

## Elaine The Magnificent Ferret

**A ferret's strong will to live and enjoy life outshines her physical disabilities and brings joy to those who meet her.**

*By Barbara Clay*

Posted: July 1, 2010, 5 a.m. EDT

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Elaine was a beautiful ferret, despite her physical disabilities.

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Elaine had a highly developed sense of smell and used it to find her favorite person, Barbara!

"I'll take her," I said softly to the man that was escorting me around his home. I'd come upon this little sable ferret spinning in circles and flopping over. He offered to have her euthanized and not burden me with her, further saying, without detail, "She had an accident."

It was spring 1998, my fourth visit to this house, and probably the last opportunity to find and remove every ferret from this hoarder's home. After two years of pleading, the man had finally come to terms with the fact that his wife had created a desperate situation for all, with his indulgence. An entire wing had been built onto their home to allow the 80-plus intact ferrets to free-roam and indiscriminately breed.

Confident that this chapter was closed, carriers loaded, I started the drive home. The little spinning girl intrigued me, and I was anxious to get to know her. I decided to call her Elaine. Don't ask me why, it just came to me loud and strong; she was Elaine.

What a mess! Elaine was blind, deaf and neurologically damaged, but she had happy sparkling eyes! She was a bobble head, unable to walk without faltering. Quickly she'd right herself, defiantly determined, nothing stopping her! My veterinarian determined that her injuries were consistent with deprivation of oxygen, strangulation. The miracle of her survival was only to be surpassed with the great life she was to impress upon us.

All meeting Elaine fell in love, and inspired by her. She always made me smile. At all public meet-n-greets, she accompanied me. Discussing rescue and sheltering became synonymous with the ferret called Elaine.

Her strength in life was her sniffer. She'd meet you once, and remember you another day. Elaine's bobble nose would tickle as she pummeled up and down your arms and hands. Oh how that tickled!

Friends dropped by one afternoon, and gathered around the picnic table. I placed Elaine there and stepped away. She was excited meeting everyone. As I returned to the table, she exploded with excitement! Her nose, pointed to the sky, tracked me and then zeroed in like a fighter pilot to his target. She almost jumped out of the hands holding her! All realized that Elaine knew the one person that she loved the most was there. With all her might, she thrust herself, landing in my open hands, that she knew instinctively would catch her. She knew these hands had saved and loved her. Trust.

Now, laughing, should I be honored or insulted that this horribly damaged little ferret recognized me at a distance by my smell? I'll take the dubious honor, and did so for many years to come!

Dee and Claudia were with me the day that precious Elaine was given mercy, after she'd valiantly fought mammary cancer. A small ferret left an indelible mark in many hearts.

Elaine gave everyone that does animal rescue and sheltering something so very important to remember: Where there is life, there is hope. She lived many years, and still lives in our hearts today. Her portrait greets everyone who walks into my shelter.

Barbara Clay is director of shelter affairs at Rocky's Ferret Rescue and Shelter in Parkton, Maryland.

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