

Our Furry Friends

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They were everywhere, every house had a least one, if not two, so they became part of the fabric of the streets in which I ran and played. I never, ever questioned why there were so many cats — I had no reason to, they were there to play with, or ignore, depending on my whim. That I saw them on many occasions with mice in their mouths, was also something I took for granted — all of the slums we lived in were infested with mice, but that was as insignificant to me as the number of cats.

I had watched cats run up a 7ft backyard wall when chased by an aggressive dog, and I had stared in wonder as a cat tumbled through the air, only to land on all four feet, after being knocked off a yard wall by one of the housewives wielding a broom.

Generally I had found that most of our streets cats were quite amiable, and would come when beckoned with a tut-tut-tut of the lips, and the rubbing of finger against thumb of an outreached hand. They responded to a head stroke with purring and a body vibration I found inexplicably pleasing, and I loved it when one would come and sit in my lap to be stroked on many a warm day in summer as I sat on the front door-step of our house.

My Dad had confirmed my observations when I had related the cats' gymnastic abilities, and had said that no matter what happened, a falling cat would always land on its' feet. This puzzled me, because I knew that if you swung a cat round by its' tail, before letting go, not only would you make yourself very dizzy, but the cat usually hit the ground and rolled over a few times before getting up and limping away.

We had a black and white cat whom I was very fond of, who would run to me without any coaxing, as soon as she saw me in the street. There was nothing remarkable about her behaviour, until one day she started sleeping in the coal-house, out in the backyard. I was intrigued to find that Dad had put a smallish box on top of the coal, and our cat had deposited various bits of rubbish in it. When asked, he told me that she was going to have kittens, and needed to be by herself for a while. I was very excited, and every morning would open the coal-house door, only to be disappointed when no kittens were obvious. Then it happened — six beautiful little mewling balls of fluff, which our cat kept re-arranging by lifting them up by the scruff of the neck with her mouth. I went out into the yard whenever I could and was captivated as she suckled and fussed over them. I was out there watching also, when Dad had filled a bucket full of water at the tap in the yard, and then drowned every kitten — one at a time. I remember at first I was

intrigued as he held each tiny body under the water, but intrigue turned to a horror I only vaguely understood, as he laid each minute sodden corpse on the yard floor, before reaching into the box for the next mewling sibling.

When it was all done, the wet balls of fur were wrapped in a newspaper and put in the dustbin, and the bucket of water emptied down the drain.