

CHAPTER 10

Now back to the strange way of acquiring another cat.

While we were living in the ground floor flat and Myrtle became pregnant with Michael, she met another newly pregnant mother at the health clinic where they both went for their pre-natal check-ups and exercises. That was Marie (pronounced Mari) - dare I say it? - a rather impulsive young woman! We are still friends though! Marie and her husband, Geoff, lived not far from the flat and also were about the same distance from the bungalow when we had moved in there. Shortly though, Marie, Geoff and children moved to a first floor flat in High Barnet, so our combination came in useful for visits to and fro. One day they were with us and we took them home - Barnet High Street had never before seen the sight of a combination disgorging the driver, pillion passenger, two women and four children! How that poor machine struggled up the hill I can't imagine! Perhaps we were all as crazy as one another! Anyway, a few years later, Marie and Geoff moved to a 3 storey Victorian semi in Hadley and tried to redecorate and renovate it on a low income and a high mortgage. That could not last for long and so they had to sell up and move way out of London to what was the last house going north out of High Wycombe. The difference in house prices between an expensive part of London and the inexpensive edge of High Wycombe paid for their losses: a car for Marie to drive Geoff to the station and, amongst other things, two seal-point Siamese kittens! The female of the pair did not, in the end, fit in with their household, so went back to the breeder, but the male, whose name was Koshka Periwinkle, was no problem and loved the fields behind the house and liked to watch the cows. He also developed a good hunting instinct for rabbits and the plastic rubbish bags that High Wycombe used instead of solid dustbins. By now, we had needed a roomier transport than the motorcycle combination and first changed to a 1934 canvas hood Morris that my father acquired for us for nothing and then to a 1948 Jaguar saloon that we bought for £ 25, my mother having contributed £ 5 as she liked the idea of having more room when she travelled with us.

Inevitably, after only another year or so, money problems got on top of them again, and Geoff hated the daily commuting to London. As Marie also missed the bright lights, they sold that house and moved all the family back to London again, ending up only a little further from us than when we all first met. However, this time it was to a rented second floor flat so that there was no chance of spending a mortgage loan! We straight away started our more frequent visits to them again and were impressed to see how well Koshka had settled in. Marie proudly showed us his litter tray on the little balcony and said that he had given no problems - clever cat. Cleverer than she thought! Solids went in the tray but liquid went on the expensive reproduction Victorian sofa - a legacy from the Hadley house - as Marie found out a couple of days later. Koshka was instantly banished, in Myrtles car as that was the only one available to Marie now, to Maries mother. I only found out about that when I got home from work and was disappointed that no one had asked me first as I liked Koshka very much. Phone calls to Marie and her mother soon established that her mother did not really want another cat competing with her elderly one, so Koshka was back to London again, this time in my car, to live with us

Koshka was by now a year and a half old and a very handsome cat. They had not bought him for breeding, so he had already been neutered. He took to our house and family without any trouble - we had of course met him several times already, so it was only the cats and dogs that he had to get used to. He was self-confident enough to cope and soon became part of the household, with of course a share of our bed at night with Cleo. They took to each other straight away, but had their own share of the bed. Cleo had developed the habit of standing behind my back, once I had laid down and then turning round three times on top of the bedclothes to get her paws together, at which point she would simply topple over and her back would meet mine with a thud and she would be already tidily curled up. She would purr loudly even after she was asleep, and it would gradually get quieter and quieter until it stopped altogether. If I then touched her, she would start purring again, but not wake up. That would then be her position until I got up in the morning. Koshka preferred the middle of the bed, between us both. If possible, he would insinuate himself into my arms, but if I later turned towards Cleo, he would still stay in the middle - UNDER the bedclothes, of course, with just his head on the most convenient pillow. If I turned away from him, then Cleo would be holding the bedclothes down, so I would end up wrapped around her.

Although Koshka liked his new home and friends, he still thought of himself as an independent cat, until he got himself lost one day. In High Wycombe he had been used to the open fields and our very large, but enclosed garden, was not, he thought, enough for him. So, one day quite soon after he came to live with us, he hunted too far and did not come back that evening. We were very worried about him and so went around calling with dreadful memories of Richard. It was not until nearly a week later that someone called us (we had of course given him a collar and medallion) to say that he was in their garden. They had just come back from holiday and found him sleeping in a roll of old carpet that had been put out into their garden. That was the last of his independent feelings! Only once more did he go missing and that was not his fault. We had a call from the local police station! He had been brought in to them as a lost and perhaps hurt, cat. When I went to get him, I knew that I was in the right place as soon as I went in the reception door. In those days, the door gave directly onto the front counter - no security screens and barriers then! I could hear him giving out with Siamese howls. They were very pleased to see me as they had started with him in the office and couldn't stand the noise, so put him in a cell! The stupid thing, they told me, was that he was less than 100 yards from the bungalow, having gone along a side passage to the front garden of a house that backed on to our land. There he gave his usual friendly shout to a young couple who were visiting relatives, and they were so worried about the strange noise that they thought he was in pain. They also concluded, from his size and shape, that he was pregnant and perhaps was in trouble with that. Instead of looking at his collar, they bundled him in to their car and took him a mile away to the police station! It really wasn't his fault. He was certainly pleased to see me and treated me to a noisy and lengthy explanation all the way home! You need to have lived with a siamese cat to really know what I mean!

During the day and evening times, if I sat in my armchair I would almost certainly get Cleo. Koshka also decided that this was a nice idea and he found that curling up on my lap was even more pleasurable if he could bury his nose in what was by then,

Cleo's lovely long, fluffy, tail. As she liked to stretch out along my legs and he liked to curl up more, then that was an ideal arrangement for the pair of them. I was the only one with a complaint. Cleo was a fluffy cat but with a small body weighing about 8 pounds. Koshka was a short haired cat, not particularly big, but with a very solid body weighing about 12 pounds. Twenty pounds of cat from knees to hips was quite a strain!

About the time that Cleo came into our lives, we had decided that holidays would be more fun if we had a caravan to tow around. Up till then, we had rented 'mobile homes' at various sites, but now that we had a stronger vehicle, we thought that it would be nice to try and tow a van from site to site. We made provisional arrangements to hire a small van for two weeks and then had to look for a towball. I had already had to do a lot of work on the Bedford to make it roadworthy so knew a lot about its capabilities. One thing that I had found out was that it already had special fitting positions to take a towball and its necessary brackets, so I made up the brackets out of steel strips and angles that I had and we then needed a towball. In the usual sort of talk at work about family doings I heard that a toolmaker that I already knew by sight had a spare towball, so we went around to his house that evening to see if it would fit and to buy it. In the end, we bought the towball for a pound and their old, pensioned off, caravan for £ 15! We went home to fit the towball, cancelled the hire booking and went back a few days later to connect up our own caravan. Unfortunately, there is a very steep hill a few yards from their house and the fitting plates I had bolted my new brackets to were riddled with rust! We got about half way up when the first bracket shook loose. The rest of the journey home was with great caution and the liberal use of rope. The next couple of days were spent in replacing the rusty steel and then all was well for some great holidays in that old, wooden, van. It needed patching from time to time, including a whole new side panel where it had rotted by being too close against Bill's garage, but did us well until on the way home one holiday I noticed that the front of the van seemed to be moving up and down independently of the Land Rover we had by then graduated too. A quick check showed that the wood screws holding the front to the chassis had rusted away, so the rest of the journey went at a slightly slower pace. That finally decided us that we needed our first brand new caravan, but we found a newly married couple who were pleased to have the old van for £ 20 and took it away to do some reinforcing on my repairs and were very pleased to have it.

Land Rovers played a very important part in our cats lives, so I need to explain how and why we got one before more cats come into the story.

[Link to Chapter 11](#)

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