



Howie as a kitten



Howie at 16½ years old

It is with great sadness that I must inform you of the death of our cat Howie at the grand old age of 17½ years. If you are reading this, you are either one of the many, many visitors to our home who fell in love with our adorable animal, or you are someone who was interested in hearing about him. We often used to receive comments like: "Can I take him home with me?" and "I don't normally like cats, but he is different."

He was different. His upbringing wasn't like usual cats as his adoptive mother was our little cross-breed bitch Kira who actually produced milk for Howie to suckle. Kira in turn had a similar upbringing, as her adopted mother was our tortoiseshell cat, Nikki. We were fond of telling folk of the unusual relationships between them and all our other animals. As you may have heard the stories I won't bore you with them now.

Not long after he was born, Howie was rescued by my younger daughter Barbi from the clutches of a two year old who wanted to swing him and his brother round by their tails. Barbi told me that the child's mother threatened to drown the kittens to stop her child tormenting them. I couldn't let that happen so agreed to take one of them. (I believe the other was also successfully homed.)

Howie's arrival in our home co-incided with the start of my relationship with my second husband, Nigel. We had just seen a movie called Howard the Duck, about a duck with ATTITUDE. The name so suited our new arrival that it was an obvious choice.

When he was small, he was a tiny bundle of fur around big blue eyes and HUGE long whiskers which should have given us a clue as to the enormous size he would grow to - at his heaviest he weighed in at two pounds over a stone.

Howie loved sitting outside our front door, waiting for the postman or children on their way to or from school. Everyone used to pet him. We even had children knocking on our front door asking if he could come out to play. Once, one of a group of 5 youngsters clustered round the front door informed me that he went to her house and her mummy gave him something to eat. A second of the group piped up that he also visited her house and was fed. Every one of the others claimed the same thing happened to them too. When we told our friends they said it was no wonder he was so big. But he wasn't fat. He was just a very big pussy cat with very fluffy fur. We knew that his fur made him look bigger because on the rare occasions he had a bath, his wet fur stuck to his body showed his real size - still big, but not obese.

Howie loved people more than he loved food and would often leave a bowl of munchies uneaten to nuzzle up to a friendly human - even at his mealtimes. Being brought up by a dog gave him several canine tendencies. He used to lie sprawled on the floor in a typical dog-like way and demanded fuss by tapping a convenient knee with his paw. As soon as he received attention, his purring grew ever louder, culminating in a distinctive two-tone mini roar of appreciation.

Like all geriatrics, as he grew older he slept more and our home held several cardboard boxes (his preferred resting places) lined with soft bedding, which inevitably got covered in his moulted soft, long fur. Once the top cat of the area, he now allowed neighbouring cats to get in through his cat-flap and eat his food, content in the knowledge that he would always be given more.

His last ride in the car was his last visit to the vet, where he was cleaned up and checked over to see why he hadn't been taking care of himself as he should. Much to the vet's surprise, his usual placid nature didn't allow for strangers to mess about with him. The anaesthetic required proved to be too much for his elderly body and he died as he recovered from it.

His ghost came to visit once. Of course it had to be upstairs, where he knew in life he wasn't allowed. I like to think he came to say goodbye. Goodbye Howie, much loved pussy cat.

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