

My Food Chain Gang – Restored!

I have a wonderful tale to tell – a God story, and I love those.

A few weeks ago now, I met a friend for lunch at McD's. Later that evening, as my hubby inquired about my day and asked how my lunch was, I talked about how much I enjoyed hearing my friend's updates on her beloved cat, Mya. I even lamented, "I wish I could have a kitten." I seem to be an animal person you say (I AM) – so why don't I just get a kitten? Well, I'm allergic to cats, otherwise I would probably have a cat (or two or three or...). I actually had one for 10 years and loved her very much, but I was very allergic to her and that was tough for both of us. But anyway – back to this Friday night a few weeks ago – I'm wanting a cat. Saturday morning, the early risers in our family were alerted by an "alarming" sound in our backyard. They found 2 cats fighting on the fence, and across the yard, 3 baby bunnies crying out in alarm. Sammie was dispatched to alert me (still in bed, allowed to sleep-in, THANK YOU Hubby!), and in the now-calm backyard I found 3 exhausted baby bunnies resting while my kids were comforting one of the stray cats. The stray was a friendly fellow; he had black and white fur, green eyes, and a few extra toes. I couldn't believe the obliging attitude – pleasure even – that this cat was deriving from the attention my kids were doting upon it.

I couldn't resist petting this friendly kitty, and when I did, something strange happened. Well, actually, it was nothing at all that happened. No sniffles, no itches, no hives – no allergy symptoms. How could it be that I wasn't allergic to this cat? For the record, Hubby is also allergic to cats but didn't react to this one either. So anyway, we let the super friendly tuxedo cat in the house. He walked right in and

looked around, and it really did seem as if he had lived here for years – and he's been here ever since! Just fit right in with our entire family, and it's not an easy feat to forge a seamless transition from outdoor feral cat to indoor family cat, especially when the new family = 5 kids (3 girls ages 12, 8, 5 and 2 boys ages 3 and 8 mos.), a dog, a parrot, a rabbit, and 2 rats. But saying we've had a smooth transition would be an understatement!

What a gift he has been. A gift from God for our family... to bring us together as we welcome a new member for however long we're allowed to take care of him. A gift for us to cherish together while we play with him. A gift for me to help ease the mounting stress I've felt lately. Have you seen the medical research on how a purring cat relieves stress? It exists, trust me!

So to acknowledge this gift for us and to honor our God, "Mittens" became "Moses" – and it is cute when the kids rhyme about "Moses with the extra toe-ses". Moses seems very adept at using his paws, and he acts very cat-like around the house, which I love – just why I wanted to have a cat around. For now, we are enjoying Moses and his company. He gets along with all of our other pets and is wonderfully tolerant of the kids – he fits in our family like the missing piece of a puzzle; not that any of us realized there was a piece missing before Moses came. So could it be that "my food chain gang" has been restored?

Both an article I read and a devotional I heard recently happened to be about the same subject: knowing and having the faith and satisfaction that God sees you, even if you feel invisible to the world. God uses many aspects of His creation to bring people closer to having meaningful relationships with Him and to help us receive His messages, even animals. My family was getting burnt out from a busy schedule, and it really rejuvenated the kids' spirits to get to have this cat. And they aren't the only ones ☐

“...You are the God who sees me...” from Genesis 16:13



This is a picture of our oldest daughter holding the cat. No, my 12-year-old does not normally wear make-up; this was “spa night” ☐

God is so good!!

Hambone Award Contender

Have you ever heard of the Hambone Award? It’s a prize given out by Veterinary Pet Insurance, the nation’s largest and oldest pet insurance company. Each month, the company selects the most unusual claims and chooses a monthly winner to vie for the yearly prize – the Hambone Award. Don’t worry, all the contenders are pets who survived their ordeals. Last year’s winner Ellie, a Labrador retriever from California, went to the emergency room after eating an entire beehive. She vomited large piles containing hundreds of dead bees, but Ellie was not harmed by the dead bees nor by the pesticide that killed them.

When reading suburban Chicago newspaper The Daily Herald’s online headlines, the following caught my eye, “Owl Vs. Chihuahua”, and that’s where I read about Chico the

Chihuahua's brave fight against a Great Horned Owl. Chico's owner was taking him for a walk in the wee hours of the morning, when a Great Horned Owl swooped out of nowhere (owls are silent flight birds) and picked up poor Chico, intending him for his late night snack. Chico and his owner won the tug-of-war, and Chico won the VPI 'most unusual' story for the month of January, beating out such claims as a Labrador retriever that ate a marijuana cookie, a Golden retriever that swallowed a 5-inch barbecue skewer, a mutt that got wedged between banister bars and a Boston terrier who collided with a skier. If you'd like to read the other entries and be part of the public voting in September, you can go to the [VPI Hambone Award's website](#).

Oh, and how did the Hambone Award get its name? There was a dog insured by VPI who got himself trapped in a refrigerator and ate an entire Thanksgiving ham before he was discovered. He was treated for a mild case of hypothermia whereupon he fully recovered.

A Different Sort Of Homecoming

Before I publish my vacation diary, I would like to say a few words about some unexpected feelings I encountered upon returning home. Ending a vacation is always a chore, and for an in-the-process-of-being-reformed-worrywart like me, it's easy to get caught up in dreading the negatives that accompany getting back to normal life; ie, returning to a cold climate, laundry, unpacking, etc. Thanks to my growing relationship with God, I've been learning to embrace positives more easily, and I could not be more grateful for the opportunity for such

a wonderful vacation and for the fact that we made it there and back safely.

But when we did return home, the welcome committee seemed a bit small. The greetings of family members left behind (read: pets) seemed to be missing something, and the house seemed more empty than I had remembered it. Then it hit me: this was the first homecoming we've had since our family dog passed away last year.

I had noticed it on vacation, and in Florida it was actually an unexpectedly freeing feeling to not worry about a loved one left behind. Don't get me wrong; I love the pets we still have, but no one will ever take Charity's place. I used to feel such a hole in my heart when we went on vacation and left her behind that it gave me an extra motivation to hurry home. But this time, our homecoming celebration was short-lived: we greeted pets and they greeted us, and there was no one around to hold a grudge like Charity used to do when we left her behind. No one was miffed about getting left behind, in fact, I wonder if the dogs even really noticed...

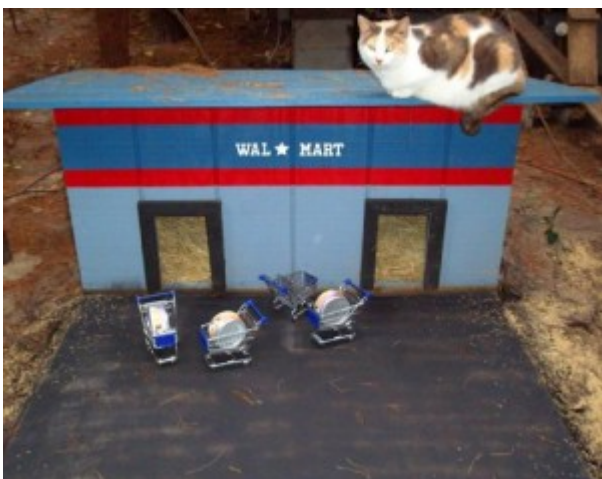
It's been over a year since the last time I saw her, and I still miss her a lot.

If Cats Ran The World

Because my family and friends know that I'm an animal lover, they're always sending me emails with pictures and articles about cute animal-related topics. All of them are adorable, but this one stands out as something to share – a man built an entire feline-sized village for homeless cats! Kind of sounds like something I'd like to do with some extra free time, money, and if only I didn't have the darn cat allergy that's

always getting in the way...

Below are some pictures of his creation. For the entire story, [click here](#). And to visit the cat village online, The Caboodle Ranch, [click here](#).



RIP Oreo

This post is a few weeks in the making – my daughter Sammie's favorite rat died on October 11. She took it pretty well; I was dreading having to tell her when she got off the bus that day. She got off the bus and promptly handed her younger brother and sister each a piece of her candy. 'Oh great', I'm thinking – she gets off the bus and immediately does something really nice for her siblings, and I have to tell her that her favorite rat died. But I didn't have to tell her – she asked me first if he had died. I said yes and asked her how she knew – turns out that big sis had taken it upon herself to tell Sammie on the way to the bus stop that morning. What are big sisters for? ☐ But like I said, Sammie was ok with it, but now that just leaves us one pet rat: Buckeye. We began with 2 rats, Bobby Jack and Oreo, and then we took in 2 more from a friend who was unprepared for pets, Mater and Buckeye – 4 rats at once was a bit much, but we didn't want to see them wind up as snake food, so that gave us 4 pet rats.

Bobby was the first to pass away in June of this year, followed by Mater in August, then Oreo in October – every 2 months we lose a rat, I guess. That's the only downside to these otherwise great pets – they only have a lifespan of 1-3 years. Otherwise, they are like mini dogs: affectionate as can be and very trainable. My girls love their rats and do very well at feeding them and giving them water every day, cleaning their cage, giving them baths, and taking them for walks. The rats would always seem depressed when my girls spend their week with Grandma in the summer, and they get really excited when the girls return. The only thing that keeps ME from getting too close to the rats is my allergy – what a bummer. I found out I am allergic to rats right after we got them as cute little babies. I would play with them and wonder why I broke out into hives on my forearms and sneezed like crazy and had itchy eyes for hours afterward. In a way,

it's a good thing, otherwise I would be more sad than the girls when they die, and at this rate, we are poised to have to say goodbye to a long line of pet rats!

Best Way To Spend 88 Cents

According to JJ my parakeet, the best way to spend 88 cents is on this little number:



I saw this little bird toy at Walmart the other day, and even though I knew it would scare the heck out of my scaredy-cat parakeet, I bought it anyway. It's a piece of plastic in the shape of an upside-down T – a perch for the bird to sit on, while the part that sticks up hold millet sprays – a favorite treat for parakeets.

I adopted my little guy JJ (short for Jungle Jack Hanna named after my favorite celeb) back in January, and he hasn't ever been interested in playing with any of the toys in his cage. My 2-year-old son used to bang on JJ's cage, and so the little bird became afraid of people, and I haven't been able to pet him in months – he flies away from me. I was so afraid that he led a miserable existence locked away safely in my bedroom – until about a month ago, when I moved him from our bedroom (where he was by himself most of the time) to the living room

(the centerpiece of most of our large family's traffic patterns). JJ has been SO happy to be a part of the action! I've been happy to see him happy, but he still wasn't playing with toys – until I bought this 88 cent Walmart Wonder on a whim. At first, JJ kept his distance, and I feared I was right – he WAS afraid of everything! I had to leave the house for awhile, and when I returned, the millet was gone from the toy – I was ecstatic!

The next day, I snapped the above picture of JJ perched on his new toy, and ever since, he's been in love with his 88 cent Walmart toy! He sits next to it and preens himself, and he even gazes at it lovingly.

I reiterate – BEST 88 cents spent (on a pet) EVER!!

A day was remembered

and celebrated in my heart.

A 7th birthday came and went without you being here to celebrate it with us. We have spread apart a bit this little family of ours. 3 not much more than an hour away, one more than 18 hours away (at least by car). And I know you were missed.

On your birthday, I had to take your dog to the vet. He needed some care, and would be in observation for two days. I had taken him in for a checkup the week before, making sure all of his shots were up to date. He was scheduled for a couple of days in a puppy vacation. I had scheduled time with some friends and he would have been in good hands. But then I got the news he needed some medical care. I was at a in a bit of a quandary. Should I go on my trip while he was at the vets, or

take that time to be around for him.

Unless the unfortunate happened, I would not be seeing the little guy for two days. Unlike hospitals, there are no visiting hours at the vets office. My being around would not help him at all, so I decided (with a bit of a heavy heart) to go on my trip. I'm glad I did.

On your birthday, I went to the Cincinnati Zoo with some friends. Unfortunately, you never knew them, and they never knew you. I think you would have liked them. It was a good day.

As I wandered around the zoo, I did wonder about the changes that were made. Some of the exhibits were exactly like I remembered them. Others seemed very new to me. Since this was not a zoo we visited often, I imagine most things were new. It has been a few years since my last trip there. We were still pushing a stroller or two around the last time. I'm sure the manatees were not there on our last visit. I seem to remember more elephants, but I could be thinking of another zoo. I think you would have remembered that. A couple of red pandas (one of your favorite animals) were doing what they do best, sleeping in trees. Just like almost every other time we saw them.

We did spend a full day at the zoo, but like all of our trips, we never seemed to have time for the entire zoo. Extra time spent at this animal, or another seemed to slow down the pace. But then again, what sort of pace should there be at a zoo. If we can't take the time to learn, observe and wonder about animals we share this planet with, why would we care if the places they live are there in the future. That was the lesson we tried to teach our children, so that they could teach theirs.

Again, it was a day well spent, but I wish you could have been there. Miss you still.

Runaway Parrot

As you might have read in my blog previously, we have a pet Scarlet Macaw parrot. His name is Squawky, although he is more 'screamy' than he is 'squawky'. Occasionally when the weather is warm enough, we take Squawky outside – he either goes for walks with our family or he gets tied to a tree (so he doesn't fly away) to enjoy nature. A few weeks ago, we were sitting in our dining room having lunch when we saw the man from our local pet store approaching Squawky in the tree out front with a towel on his hand. "He's going to take your bird!" I said to my husband, "You have to go outside!" I guess this is where I should get it in that I didn't think it was a good idea for Squawky to be outside alone in the first place, but we had to give the kids lunch and Squawky was enjoying himself so we didn't make him come in with us. So anyway, we ran outside, and told the pet store guy that he was our bird – apparently our neighbors were unaware that we had a parrot (guess they hadn't seen him outside before; sometimes we put him in the backyard). So the neighbors called the police, who called the pet store, who sent the bird-catcher. He thought it was someone's lost bird, and he was going to "rescue" Squawky – and lose some fingers in the process. It's not an exaggeration when they say that adult Macaw parrots can snap a broomstick handle with their super-strong beaks. Check out a few of my husband's parrot battle scars or use your imagination to see what one of those beaks can do to a fleshy finger. Luckily we got out there just in time to save the pet store guy's fingers, and he apologized profusely, as did our neighbors who had called the police. The pet store guy found it unbelievable that we could have a macaw parrot (a notoriously loud bird) and not have the whole neighborhood know about it. I told him that the neighbors on the side of

the house where Squawky's room is probably know about him, but the neighbors who called the police live across the street – plus Squawky doesn't scream when he's outside.

But all's well that ends well – as much as that bird irritates me sometimes, he has been a part of our family for 8 years now, and I don't want to lose him. Well, not to have him stolen or lost anyway – getting paid the going price of an obnoxious Scarlet Macaw might be kind of nice... A joke, sort of. ☐

I looked around for a picture of Squawky in the tree, but I guess I don't have one. So here he is having a tremendous amount of fun taking a bath. He is a bit larger now because this was taken 7 years ago.



****UPDATE**** – Squawky was back in the tree tonight, so this time I made sure to get a picture of him enjoying his tree:

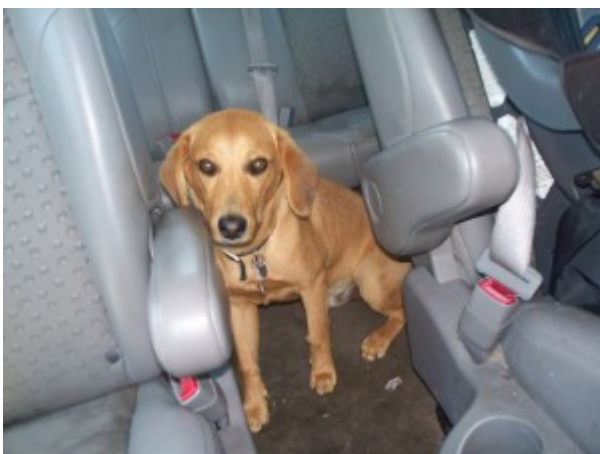


If only his personality was
as beautiful as his plumage

He's Not Half The Man He Used To Be...

Our little puppy Gizmo is now about 6 months old, and we've been marveling at what a handsome young man he's become. But yesterday, he had his appointment for his, um, fixing.

He handled it like a trouper, and we haven't noticed any behavior changes, positive nor negative. We're happy the little guy is ok, and he doesn't even seem to need his prescribed pain meds. I've always had girl dogs before him, and it seems to be a bigger ordeal for females since the incision is larger. Yesterday when we picked Gizmo up from the vet, he seemed happy to see us but still a little dazed:



And while we were waiting for the um, procedure to be complete, we had a few hours to kill, so we began at Meijer where the kids rode the 1¢ electronic horse. We also learned that our almost 2-year-old son knows how to say 'pop tart'

since he loves the treats:

And then we went over to a nice scenic place on the Maumee River called Independence dam, but we had some unwanted excitement and had to call [our friend Mary](#) at work. Nothing bad, at least we don't think, but no one was hurt, if that's what you're thinking (Mary is a 911 dispatcher). The water level was very high due to all the rain in the area recently, and the current was swift around the falls from the dam. And we kept seeing something suspicious bobbing to the surface – some tires, some large beige objects, and a few other strange looking items that just weren't moving right. My first thought was that it was an ATV, and that someone had been 4-wheeling and went into the river. After a few more bobs, we saw that the wheels must have belonged to a full-size vehicle since we could still see the tires' rims. The kids' imaginations began working overtime, and soon they began to see heads and hands reaching out of the water. My husband and I saw nothing of the sort, but it was an odd sight, and we figured better safe than sorry so we called Mary's work number – 911 – and apologized for the non-emergency nature of the call. The officer that was sent to talk with us was very nice and completely understanding about why we had called, and as it turns out, he is head of the Sheriff's Department dive team. At first, he seemed to think that nothing was amiss, but as he watched the bobbing debris, he seemed to become increasingly interested. He told us he'd keep an eye on it, and we drove further into the park to turn around, and when we came back, there were more officers in the park. I'm curious to know what was found, if anything... perhaps our tip helped them locate a minivan that's been missing since it went down in the ice 2 years ago or something else useful. If anyone hears anything, let me know!

Things that turn back the clock

Many years ago, my wife worked at a pet shop in our little town. A friend of ours owned it and needed help keeping the animals fed and cages clean. It was a little shop and tended to have fish, mice, rats and some more exotic pets. My wife found a cute little grey furball. It was a chinchilla. That first chinchilla was brought home and given the name Jimmy. He would sit on her shoulder, under her hair with just his nose poking out most of the time. A very clean and personable pet. Over the years many other chinchillas made it into our house. Some were welcomed because of their specific colors, some because they were 'rescue' chinchillas. Homes that could or would not take care of the animals, those animals were cared for here.

Fast forward to 2003. My lovely wife died, and my daughters and I are left with over a dozen chinchillas. Some most were older, but there were still a few youngsters. Over the last few years, I gave a couple away to friends. Others made it through their lives and died. The last few are all over eight years old and they are coming to the end of their lives too. Chinchillas can live to be over 20, I'm almost sure one of ours was close to that, but we never really knew how old she was. Most die after 10-12 years of life. Today, another little chinchilla passed on. Another connection to my wife is gone.

My wife and my youngest daughters could tell you the names of almost every chin. I'm taking nothing away from my oldest, but she had been on her own during the last few chinchilla arrivals. Me, I remembered just a few of the names. Those chinchillas have been gone for some time now. I didn't remember the names of the remaining 4. I just know the color and location.

So a little beige chinchilla is not with me anymore. And memories of other chinchillas and how my wife loved the little animals flood my mind. Funny how things turn the clock backwards.