

Ping Is He's Farewell

A dance of joy leads to tragedy for Alexandra Sargent-Colburn's ferret, Ping is He.

By Alexandra Sargent-Colburn

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Todd is adjusting happily to his new home.

I have written many times that it is the singular characteristic of the ferret to find and embrace joy, wherever and whenever possible. Joy is the martial art of the ferret. They express it with that magnificent open-mouthed dance, the war dance. They zig and zag in place, they throw up their heads and open their mouths to show the world what lovely fangs they have. Some dook, some pant. The war dance is an awesome spectacle, regardless of precisely how it is executed.

And I believe that it was one of Ping is He's dance moves that took him from us. I think he was dancing when he came up behind my dog, the Noble Allis Chompers, and bit one of her back feet. Allis was very frustrated at that moment. She believed that she had been invited to climb into the car with all of her humans to go for a ride. Yet she found herself on the wrong side of the front door, still in the house. She was frustrated and upset, and I believe she was also suffering pain in her back leg, the one that was shattered in a car accident many years ago.

We have all had those moments when we don't want to be bothered or messed with. Well, that was the moment when Ping zipped out from behind the green rocking chair and bit Allis on one of her back feet. I'm sure he danced all the way — laughing.

I am sorry to tell you that Ping did not survive the sharp bite that Allis gave him to demonstrate her frustration. Ping was brought to a vet for an emergency appointment at the Worcester Small Animal And Bird Clinic in central Massachusetts. They examined him and made him comfortable. They encouraged me not to give up, and they made a call for me to nearby Tufts University in Grafton. Ping was seen there by a lovely young lady. I say lovely because she told me what she had to say so very gently. (I barely remember what she looked like, but I will never forget her kind manner.) She explained that there were a number of treatment options that she might try but, when all was said and done, she only believed that Ping had about a 10 percent chance of survival.

And Ping, he danced from this world and into the next. My lovely boy with the comical burglar's mask. My 2-inch wide raccoon. My pygmy wolverine. He danced across the worn wooden planks of the Rainbow Bridge into adventures I cannot imagine, but that I am sure would make me smile.

Saying Goodbye

When it was time to bury Ping, my 5-year-old nephew, Alexander, asked for the honor of carrying Ping in his favorite rose-patterned sleepy sack out to the place in the backyard garden where we lay our small friends to rest. Alexander was so very, very gentle with Ping. His eulogy was simple but very moving.

"Ping was a good weasel, Aunt, and we loved him."

Yes he was, and yes we did.

A New Face In The Family

I went through a variety of difficult thoughts after that. Did I want another ferret in the house after what happened? Would I ever entirely trust Allis again? The decision was made for me when my husband came home with a handsome fellow cradled in his hands, rough hands that work hard but that are very gentle to small, 4-legged folks.

We have made changes in our routine to accommodate the new fellow in safety. Allis is no longer allowed to play with ferrets, and this puzzles her. She enjoyed paw-play from time to time, but we have put an end to it. She is no longer left alone with ferrets, and her vet is evaluating her for pain issues. It may be that her back leg has been paining her more than we knew for quite a while. What a terrible way to find out.

I have named the new fellow Todd, after my friend Todd Leuthold, who wrote for this magazine from time to time. It made him happy, so very proud to write for Ferrets. Todd's life was cut short in August of 2007, when intruders forced their



way into his home and murdered him for his new big-screen TV and the cash in his wallet.

The loss of Ping has been very hard, very hard. I blame myself, I blame the world. Sometimes I am angry, sometimes I remember the good times, and I smile. It is much the way that I remember Todd. I miss you, buddy. Give Ping a scratch for me.

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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.