

Memories Of Hebert The Ferret

Hebert the ferret is remembered fondly, and another ferret joins the family.

By Alexandra Sargent-Colburn

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Caff-Pow has joined the family, but he has not taken the place of Hebert the ferret.

Much has happened since I last wrote. We suffered a completely unexpected loss early in the summer — Hebert, my soft, sweet albino ferret. Hebert passed during the night. He had seemed a little tired that evening, not romping and stomping as vigorously as he generally did, but there were no alarm bells going off. He was fine at ferret bedtime.

In the morning, I lifted the cage cover, and I knew. Somehow, I just knew he was gone. I found him in his favorite hammock, entwined with my other ferret, Todd.

Todd and I shared a moment then. He sat up on his hip and looked into my eyes, keeping one paw on Hebert's back as he did so. It was one of those strange moments that transcends the gulf between the species. It was a very sentient look he gave me. It spoke of loss and transition, and lasted a long time. I wondered how long Todd had been keeping his vigil over his friend throughout the long night, waiting for me to make my customary morning visit. I will never know.

And I will never know what took Hebert from us. He was only a boy, just around a year old. I had the option to bring him to my veterinarian for a necropsy, but I just couldn't do it to him. No, let Hebert rest peacefully. We buried him beneath the pink flowering almond tree in the back yard, near Ping, Puma, and France, the Fricken' Pigmy Hedgehog. I took Todd to the veterinarian for a check-up, along with some of Hebert's poo. The vet could not find anything out of the ordinary, and gave Todd a clean bill of health.

When I consider Hebert's short life, I remember how challenged he was by certain things that were effortless for all the other ferrets that I had ever known. He could barely climb, and was always frightened when faced with climbing down from any height. He only climbed in and out of chairs with the greatest difficulty. I remember once I found he had climbed to a height and panicked, completely. He was rigid with fear, unable to figure out how to get down. I lifted him down to the floor; he was hyperventilating and hot to the touch. Any other ferret would simply have bounded down, without a second thought. Some things just came hard for Hebert, and there was always the urge to be protective of him. Everybody felt it. Some part of him was just too fragile for this world, and it really wasn't a shock when he left it. But oh, my sweet boy ...

Hebert's short life left me very sad. I took some comfort in following the lives of newborns on the FML, the Ferret Mailing List, an Internet ferret group that I frequent. One particular breeder had a group of kits whose lives she was sharing with us through written posts and pictures. She had documented the lives of the four girls and two boys from birth to fuzzy, adorable kithood. I had watched them being born. I had watched their little eyes open, had watched them take their first stumbling steps.

There was one in particular that had always caught my eye. He was a male, and he had the faintest white thumbprint on his head. You had to get him at just the right angle to see it. It was as if The Creator had dipped his thumb in white gold dust and rolled it across the boy's head, right between the ears as a maker's mark, a signature. That boy lives here with us, now.

No, he is not a replacement for Hebert. I could no more replace Hebert than I could ever be replaced, or you, or one of your children. He is one more link in the chain of life, and we love him very much.

The new boy is named Caff-Pow, after a very caffeinated beverage on the television crime drama NCIS. It is the favorite of the forensic scientist on the show, Abby, who never appears to sleep.

Caff-Pow does sleep, but when he is awake — oh, boy. His rompin' and stompin' lifts the rafters! As a private breeder's ferret, he wasn't neutered until he was 4 months old. He is big! Todd loves his new companion, and I hope to have big tales to tell you in the future.

In the meantime, please say a little prayer for Hebert, who will never be forgotten.



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Alexandra Sargent-Colburn lives in Massachusetts with fish, ferrets, a cat, a husband and a neurotic dog. The ferrets are in charge.