

CHAPTER 7

Now lets span a few years in a few words! During 1959 and 1960 there were just four humans, two cats and one dog - Myrtle, Michael, Eric, me, Susie, Blackie and Tina - the outnumbered dog. In 1961 Richard came back to us and in 1962 Blackie decided to move permanently to number 15 - the other side of the drive from 13. Vera Wales and her mother were a bit put out at now having a cat of their own to look after, but Blackie soon sorted them out and stayed with them the rest of her life. During this time we changed the single seater motorcycle sidecar for a one plus two seater so there was more room for Myrtle and continued to holiday with it and with Tina as a passenger. Now we had a house of our own, we could safely leave the cats to be looked after by Myrtles mother.

Now we are in 1963 and in April, Michael now being in his second year at school, one of his friends had a cat who gave birth to kittens in an airing cupboard. He arranged, ostensibly, to bring a kitten home to see us just to see if we could tell its sex, but, of course, she ended up staying with us as his new cat. She was given the name, Nooky. Myrtle says that the name was Michaels idea but I say that she reminded me of a piece of camera equipment made by Leica. Leitz always gave their accessories all sorts of strange alphabetical code names, and that one was, Nooky-Hesum. It is an Optical Short Distance Focussing Device, so perhaps Myrtles memory is better than mine! Myrtles version is that her mother and father went on holiday to Newquay and that was Michaels best attempt at the name!

Whatever, Nooky was a lovely little black female. We were pleased to have her as a kitten so the boys could get used to having a very young animal to look after and we thought that we would let her have kittens of her own so that they could also see kittens being born and raised by a mother cat. In due course, the spring of 1964, Nooky produced four kittens. One boy eventually went to live some distance away and was called Mickey Fred - he lived happily for many years with his new family. Another also went to a new family. The other two we kept but not at first intentionally! One was a boy and the other a girl.

That one was a little all black kitten and we named her Sara. The other was a black boy with a white patch who was very sick to begin with. When the other kittens started to climb out of their bed and stagger around, he stayed in it looking very pathetic. When he tried to go after the others, his back legs just did not seem to work, so we were very worried about him. Mr Amsden, still our vet, had a look and said that it was nothing to be too bothered about - he had a mild form of rickets and needed more calcium in his diet so gave us some tablets for him. Within a day or so his bones had already started to strengthen and he was soon staggering after the others. Obviously we had to keep him after that. His name was also an obvious choice - as the tablets were mainly the constituents of chalk, he became immediately, Chalky. He was bossed about by his mother and sister but soon got bigger than both and then he flattened them! He was always a bit strange in his walk as his back legs never got as straight as they might have done - we have one photo of him in a favourite sleeping position with his middle comfortably supported by our wedding photograph, still upright in its frame. By the time that the kittens were getting more adventurous, the

weather was nice and warm so we propped the cat door open so they could learn their way in and out. Michael and Eric in effect took charge of them as they loved to play with the kittens. They made a little ramp from the cat door down to the garden and from odd bits of wood, they made a form of toy train track and truck to give the kittens a ride. Mutual fun and learning!

However, this was not all. Tina, our little black streak of lightning was now almost eight years old and getting, we thought, a bit fatter. But no - she was pregnant and gave us a big surprise when all unannounced she produced a puppy. She went on to have four altogether over a couple of days of which one was stillborn and one died after a few days. The other two were perfectly healthy and were still nursing when Nooky had her kittens. After the kittens started to get around, we began to lose track of which were which as they would often end up all asleep in the same cosy animal bed; usually Tina's as that was bigger, so this time, Tina got the job of looking after kittens. Nooky didn't get away with it like Susie did as we had her sterilised before she got around to looking for a new boyfriend! We did not want to keep the puppies so the black girl, who looked just like her mother, went to live with a nearby family when she was old enough. That lasted for about a week, when she was brought back to us as being too noisy and disruptive - in other words, she played like a puppy! We decided that once was enough, so kept her and named her. The boys loved the male so we kept him as well. The girl became Sheba - the black queen of Africa - the boy was patchy with black, red and white and very plump, so became Podge. Sheba, needless to say, was sterilised as soon as she was old enough - we didn't need any more surprises!

Now, the house was getting a bit crowded. Something had to give. One thing that we had arranged with Mr Selley in the original design was room for a car parking space, maybe even a garage, alongside the bungalow. In the event we decided on the double garage elsewhere but the concrete slab that we had later laid in readiness was right outside the kitchen outside door and also our living room french doors. On the kitchen end we had erected a useful shed so we only had to enclose the other end with a piece of fence (the boundary side already had a fence) and we had a perfect dog run. We made a roomy kennel and when they were old enough, the dogs all slept out there. Anyway, that was how it started. It turned out that Podge was to grow almost twice the size of his mother and sister and could high jump into the bargain. The only way to keep him from leaping over the six foot fence and running around the roads was to have a rope run and keep him on a collar during the day. Mostly at night, they would then all come back indoors and sleep in the kitchen.

The house was designed on a very modern plan, with the kitchen and living room being an open L plan with just a combined counter top/cupboard unit making a nominal separation. We therefore had to make a folding door arrangement to close the side walkthrough and a drop down blind to the counter top to keep the dogs in the kitchen when needed. The two bedrooms, the toilet and the bathroom were off a small entree which also gave onto the living room via a glass door and screen. From there, there were two steps down into the living room to make it easier to match the slope of the land and also to give an interesting feature. We also asked Mr Selley to design us a photographic darkroom off the same entree. On the plans, it was shown as a cloakroom so as to not make a hobby appear as a business!

So now we had the four humans, five cats (plus Blackie passing by occasionally) and three dogs. Our new little home was getting a bit crowded!

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