

**My cats**  
**By Gail Grenier Sweet © 2006**

**(1) Fluffy, circa 1960, Milwaukee, WI**  
**The Ladies' Man**

He was a big -- fluffy -- stray grey tomcat. He showed up one morning when my dad was in the back yard on Beckett Street, cleaning fish he had caught. *Mmmmm, fish guts!*

You can tell by Fluffy's name that he was named by kids age 10 and younger.

Fluffy was very popular with the neighborhood female felines during certain times of year. I remember one winter, looking out our picture window and seeing a girl cat waiting for Fluffy where our front walk met the sidewalk, huge piles of shoveled snow framing her small body. Fluffy had a steady stream of girlfriends. I didn't quite understand it, but I remember my parents laughing about it.

I don't know how long Fluffy stayed with our family, but he's the first cat I remember. I think he's the first cat I talked to, the first cat in whose soft fur I buried my teary face.

**(2) Zsa Zsa, late 60s, Milwaukee, WI**  
**Glamour-puss**

Zsa Zsa got her name because she was *glamorous*. She was my first calico cat, a longhair. I don't remember anything else about her.

**(3) Tigger and Fonsey, mid 60s -- early 80s, Brookfield, WI**  
**Mum and Pop's Faves**

Tigger and Fonsey stick together in my memory, although I think our family had Tigger first. They were both great big neutered males -- Fonsey gold, Tigger black and white.

Before Tigger and Fonsey, my family never had more than one cat at a time. I suspect we got Fonsey because he was so beautiful my mother couldn't resist him. Maybe some of my siblings will read this and enlighten me on the story. I think Fonsey is the reason I believe to this day that there is no nicer cat than a neutered yellow male.

My mother's cats never had a litter box. They never had their claws removed. Mum was a farm girl -- cats belonged outside, and they needed their claws to catch mice.

Tigger and Fonsey lived amicably enough with each other and our family of seven. Pop loved to "fight" Tigger. He'd slowly move his opened hand with claw-like

fingers closer and closer to Tigger's face. Tigger's ears would flatten and his tail would sweep back and forth in warning. Finally Tigger could stand no more and he'd attack Pop's hand. Pop would laugh his head off, even though he came away from these battles with lots of scratches.

Tigger died while Mum and Pop were still living. Mum grieved hard for a couple of weeks. Pop put together a slide presentation memorial tribute to Tigger. We all watched it.

When Mum and Pop and George died in a car accident in 1978, my sister Sally took Fonsey. She also took Grandma Hoerig's cat Olivia when Grandma died in 1985. Sally kept Fonsey and Olivia until they died. She told me she considered it an honor to keep those memory cats.

**(4) Lou Al Boots, 1972, Brookfield, WI**  
**Bad Choice**

I had a habit of picking up stray cats. My mother put up with them or found them new homes. Lou Al Boots was a stray I found cowering under my 1971 Pinto at college during the spring of 1972. He was one of the most beautiful cats any of us had ever seen: all black except for white boots, with long luxurious fur and piercing eyes.

Mum was willing to keep him even though we already had Tigger and Fonsey. I gave the new cat his "Boots" surname for obvious reasons. I named him "Lou Al" after Lou Al Mische, a friend from college, one of our "Muncher" gang of townies.

Mike and I posed for our engagement photo holding Lou Al Boots. In the photo, Lou Al looks placid and unaware of the fact that Mike and I are in the middle of a big fight about something or other. (You, however, can read in our eyes how happy Mike and I were at the time.)

The next week I was away at work and heard the story about the cat's demise from Mum when I got home: Lou Al Boots had started foaming at the mouth. Mum called a Brookfield Policeman to come and shoot him. I think the cop also carted away Lou Al's body, because I don't remember burying him.

I was sad but sort of freaked out, too. I had brought home a cat with rabies. Thereafter, I was known as the person who "always brought home sick cats." (Both my parents had a way of generalizing from one incident.)

**(5) Lira, 1972, Norfolk, VA**  
**Irony**

During the month before we got married, Mike stayed at his Uncle Dennis's home in Somonauk, IL. Mike and I dreamed of having our own farm, and Mike wanted to work on Dennis's farm to see what it was like. I joined him there for one week.

Of course – there was a kitten on the farm. We brought her home with us. She was to be our first cat when we were a married couple. I named her Lira, because that's what I figured she was worth – about one *lira*. When I had been a student in Italy junior year, there was no such thing as one *lira*. The smallest amount you could get was a coin worth 10 *lire*. At the time (1970-71), a 50 *lire* coin was worth eight cents.

Mike and I got married on Aug. 12 and took off southward in a rickety retrofitted van. We had our college degrees and \$1,000 wedding cash. We wanted to find someplace warm to live. When the van burned up in the Ozarks, we figured “This place is warm. Might as well settle here.” We rented a \$65-month apartment and Mike started job hunting. My parents drove down to bring us some of our things, and Lira.

A week later we were almost done scrubbing the apartment, and a call came through: a job I had applied for in Norfolk, VA, had suddenly become available. It was already September, but a teacher's disability retirement had finally come through. I was to take her place. I hopped on a plane to Virginia.

Mike followed with all our belongings in the Pinto, and Lira. It was a grueling trip, with Lira mostly freaking out the whole way. We didn't know anything about drugs for pets back then, and Lira was a wild kitten. Mike spent some harrowing times calling “Kitty, kitty, kitty” in a hotel parking lot searching for the escaped feline. I think there might have been some unhappy cat potty incidents in the car, too.

We settled in a two-bedroom rented house in Virginia Beach. I started my teaching career, and Mike found a job in accounting. We put Lira outside during the day when we went to work. She'd be outside all day, but when she came inside the house, she decided it was time to pee. Since I had been raised with the idea of cats doing their business outside, I didn't even consider a litter box.

We eventually gave up and had Lira put down, figuring she was unfit to be a pet. It was a sad ending for her, especially after all Mike's suffering bringing her to Virginia.

**(6) Rhoda, 1973 – 75, Norfolk, VA**  
**Bitch-cat**

Rhoda was our first and only cat in our new house in Norfolk. After we had lived in Virginia about a year, we bought our own home close to Lake Taylor Jr. High where I taught seventh and eighth grade English to a bunch of children far wilder than Lira (but that's another tale).

Rhoda was black and white, like Tigger. I think we let her have a litter or two and found good homes for her kittens. She was one of the few nasty cats I've ever known. When we moved from Norfolk back to Wisconsin, I was relieved that one of my students wanted to adopt Rhoda.

The student's name was Christine and she had cat-sat for us on occasion and thought Rhoda was a swell feline. It's weird how it turned out, because Christine had tormented me with phone calls after I had found her smoking in the Lake Taylor Jr. High restroom. (I really just wanted to pee but since I caught her red-handed I had to report her, me being a teacher and all.)

Christine and I wound up being friends, and she loved my cat. Christine had relatives in Milwaukee and I think in later years she paid me a visit. I think we met at the Domes, but I can't remember for sure. All I know is Christine did her reparation for the prank calls by adopting Rhoda. Good riddance to a grouchy cat, and I've never liked a black and white one since.

#### **(7) Seymour, 1975, Norfolk VA and Wauwatosa, WI Sweetest little kitty in the world**

Seymour was a gold kitten, pretty and sweet like Fonsey. I was crazy about him, and he always rubbed against me with powerful cat love. Mike, not a cat person, made up a rhyme: "Seymour deemore little peemore. Why do you pee more than any other kitty in the world?" It was Mike's twisted way of saying he loved Seymour.

Once again we transported a feline across state lines. And once again it was all for naught.

When we decided to return to the cold Northern land of our families after three years in the warm South, we drove our green '69 VW bug into a U-Haul trailer, loaded car and trailer with our belongings, and towed the Pinto behind. Seymour must have sat with us in the cab all the way from Norfolk to Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, where we had decided to live as renters for a while in the upper flat of Grandma Hoerig's duplex.

Before we left Norfolk, something happened to Seymour. Either I hit him backing out of the driveway, or he climbed up into the wheel well of the car and got hurt. I found him in the driveway acting injured.

By the time we got him to Wauwatosa, he was breathing pretty hard. I took him to the vet. The vet had me leave Seymour with him.

The next day, the vet called me. He had opened Seymour up and found all his intestines had exploded out of their sac and were pressing on his little lungs. That explained the labored breathing. The vet said, "I can try to fix him, but he'll never be normal."

We let Seymour die on the table. And had a very long hard cry.

**(8) Phoebe, late 70s – early 80s, Sussex and Menomonee Falls, WI**  
**The Cat who Refused to Stay Buried**

My cat memories start to blur here because KIDS come into the picture. I remember distinctly the amazement I felt when cats no longer smelled good to me because now I was used to smelling the sweet scent of my own sweet baby.

I don't remember anything about Phoebe except that she was a tortoiseshell cat. I think a car in the road might have hit her. It was winter when Mike buried her next to our garage. During the rest of that winter, one of Phoebe's paws would jut out from the frozen ground now and then, no matter how often we tried to re-bury her.

**(9) Seymour II, 80s, Menomonee Falls, WI**  
**Hospital Cat**

Seymour II looked a lot like Seymour I, and as a neutered yellow male, he kept up his bargain of being sweet and loving... well, until the end, when I wouldn't let him wander outside anymore because of his habit of breaking into Community Memorial Hospital next door.

Seymour II lasted seven years, the longest I ever had a cat until then.

*(to be continued...)*

**(10) Gracie, 1991 – 2005, Menomonee Falls, WI**  
**Best cat in the world**

Gracie has her own story in this section, entitled simply "Gracie." No cat will ever top her.

**(11) Sadie, 1991 - ?, Menomonee Falls, WI**  
**Neurotic Cat**

*(to be continued...)*