

## My Mother & My Ferrets

**Alexandra Sargent-Colburn details the uneasy co-existence of her mother and her ferrets.**

*By Alexandra Sargent-Colburn*

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Ping and Alexandra's mom share a rare moment together.

I am the adult child that my mother decided to stay with for a week or so after her recent surgery. (She will be fine!) She could have stayed with my sister, but my sister has a very energetic 5-year-old son and a big dog that likes to jump up on people and lick them. Screaming children and jumpy dogs don't necessarily lend themselves to the concept of convalescence following a major medical procedure, and Mom really needed a little help after the surgery.

Reasonably, my mother thought that the peace and quiet of my home would be the perfect place to convalesce for a time. It might well be, for the right person. My mother is not the right person. My mother does not like ferrets. She has her good points, but she does not like ferrets. Did I mention that Mom does not like ferrets? However, Ping and Puma find this new person in their midst absolutely fascinating! They can't get enough of her. They really, really enjoy my mother. They want to swarm up her legs, smell her, climb up furniture that she is sitting in, and slither through her luggage. Did I mention that my mother does not like ferrets?

First off, Mom has this fear that ferrets bite. Well, yeah, some of them do bite. Like Puma. Puma bites a lot, just for fun. Early on in my mother's visit I taught her that the ferret with the little black mask (Ping) is perfectly safe. It's the ferret with no mask that's a problem.

### A Sneak Attack

One night Mom went to bed early, before the ferrets were let out for their evening romp. Five minutes after the ferret cage was opened, I heard Mom yelling, "Go away! Go away! Go away!" from the guest room. I hurried over and, hmmm, what a surprise. It turns out that the ferrets can open the guest room door, where my mother was trying to sleep. I had no idea. Mom's yells rose to a more urgent note, "It doesn't have a mask! It doesn't have a mask!" Nope. It didn't. That was Puma, all right. No mask. That little minx was on my mother's bed, and Mom was not happy.

After that we resorted to latching the little hook and eye on the guest room door so that Mom could sleep in safety. The joke is, of course, that the latch is on the outside of the door to keep my little nephew away from the computer, so Mom was locked inside the room. We had to remember to let her out.

### The "Look" Appears

I think it was the second or third night that Mom was here that Puma finally managed to bite her. It was one of those "make a strafing run across the floor and sink the fangs into the shin" attacks that Puma is famous for. Usually I spy Puma coming out of the corner of my eye, and I don't have a problem. Mom, however, had a problem. She was sitting on the sofa in front of the TV, minding her own business. She wasn't expecting to be stalked and attacked by a pygmy wolverine. She is wiser, now, and has learned to keep her feet up. I showed Mom my shin and demonstrated that my most recent shin wound is quite a bit bigger and deeper than hers, but she wasn't particularly impressed. She gave me a smoldering look that I hadn't seen since I was a teenager, actually.

I got another one of those looks when we let the ferrets out for their evening romp. Time passed and Mom was getting ready for bed. I went around the house with a rubber squeaky toy, trying to round the little guys up. Puma is easy. She hears the squeak and comes running every time. Then she bites the squeaky and shakes her head back and forth like a shark, feeding. I can actually pick her up off of the floor and she will dangle from the poor squeaky by her fangs. Ping doesn't always come so quickly. I was squeaking beneath furniture, opening drawers — the usual routine. I turned around and there was my mother with a perfectly contented Ping in her hands. She was holding him out to me gently, but she treated me to that look again. I hate that look. I hated it when I was 16, and it hasn't improved much over the years. It has a real sucking-on-lemons aspect to it.

### More Surprises

Mom has been here about a week, now, and in many ways she has adapted to life with ferrets. She has not, however, figured out that it is a really bad idea to leave her luggage on the floor of the guest room. She has noticed that ferrets



have gone through her luggage many times, but she has not yet noticed that things have been disappearing from that luggage. She asked about her roll-on this morning, and I'm pretty sure that there will be another one of those dark looks in my future once she catches on to what happened to it. And I have a feeling that the next time Mom needs a little help, my sister is going to have a houseguest.

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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.