

Bill Rea ? Ailing pets can be a bother

Not having fathered any children, I can only imagine what it must be like to have a child who's ill.

However, I have shared my home with pets for most of my life and, as any pet owner will tell you, they are just like one of the family. And since they require care and responsibility, they tend to take on a role in the home, whether there are kids there or not. From my first conscious memories, there were dogs in the house in which I was raised, right up until we had to have the last one put down. I was 26 at the time. I don't think I ever saw my father that close to tears. My brother made a pitch for my folks to get another dog, but my dad was set against it, and made it clear in an emphatic fashion in which he excelled. I don't think he ever wanted to go through that grief again, although I got the impression in his later years that he regretted the decision.

There is no dog in my house these days, but having married a cat lover, I have been obliged to deal with the patter of little feet for the last several years.

Our current cat is named Sidney, and she does not like me. Considering the way the last week has gone, I would hazard it's safe to say she hates me, with a passion.

From her point of view, I can hardly blame her.

Now while Sidney is about as fond of me as I am of brussels sprouts, she has found me useful in the past. For example, while she has her own bed, she's in the habit of jumping into bed with Beth and I, usually arriving around 3 or 4 a.m. And it's always on my side of the bed she jumps up on, for reasons I can't explain, unless it has something to do with my side being closest to the door. She normally hangs around the side of the bed, making enough noise to wake me up. Then she waits for an invitation to jump up, which I usually bestow in an effort to obtain enough quiet that I can get back to sleep. The problem is she has to be a pest around me long enough to get some of my very sleepy attention before moving to the other side of the bed to wake up whoever she may encounter.

This was the case very early a couple of Friday mornings ago, and while I was paying attention to Sidney in hopes she would get lost soon, I felt something very large on her neck that I knew shouldn't be there. I mentioned this to Beth, and I think we both realized something like this was not good.

A trip to the vet seemed in order, and as soon as people were on hand at the animal hospital to answer the phone, an appointment was made for that afternoon.

Now we come to that singular personality that is Sidney.

Beth and I adopted her nine years ago this month from the pound of the municipality where we were living at the time. We were told then that she was about a year old.

Part of the adoption arrangement required us to have her checked out by a vet within a couple of days. At that point, we were told Sidney (Beth picked that name, not I) was more like three years old, and had had at least one litter of kittens.

It didn't take us long to start wondering if she hadn't been mistreated earlier in her life.

For one thing, she wouldn't let us pick her up, and still won't. Indeed, she will bolt any time she gets the idea that one of us is going to reach for her.

That means getting Sidney ready for a trip to see the vet is exciting, although lacking in fun. It requires closing certain doors and blocking her access to various hiding places, then cornering and seizing her and getting her into her kennel for the trip. Since Beth is the resident cat-lover, I usually get the job of being the heavy, and such was the case the day in question.

Needless to say, Sidney was not enthused with the excursion she was taken on. Things didn't improve much when we got her in the examining room. Getting her out of the kennel was a little like trying to get ketchup out of a new bottle, but that task was successfully completed, eventually.

The result of the examination, albeit preliminary, was the skin problem (which was over much of her body, primarily her neck area) was the result of an allergy, which caused excessive itching. And since we had recently changed her diet, that's from where the problem was surmised to have originated. Assuming that was an accurate diagnosis, it was easy to correct. Just put her back on her old food, was what the vet suggested, which in fact has been done.

The hard part came when we were handed a tube of ointment, with direction to apply it to the neck area twice a day.

Remember the fun I described earlier, trying to get close enough to Sidney to get her in her kennel? Now we found ourselves obliged to get close enough to apply unwanted slop to her neck and throat area twice a day. I sometimes wonder at the amount of fun floggers had in Captain Bligh's day.

Now I fancy myself a smart fellow, so I should be able to outthink some dumb pussycat. But Sidney is not quite as dumb as I thought, and I was obliged to employ some creative planning to hold her still. There were a couple of times I had to get Beth to do

the grabbing, since Sidney was watching my movements closely. I could only go to that well so often, however. A man gets in between a cat lover and her pussycat at his peril. Thus it was important that I play the role of the heavy.

I don't like being the villain, even when I know it's for a good cause, such as Sidney's wellbeing.

Even during the course of this treatment, Sidney still appeared at my bedside at revolting hours, waking me up and awaiting an invitation to jump up. And once she's up these days, she heads to the other side of the bed, without bothering with my attention.

In Sidney's eyes, my name is Mudd

