

## RULES FOR DEALING WITH CATS AND LIFE

"I'm so lonely here by myself during the day, and there's free kitty advertised on the radio. Can I get it? Please?"

That's the way the phone call began our third week of marriage. But I was newlywed-husband adamant. "Absolutely not! Cats carry germs and suck the breath out of babies. Mother said so. No cats!"

She didn't seem to hear. "But I'm so lonesome. You're at work, and I'm here by myself all day. Please!"

"No way! Cats are out!"

"P-l-e-e-e-e-e-a-s-e!"

My family had always been dog people. Like men, dogs are logical, practical. Blundering and clueless perhaps, but stalwart and faithful nevertheless.

Consider Blackie, the bench-legged feist who used to go possum hunting with us. After being sprayed by a skunk one hapless night, he endeavored to solve his problem by jumping in the back seat and rubbing the vile odor onto us boys.

And before human ear could detect an approaching storm, Muff, our gentle Collie mix, would streak around the yard yelping, warning us of danger looming beyond the horizon.

Old Joe, a mutt who showed up after I left for college, developed a penchant for finding misplaced hammers and axes. Then he chewed off their handles to rebuke our carelessness.

Dogs are useful in countless ways.

Not so with cats. They wander about in self-centered oblivion, doing as they please. So we never had a cat, and Mother often cautioned us of their evils.

So when I pronounced, "No cats," I had an agenda. But when newlywed wife pled, "P-l-e-e-e-e-e-a-s-e," so did she.

Thus our struggle blossomed from deep, solid roots. For reasons I've yet to comprehend, my resolve unexpectedly weakened, breaking the stalemate. I suddenly, inexplicably relented. "Okay, okay. You can have the cat."

Exuberance exploded over the telephone wires. "Oh, goodie! She's under the bed right now!"

And there Punkinhead Julie remained--petrified--for three full days. I eventually accepted the purring kitten, the first in a long line of memorable felines who have rendered themselves indispensable to our well being.

But there were unforeseen complications. Being neophytes, we didn't realize that our apartment complex forbade pets. So Punkin had to be smuggled behind the building for furtive outings. And having nothing but a bed sheet to use for a leash, we were hardly invisible.

Months later, a painful truth finally dawned: I had been snookered. The outcome of the great cat debate had been determined before negotiations commenced.

Like cats, women apparently fabricate rules that suit them, and somehow the future mysteriously conforms to those constraints.

Though too late to be of much good now, I've developed Two Rules for Dealing with Cats and Life:

1. Never pick up a purring kitten unless you intend to keep it.
2. Never give in unless you're prepared to stay in.

The end may not justify the means, but you still arrive at the end anyway.