

He preserves both man and beast...

Thoughts on two favorite animals

by Vicki Sairs

Cyrano

“Snyder, drop that toad right now!”

My cat was running down the sidewalk, dangling a limp body from his ruthless little mouth.

When he released his victim, I saw that it was not a toad. But what was it?

“Ooooh, it’s a rat! Oh, yuck!”

I am not squeamish about animals, but there was something about this tiny, naked body with its skinny rat tail that upset me. Unsettled, I retreated into the house.

In a few minutes, my oldest son came in. “Dad thinks it’s a baby squirrel.” He waited expectantly.

I am an animal rescuer from way back, but I said nothing.

“Mom, it’s still alive.”

No, no, not now, I’m waist deep in depression, I don’t have time for this. “Honey, it’s going to die. Snyder had it in his mouth.”

He didn’t miss a beat. “If you were dying, Mom, wouldn’t you want a nice warm bed and some food?”

I was undone. Hospice care for the baby squirrel was arranged—a shoe box lined with an old washcloth and warmed by a heating pad, an eyedropper filled with warm milk. I warned the children that he’d be too weak to eat and probably wouldn’t make it through the night.

They listened and hoped anyway, just like their mother. We gathered around to watch him and were delighted to see him

suck away on the eyedropper.

His body quivered in my hand. His eyes weren’t open yet and he had a vaguely alien appearance, with an enormous, boxy snout. We named him Cyrano.

The next morning found Cyrano scratching around blindly in his little box, hungry and very much alive. The boys laughed as they buttoned their school shirts and watched him claw wildly at the eyedropper, desperate to drink.

Thus began the Cyrano period of our lives, a time measured by tiny squirrel landmarks: his open eyes, round and black and shining; silver-gray fur bristling up and down his tail; his first tentative leaps and bounds, executed on our bed while surrounded by smiling children.

We took turns feeding him. He graduated to a larger box and entertained us with his baby squirrel efforts at burying acorns in the bits of towel and chips that made up his bedding. He took such care, patting the little pile

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of debris he'd gathered together with his small but skillful paws, which were so like hands.

Cyrano ran up and down our arms and in and out of the sleeves of our sweaters; he climbed on the bunk beds and chewed the controls on the boom box. He went to school and performed for science classes, and came home and hid under my son's dresser, whimpering.

"He sounds so mournful, Mom." And he did. We never knew the range of sounds a squirrel could make, and Cyrano's plaintive cry was disturbing.

It became obvious that we couldn't keep him forever. He needed more room to run and climb, and he needed other squirrels. We put his cage up in our tree house for short periods, hoping to get him used to being outdoors. One day he scrambled out of the cage and up the tree trunk, gave two or three of his mournful cries, and disappeared into the woods behind our house.

When I am sad, I sometimes think of Cyrano. He was just a little rat-like thing, of no earthly value to anyone. We could have let him die, but I'm glad that my son argued for him, because we learned some things.

We learned about the difference that taking small steps can make—the difference between having a furry buddy who nibbles your ear or a dead creature waiting to be cleaned off your sidewalk in the morning. Little things count.

We count even more, and opening our hearts to Cyrano did not diminish that knowledge. "If you were dying, Mom...."

Snyder

William Carlos Williams' short poem about so much depending upon "a red wheelbarrow, glazed with rain water, beside the white chickens" is deceptively simple. I am not a literary critic, but I love that poem, and I see it happen around me every day.

So much depends, for instance, upon a gray and white cat, wearing tiger fur, asleep on the blue chair. I see him there in the afternoon, stretched out on his back, with his white belly facing up and his paws balanced in midair like little signs that say, "Can you believe how mellow I am?"

So much depends upon this dusty old cat. I will be reading at night and suddenly realize there is an odd sort of background music playing in the room. It is a soft, rhythmic sound, something between a wheeze and a snore, and it comes from my cat, who has assumed his

nighttime position in the blue chair. He is curled up in classic feline mode, working hard at sleeping, his head tucked into his tail and paws.

He does not want to be bothered now; he has too much to do—he must get more sleep. His breath wheezes in and out, and it is eloquent. My cat's labored breathing says, "I'm an old cat and I've seen a lot. My mother died when I was six days old, and you see this wacky family I live with."

I hear his gentle rasping and think about pain and aging, and how good it is to have a place to hide and a place to rest.



In my life, I have thought and believed and acted on those world views. I have gone from atheism to cynicism to monism, but I'm back to red wheelbarrows and white chickens these days.

My cat sleeps noisily and makes me love my home even more. So much depends on this. I don't own a wheelbarrow or chickens, but I have cats and a husband and children, and I know they are real. We depend on each other for dear life.

There are many who think my happiness is illusory, a merely physical affair, based on which chemicals are coursing down the pathways in my brain at any given moment. There are others who don't trouble themselves with the details but simply write the whole human experiment off as a bad cosmic joke; my puny life gets swept away with everyone else's in their scheme of things. Still others acknowl-

edge that there is a grander purpose behind what we see around us, but they view the everyday minutiae of life as an illusion, something that distracts us from seeing the true reality that underlies all being.

In my life, I have thought and believed and acted on those world views. I have gone from atheism to cynicism to monism, but I'm back to red wheelbarrows and white chickens these days. I don't know where William Carlos Williams stood on these issues, but I think he knew

that what he saw was real and mattered very much.

So much depends on my old cat, who asks to be let in at suppertime and heads straight for the blue chair to take his evening nap. He is a fixture, and a focal point for amused affection, and a sign that there is love in our family, in spite of everything that tries to convince us otherwise.

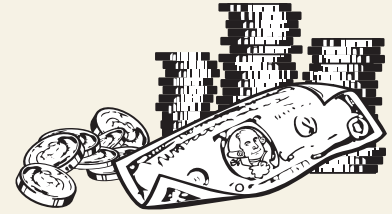
I watch this cat, in this chair, and think about how things are woven together over time, and what that can mean. I wonder about what it is that makes us feel safe in this universe, and able to go on, day after day. It seems to me that it all has something to do with my cat. He has a home where he is known and loved, and when I see him I remember that the same is true for me.

And his tiger ways say to me, yes, there is a God, a real God who created a magnificent universe, in which day-to-day reality is stitched together by things like the pecking of a hen, and the rolling sound a wheelbarrow makes in the wet grass, and the way a cat can make you glad to be alive, just by the way it sleeps at night. **BB**

Vicki lives in London, Ohio with her husband Reuben and a newish cat, Chloe. These articles are reprinted with permission from The Mobile Register in Mobile, Alabama.

Uncommon \$ense

Guest Writer Levi Miller



Last year for the first time since the Great Depression, Americans collectively spent more than their net pay—according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. The household debt-to-income ratio has reached an all-time high, topping 19 percent. To make matters worse many forecasters see rising inflation and interest rates ahead.

How are you positioned in this dilemma? According to the research firm CardTrak.com, the average household owes about \$9,000 in credit card debt at an interest rate of 15 percent, resulting in an additional cost of approximately \$1,500 a year. If, instead, a family would invest that same \$1,500 annually, after 30 years with an 8 percent return, they would have an extra \$181,700. It is true that interest rates for auto, college and most mortgage loans are less costly. Nevertheless, earning interest is always preferable to paying it.

Ours is a consumer oriented society. No doubt many of you have received a “bonus” check from the government, which you were encouraged to spend. Although some will do the wise thing and pay off debt or save for a “rainy” day, I suspect most Americans will spend it for things they don’t need. Hopefully, some people, who really don’t need it, will give it to charity.

What is your concept of money? Do you recognize that all you have belongs to the Lord? He uses you to manage His resources. From a human standpoint, how do you think you are doing? I wonder what God’s perspective might be? Are you entitled to all of the “stuff” you have accumulated? What are you doing with it? Why is it people always want more? More wages, a better car, a better and bigger home. The sec-

ular press uses the term “greed.” This word seems to have vanished from the church’s vocabulary.

How will God grade you as a manager of the things he placed into your care? Here are some steps to consider as managers of God’s resources. You may want to add to the list.

- Be generous with your giving to your church, the tithe plus.
- Give generously to other conference agency causes... RMM, RBC, CMC.
- Give to individual hardship causes.
- Remember charities in your will.
- Instead of giving money/ gifts to your children and grandchildren for birthdays contribute to some worthy cause such as missions or a scholarship fund at RBC.
- Do volunteer work.
- Go on a mission trip.
- Develop relationships with people, including unsaved neighbors.

Perhaps we should be more open with others in the church about our finances: our incomes, our spending, our giving, and our life styles. Where does our accountability begin or end with our church brothers and sisters? Are we only responsible to God? How might we help each other become better managers of God’s resources? **BB**