the radio, but there was nothing I could put it on.

I went back to Byrkley Street to dig out some soil for Charlie's litter tray and put it in a plastic bag which broke half way en route to our new dwelling in Princess Street. Whilst relating this tale to John in hospital he laughed and said that I had a whole garden at Princess Street to dig up.

Well, Charlie was not happy at Princess Street and I was a nervous wreck, when anyone knocked the door, which was quite often as the previous tenants owed money left, right

and centre, so I returned Charlie back to Byrkley Street. He positively expanded when he inhaled Byrkley Street air. Was he a happy little cat? Several times a day I would go back to Byrkley Street and call him for a bit of fuss.

All was well, but there were no workmen in sight. When they did come unexpectedly it was the demolition gang, who made so much noise that Charlie fled. Ecclesiastipus, Ging, Whitey and Stripey had found sleeping quarters in the bottom of three of my wardrobes – left there because they were too big, and the odd cushion. We had left them a window open for their entrance and exit, but the demolition gang did not deter them. I kept calling Charlie, but he would not come back. The other cats were there as large as life, but no Charlie.

I put notices in the post office and through all the letterboxes of properties in the square, notified the vets, the R.S.P.C.A., and Radio Derby, and finally went round to all the properties of the square and asked them about Charlie's whereabouts (he had been seen a few days previously – never knew he had gone so far! John was back from hospital then and he did not want to have me fretting over my little cat.

Five days later, on a Sunday, en route to church, all was quiet at Byrkley Street, as no builders were working, so I popped into our garden via the entry on the off chance to see if my little one had come back. He had! there he was, my special green-eyed boy sitting on the fence. I resolved to put him in a cage and take him home after church. John was not amused, saying that he would be better off at Byrkley Street, where he had his mates. I was adamant. I did not want my cat terrified out of his wits.

I had a retreat while Charlie was at Princess Street. I was glad I was not there, since the decorators had decided to paint the exterior of Princess Street. John had devised a plan – a piece of plywood over the whole window in the living room, which meant Charlie could be locked in there with no fear of him getting out.

I breathed a sigh of relief once the painters were gone, but not for long – their supervisors said that their work was not good enough and it had to be done again! They took ages this time, as they had to take off their old paint before re-painting. Was I glad when I saw the last paint tin being shut. I said, “I’m glad to see the back of those painters”, to which John replied, “You haven’t seen the back of them, for you’ll see the back of them painting other houses.”

At last we moved back to Byrkley Street. A chap from church hired a van for the removal and the vicar moved all the electricals in the living room. I had Charlie in a cage in Princess Street’s bathroom as no one would go in there, and Woody got in the way as there was so much activity going on. It was decided that I could do more good if I took Woody and Charlie back to Byrkley Street. “I’m not letting him out”, I insisted, “he’s got to be in for three weeks”. So I transported both pets to Byrkley Street and locked them in the upstairs bathroom. John was stationed at Byrkley Street. He could not do much, due to the bulkiness of his wheelchair, so he was positioned out in the street.

The move complete, I let Charlie out of his cage in the upstairs bathroom and gave him the run of the house. While having a cup of tea I looked out of the window and thought I saw Charlie OUTSIDE!

“You must have two of them”, John inferred. Charlie had only got out of the window that we had opened a bit to throw bits of carpet out (carpet layers always leave bits behind).

All five cats, on our move back, had a glorious night’s sleep indoors, dotted around new carpets that held our furniture.

We had three years all together in Byrkley Street, before John had another heart attack. He had been back to his lethargy prior to it, not bothering to get up, with his day cat and night cat (Ging never moved when the doctor came to examine him) but he had decided he wanted to go and see the pub across the road be re-opened. (Woody was then on tablets for kidney failure. He was wetting the bed at night and the vet said that I was to tell him when I had had enough, for Woody was an old dog – nearly fourteen years, which was a good age for a whippet dog).

There was a good spread on at the pub and John ate his fill, which was unusual as he was on soups or potatoes and beans. Outside the pub he complained of a pain in his chest and not feeling right in his head. I said that he had probably got indigestion from all the pickled onions and onion rings which he could not resist.

The pain persisted. I rang 999 for an ambulance. John was never to come out of hospital this time, being in intensive care and finally dying peacefully in his sleep. (The night before his death he said that he had the same pains as he went in with).

After his stay at the I.C.U. John was as high as a kite on his oxygen. He did not register that his day cat, Ging, had died in the dog's old box in the shed. He had come in for his food then gone out again. It was snowing.

I called the vet to dispose of Ging, as I could not handle his rigor mortified body. When the vet came into the house for his cheque he laid Ging's body in its sack on the floor and Woody cocked his leg up as if he was saying goodbye.

My mother came for John's funeral and to re-organise the house and my finances. Everything was in my name, so I was skint. John never believed in saving for a rainy day. I know my parents did, and I once found some money in their tallboy in their bedroom. I asked my mother what this money was for and she said its for a rainy day. I retorted "It's raining now (it was) "We can spend it!"

She worked like a tornado disposing of all John's clothes, his bed and his chair. Once rid of and before the funeral, she set about making the living room more cheerful. Finally, she announced I could not afford to have so many pets, which were all on their last legs, except Charlie. Besides I could not have a holiday with so many – which curtailed my freedom. I did try all the neighbours with the cats, but they said that they would only return to me. Thus my mother, as usual, took charge, and took Woody, who wagged his tail on his last walkie and the three cats, Whitey, Ecclesiastipus and Stripey, who had something wrong with him, as he was then a frail cat instead of being a former robust cat.

Now we were to start a brand new life, Charlie and I. Firstly, I had a holiday with my parents in Spain, which got me eating again as the great shock of loss affected my stomach. I put Charlie in the first cattery in his life. Poor Charlie spent most of his sixteen days away from me on the top of a door. His dietary needs were not met, best Felix and some 'Go Cat' with the occasional helping of Sheba, and I did not see any water.

Until I met and married Michael, he went through some catteries, one where he was thought of being very intelligent and he bit the owner's thumb, one where the roof blew off and another one where the owner retired. He then started going to Carol, where she picked him up and brought him back, but sometimes she could not get him back in the cage, so she had to get her daughter to do it. Charlie was not a very friendly cat.

Charlie never got over his fear of loud noises, which reminded him of our house being demolished. Whenever anyone knocked the door he would vanish upstairs under the bed. He hated women as he associated them with being taken to catteries. I did have a couple of weekends away and avoided the dreaded cattery. The church warden did the honours and he was only evident the first night and allowed Peter to tickle his chin, then he never saw him again. Another weekend I asked Ian, the chap who did my odd jobs. Charlie was better with Ian and even went on Ian's knee.

One time Charlie was off his food and I took him to the vet, and was told to starve him for twenty four hours, then to feed him cooked chicken and rice. I went especially to the supermarket to buy him his chicken portions which were expensive. When I was relating about poor Charlie to a friend, who has an Alsatian bitch called Ronda, he said that he has

taken his Ronda to the vet, and the vet had also told him to starve her for twenty four hours, so Ronda was starving and would like chicken flavoured cat!!

No. 4 Byrkley Street thought Charlie was beautiful and gave him a card and sachets of Whiskas for Christmas. He had an accident to his paw and he had an anonymous benefactor who sent me the price of the vet bill through the door in £10 notes.

He was getting on – my soul mate and my sleeping companion. I adhered to his routine so continued to supervise his going out. I would turn the TV down whenever I let him out so I could hear what he was up to. I had a larger than life photo taken of him when John was alive, so I wouldn't forget him and his beautiful green eyes that I took the sleep out of before he washed his face. A bit of his fur I had in a locket around my neck. I contemplated getting him a companion, so when I lost him I would not be so distraught.. A friend wanted a home for his female cat "Ash". That was a non-starter, since Ash would only come out to eat, drink and use the litter tray. The rest of the time she spent behind the washing machine.

Aimee

We acquired Aimee from a breeder who had moved to the other side of Nottingham. (She has now taken her cats and gone to live in Spain). She was the same breeder who had had Shikari. Aimee originally had gone to a man who was allergic to her so he sent her back for re-homing. We were assured that she was an affectionate cat, so I would have her to fall back on when I inevitably lost Charlie. Mrs Peters and I had corresponded regularly at Christmas for many years and she knew all about my beloved Charlie.

When we first saw Aimee we were smitten – such a tiny ball of fluff playing with a long wire and wanting it to be constantly moved just for her!

Her journey back home was quite uneventful. She'd be quiet on straight, fast roads, then squeal on slow roads or going round corners.

The introduction to Charlie was quite unmarked. Charlie just went upstairs to bed or asked to go out where he had all his territory, just for him.

Aimee caught a chest infection and had to go to the vet. Charlie caught it himself and had to go as well to the vet, then Aimee caught it again. The vet explained that it had not re-occurred. It was a new strain, as humans cannot re-catch a cold.

Charlie, one Sunday, came back with a wet tail. Nowhere else was he wet. He must have gone to steal a Sunday joint and got a wet tail for his pains.

Michael had decided to get a double bed as the large single was a bit cramped for both of us and Charlie who still slept under my chin, me holding his front paws. One could not get all double beds up the stairs, so we had to get a pine lattice one to construct upstairs. Charlie, on seeing the structure of the frame, kept mewling – where had his bed gone? He was delighted with the end result though – more space for him and me for his siesta when I would keep him company.

Aimee developed a fascination for the heavy velvet curtains in the front room. She would take an end and ran backwards and forwards opening and shutting the curtains. She had a special noise when she did this – her curtain run. Aimee did the wire in for the upstairs telephone. I had someone in to reconnect it, but it would not ring upstairs.

I had some touron (Spanish Christmas delicacy) in the front room in a little wooden box. Aimee sniffed it out and ate the lot! I had wondered what the rustling was in there and when I felt like a piece, there was only a small bit left with her tooth marks on it!

Aimee, being a Burmese, had to have a special diet, so for weeks we went to a certain supermarket butcher to get her off cuts of different meats. She was eating like a lord until she went off it and Charlie preferred it to his common ordinary beef Felix. We tried her on wet fish coley. This was wonderful until she get fed up and Charlie cleared the plate for her.

At Christmas time we put up the tree and Aimee had great fun knocking off the baubles. No sooner had you put them up then down she would knock them. We had some little tapestry cat tree ornaments that Aimee knocked off, played with and filed away.

She'd love a piece of string from a parcel which she'd run about with it getting smaller and smaller until non-existent.

We had Charlie up to bed with us and Aimee stayed downstairs. If she'd sneak up it was hard to catch her, for she kept on going under the bed. We'd mimic sleep then pounce. Why she could not stay up with us was that she would play with our toes – under the duvet she'd go.

When we came to bed at night we would have to re-press the press studs. Aimee had left her evidence. She had had a nice sleep INSIDE the duvet.

Aimee was a year old on 3rd January 2003. On 1st January that year she did the door knob just right and got upstairs to wish us a Happy New Year. We were not amused, but on the whole thought her a clever cat. Michael said that she had been lucky and most unlikely to do it again. She didn't do it again.

In March that year we went on holiday to Cornwall. My Mum asked before we went away, when we were going to have some nice weather (it had been cold and wet). Michael said we would get some when we were away. And we did, but on going down to Cornwall it

started to rain. I asked Michael where did this (the rain) come from? Michael pointed upwards and replied, “up here normally.”

Aimee and Charlie were in a cattery – first time for Aimee. She played up. She found some kitchen roll that she ripped. The cattery’s owner, Carol, said that her grand daughter thought Aimee was an alien. She (the grand daughter) had not seen a pedigree cat before, so Aimee did not look like a normal cat!

Charlie would jump onto Michael’s knee and Aimee would jump up and keep Charlie warm. They both made use of Michael’s long legs. Aimee found palm crosses from church which she’d run around with, then she discovered bubble wrap. Very tasty she thought and it went pop, so she went on the hunt for it. We noticed that her fur did not go down like Charlie’s. She had ripples – her own heating system.

It was a condition on buying Aimee that she was a pet and therefore she had to be neutered. Although she had been done, she had phantom pregnancies. We surmised that if she had had kittens she would have been a bad mother and would wrap her kittens in bubble wrap!

We called her the S cat, for she squawked, slept, scoffed and stank. I have never known a cat who NEVER washed herself (the exertion was too much). She had big C.B.O. Once she fell in my bath water and she came out all soft and smelling sweet. Michael would spray her with deodorant to eliminate the Aimee pong.

In the autumn of that year we had a holiday in Ireland and the two cats went to Carol. Aimee tore down the bubble wrap that Carol had put round her house to keep it warm. We had planned a holiday for Christmas and we noted that we needed an overnight bag for a one night stop in France. Michael went upstairs to the other bedroom and went rooting around the cases. He came back with a small case. Charlie spied it and shot upstairs like a rocket. The look on his face spoke volumes, "Not again.... I've only just got back!"

Aimee, strange cat, brought down a cuddly toy of Tom Kitten, the same colour as her, always on a Monday night when I was at Art.

We had one night away to see Queen "We will rock you" in London. We left Aimee and Charlie with bowls full of meat and a big bag of biscuits for them to help themselves. Aimee was to feed Charlie as she was the most adventurous one! When we opened the front door it was Charlie who was here to greet us. Aimee was not bothered. Under my chair was the bag of biscuits. Her expression read, "that's mine, do not touch!"

After our holiday in Spain we just ticked over. In March we stayed at Cornwall for two nights. Once returning, Charlie spent all his time on the fridge and would not go out at all. The week before his death – 6th April 2004, when he ate anything, some red stuff came out of his mouth. He was not enjoying life and the day before his death he jumped up onto Michael's lap to be with Aimee. When finally consulting the vet he said that Charlie had a weak heart and there was nothing he could do, as he was an old cat. The vet

administered the lethal injection and I was heartbroken. I kept his ashes, as I want to be buried with him, my faithful friend.

Meantime, Aimee grew into a very large fat, lazy cat. The vets say at cat shows that she isn't a fat cat, but a well loved cat. They're being diplomatic.

Tangye

I had written a book called “Manx Cat Tales” and had visited the Isle of Man in search of Manx cats, where I did not see many, but when my book about Manx cats was published two people locally asked me to see their Manx cats. One had been brought over from the Isle of Man and the other one was from a breeder of them who lived in Chesterfield.

When the time was right, i.e. when I had grieved sufficiently for Charlie and could look forward instead of backward, I rang the breeder, a Mrs Gill Newton in Chesterfield. She said that she had two Manx kittens, a female and male Stumpy which originated back to the Isle of Man. I thought about the male, stumpy-male because of Aimee and was told he had a small stump of a tail. Would we like to look at him? We did. He was a beautifully marked red tabby and white and he seemed extremely healthy. She kept him for fourteen weeks after birth, before I could have him.

Aimee, who now slept upstairs, (if she'd spy an insect she'd go bananas. There was once a big moth on the bedroom ceiling and she'd scream at it. We went to sleep and it was gone the next morning. Aimee would sleep widthways and not lengthways). When we brought Tangye home and he took to going into any corner he could find where he would defecate. He would not jump on my knee, nor show any affection, however, he would go on Michael's lap. He'd pass through on the way to his holes.

Michael admitted Tangye was a good looking cat and he was sure he was a girl and if Tangye was a girl we could make a fortune on her kittens. We must show her/him – he was sure as he/she was a very healthy, good looking cat.

I was meanwhile far from pleased with his cleanliness. I did take him to register him at the vet and to find out exactly what sex he was. He was, in fact, a boy.

When Aimee and Tangye went to Carol's he was clean and used his tray. What really broke the ice was when Carol was booked up and we had to take him to another cattery – a room with a view. Both cats could look out onto fields. Music was played – the old cats had classical music and the young ones had pop. Tangye was groomed there and the owner's sister in law loved him.

Now we could see Tangye he would spend hours in the washing machine or in the sink. We did not know that he suffered from the heat.

Since we had Tangye we noticed he relaxed in the daytime while at night he'd play. We could hear the bell on his scratch post ring (he wanted room service). He would knock the bin over and any ornament off any surface and he could not stand fridge magnets. He'd hunt out clothes pegs, pens and any small item and file them away under the fridge or washing machine. About every six months we'd sweep out his treasures.

Tangye would like to eat my roll up tobacco. Once he'd found out some Brussel sprouts and play football with them in the washing machine. Clean Brussels. He'd like to play with bits of egg shells – just when I'd been to see the Shell Seekers. Our central heating then came on when you ran a tap in the downstairs bathroom and Tangye sussed this out and I came back one cold day and found him basking under a radiator. Clever cat!

I think Tangye's worst misdemeanour was when he ate in two places the cable of the telephone. He did not like that electronic woman's voice that said, "Please replace the handset", so he killed "her"! Yes, we often found the telephone off the hook (Aimee had started on the telephone and Tangye finished it off).

Tangye's most scary happening was when Michael had gone to work early and I heard loud voices downstairs. Creeping downstairs thinking I had burglars, I found Tangye sitting watching a cartoon on the TV. He looked as if he was enjoying himself. He had worked the remote for himself.

I believe Tangye has got some lovely markings. I try and decide what each line means. I start "That line means I'm a beautiful cat" and Michael continues, "That line means I HATE cat shows!"

Now after taking him to some five cat shows up and down the country, he is not laid back about it like Aimee and Bling Bling. He breathes heavily, pants and knocks his nose at the side of the cage. We're thinking of retiring him now he's in the Premier League.

We've been having a hot spell and he sleeps in the red litter tray by the wall in the downstairs bathroom, which was meant for Bling Bling.

He likes to come up to bed in the morning, when Michael has gone to work and for my siesta in the afternoon. Often Aimee will give him a lick, but she won't wash herself. If he has sneaked up at night, at 5 a.m. he goes under the duvet in search of our big toes which he bites to make sure we are awake!

Bling Bling

We got Bling Bling from the same breeder as Tangye. He was a much smaller kitten than Tangye was, and he did not look so robust. Now, there is no meat on him. He is a tall, long, thin cat. Michael says he is a tall, thin Sally.

At first we did not realise that both Manx's were so well related – brothers, but from different litters. (We thought they had the same mother, but a different father) until we saw how inseparable they were – sleeping together and washing each other. As they are both ginger and white we often confuse them, but Tangye has more ginger on his face and Bling Bling is a slightly lighter ginger.

Bling Bling did not know what fuss was. He and Tangye spent their early life in a pen in Gill's garden. Tangye would come for a few minutes fuss on Michael's knee while Bling Bling would not jump up. I would have to handle him on the floor and he would purr contentedly. Then to my surprise he jumped on my knee and formed himself into a ball and fell asleep. I was highly honoured by my cat.

All three cats supervise me at bath time. Both Tangye and Bling Bling are fascinated by the water going in and coming out. Bling Bling got over enthusiastic and fell in, so got much wetter getting out. He dried himself on the bed. Bad cat!

Bling Bling I think is an Australian cat. He hides under my coat, but his behind is on view. Sometimes I find him asleep in a plastic bag. He has his own corner, underneath my

chair, for his cache of toys, pens, milk bottle tops, pegs and cotton reels. There is even a cushion there for his cat nap.

Now Blingy has two annoying habits. First he scoops water from his water bowl to wash his face and the floor and secondly he hooks the teabags out of hot water and milk. I found a collection of sucked teabags on our bedroom floor!

Bling Bling cannot stand pictures being straight. He is always jumping up and making them crooked. He is a real artist's cat.

We thought about breeding from Bling Bling and getting him a female, but the litters are small or stillborn due to spina bifida genes. Then, true Manx's (no tail) are not often bred – could be a Stumpie like Tangye or a Tailie – a Manx with a tail, that you would have to give away.

After a lot of deliberation and soul searching we are back to our original idea to have a female Cornish Rex and breed from her. It would be very expensive trying to breed Manx with all the vet bills and I could not cope with the still born incurred.

Knowing our luck, though, Bling Bling would be a dud with his own spuds. He's got a spud filed away near his litter tray in the kitchen.

Tangye and Bling Bling sleep together on my chair at night. Aimee before coming to bed rolls in Michael's clothes to get his body odour. She does not like late nights or early mornings so she goes upstairs on her own accord. Before booking her space either

between us, or on some jumpers on my side of the bed, she kneads me. I say she's making bread. To which Michael asks where Aimee's bread is, as he's not seen it.

If I ask Aimee nicely she'll roll over for me. This I call the Aimee roll, but this is not as nice as the Aimee wriggle when she is about to chase Tangye and Bling Bling. Bling Bling being the youngest is first to have his fling. Aimee entices the two Manx's by waving her tail or banging it as if to say "I've got one. You haven't!"

Tangye and Bling Bling must be up all night playing. We spy the bin on its side (the knocking over of the bin must be a Manx thing. Tangye did the same as a kitten. Aimee didn't – too lazy) and the loo roll in shreds – Tangye we suspect, but not sure. We notice Tangye in the morning and he is done in, so he goes upstairs for his 'personals' when he's not disturbed.

Bling Bling is fascinated to smell our shoes to see where we've been. He likes the smell of my Mum's dog or of Aimee's G.C.C.F. shows. Think in his cat mind he wonders why he hasn't gone, so he can do his posing. He loves his cat shows, and so does Aimee. She just goes to sleep in between all the judging.

The Cornish Rex came and was integrated with the other three cats straight away. Bling Bling has got a playmate whom he chases around then gives her a full wash. Aimee is fascinated by her long thin rough tail, while the Manx's play with Aimee's tail, which she wafts around on purpose!

Jasmine, the Rex, likes to climb onto high shelves or on top of a door, or on your back if you're on the loo. Tangye is done in after a hectic night of play so he vanishes upstairs for an all day personal sleep. Ditto Aimee, who is extra exhausted after a cat show.

Bling Bling and Jasmine are always together. We are going to take them both to the next cat show, so Bling Bling can show Jasmine how to be a good poser.

I don't know how anyone can be cruel to a cat or hate them for the damage they do to the birds or their gardens. God gave us cats to worship their beauty. Each one is certainly an individual.