

# SHELL SHOCKED

## Chadwick The Boxing Cat

**By Art Stevens**

When I was a kid I had a deprived childhood. I never had a pet or owned a bike. Admittedly, there are children growing up today who have far more traumatic childhoods than I ever did but those two deprivations left a lasting impression on my life.

My parents were fussy people who didn't like pets. My two brothers and I were the complete opposite. Most of my friends had dogs and bikes. I had neither. I spent most of my childhood begging my dad to get me a dog. He had different ideas.

"What do you need a dog for?" my father would say. "Too much responsibility. Another mouth to feed and more doctors' bills. We have a big enough family."

"But why can't I have a bike like the other kids?" I would plead. "What if you fall off and break a leg?" my father would reply. "When you're older you can ride a bike."

But as I got older I kept waiting for a bike on my birthday but it never arrived. My childhood pleas fell on deaf ears. The older I got the more I missed not having a pet and loved being around other people's cats and dogs. Call it childhood deprivation if you will but I started a life long love affair with cats and dogs. And call me promiscuous but there wasn't a cat or dog I didn't adore. The cats and dogs I would encounter had me pegged immediately and knew instinctively that they had found a soul mate. Regardless of who else would arrive with me when my family went visiting, the household pets would always approach me first. They just knew I preferred their company over the adults.

When entering someone's home and discovering a cat or dog I would immediately shirk my social responsibilities and go play with the pet before I would say my full hellos to my hosts. I would hug and pet until a bond was formed and then I would get on all fours just like my furry friends so that I could communicate with them better.

How could a kid like me not have a pet given these circumstances? When I was twelve I decided to devote my life to bonding with cats and dogs. I would greet them in the street, in peoples' homes, or wherever I could find them, and get to know them as quickly as I could.

At a certain point I even imagined that I could actually talk to them – that cats and dogs would understand my very words and that I fully understood their meows and bow wows.

My aunts and uncles took note of this and hired me to cat and dog sit. They knew they could rely on me to keep their pets company as well as fully entertained. They also took up my cause and pleaded with my father to let me have a pet. But good old dad was adamant. He stuck to his mantra of no more mouths to feed. He told me that when I got married and lived on my own I could then get a pet.

Well I did get married and my wife and I settled on a tiny orange tabby kitten which ran our household for fifteen years. That kitten grew up with us. While we didn't have to worry about sending it to college we sure took care of all its other needs – food and shelter, fortunately no

clothing. My wife and I adored Tiger and always looked forward to playing with him. Tiger was an affectionate cat and socialized with friends and family easily.

Then came Chadwick. We actually named Chadwick after a restaurant at South Seas Plantation in Captiva. We thought it was a very classy name for a black and white alley cat with a touch of Siamese in him. Chadwick was a character. He'd jump on the dresser in the bedroom and would get on his hind legs and box with me. It became a ritual for many years. And Chadwick would always win.

He would greet us at the door without fail when we returned home. Of course, he was happy to see us but he always signaled his displeasure at not being fed promptly enough. He slept on our bed every night and purred us to sleep. When Chadwick passed on to cat heaven my wife and I decided to take a break. We had invested a lot of love and affection in Tiger and Chadwick and when they left us we were grief stricken each time.

The two cats were in our household for almost thirty years. I sure made up for my deprived childhood, didn't I? My wife and I remain enraptured by cats and dogs to this day. Whenever we see pet food commercials on TV we stop what we're doing to pay more attention to the adorable pets they show than to the news coverage of the presidential primaries. The candidates may be very capable and professional but they're not as cute as the stars in those pet commercials.

Our affinity towards cats and dogs is reflected in the social invitations we get. We're always partial to friends and family members who have pets. One of my brothers has a beagle named Billie – after the great jazz singer Billie Holiday—and the other has a bichon frise named George. Then there's my niece's bichon frise named Molly and our close friends who own Sophie, the golden retriever who at five is still a perennial puppy. Sophie, please don't ever grow up.

Although my wife and I are currently taking an emotional break from having a cat in our household there are days when the temptation can become overwhelming. There are articles in the local newspapers about pets needing good homes. Kittens and puppies are often available at stores we frequent. At times, my wife and I look at each other, always on the same wave length when it comes to pets, and need to physically restrain ourselves from hauling a litter of kittens into our car.

Addiction? Yes, but a happy, positive one. We're suckers for cuteness. Cuteness does count. We'll welcome a new pet into our home one of these days. Just don't tempt us too soon. Let us get over Tiger and Chadwick first.