

Falling In Love With Ferrets

Ferrets bring new life to Joseph Bowker.

By Joseph E. Bowker

Posted: April 1, 2009, 5 a.m. EDT

Courtesy of Joseph Bowker

Ferrets Silas and Woodstock are two of the three ferrets that keep life interesting for Joseph Bowker.

At 66 this year, I would never believe that I'd fall so deeply in love again. I am a single dad, kids are grown but still at home. I am also a 30-year retired/40 percent service-related (Vietnam) disabled E9 (Chief Master Sergeant.) My wife died two years ago, but we were separated at the time. I've had the children since my youngest was 6.

I had my own computer business since I retired, but my disabilities got worse. I hurt my back in a car accident, so I retired at 62. During my time in Vietnam, I got trapped in a collapsed building for about 20 hours. As time went on, I became morbidly claustrophobic as a direct result.

Silas The Ferret Arrives

My son came home one day with a big cage and a ruby-eyed albino ferret he named Silas, after the monk in the DaVinci Code. Silas was 4 months old. When I walked into my son's room, Silas was more often than not in his cage, shaking and biting the bars. I would get shaky and choke, feeling horrible for this gregarious little creature stuck in a cage. It was a big cage, but still a cage. I used to sneak in and steal him, bringing him to my room, and letting him run free.

I modified the doors so he couldn't go under to escape. I put food and litter boxes in my bathroom, and I have a waterbed with drawers under it, but no longer a water mattress. Silas would sleep in the drawers and climb up into my bed at 5 a.m. and wake me to play. He hid in places I was unaware of, but generally we played a lot. My son started getting angry about this, but I don't believe he realized how much maintenance a ferret requires. Ferrets need time out of the cage. Silas loves to explore, he should have been named Magellan.

Eventually, after fighting over where Silas should sleep, I offered first to cover all of Silas' veterinary costs and visits, and then I offered my son \$250 for him and his cage. I already owned all his toys.

Additions To The Ferret Family

When Silas was a year old, I brought home a friend I named Woodstock, a 4-month-old, dark-eyed white (DEW). After a week or so, Silas and Woody became friends, and Silas stopped bullying him. In part, Woody was not a pushover, and very soon, he became bigger than Silas. Silas was sporty, and an adventurer you'd think he was a lemur. Woody got fat and my veterinarian said she has worked with ferrets for 30 years and never saw such a fat ferret. Good thing he was never caged and had lots of room to play, run and climb.

For Christmas, I found my newest ferret, a female I call Starr. She is a sable, and looks and sounds like a real European polecat. (I lived in Germany for six years in a farm community and saw several polecats stalking chickens.) Woody makes chirping noises when he wrestles with Silas and now with Starr. I've only heard Silas hiss, but Starr is a real girl and squalls, dooks, gives 'em hell all the time. At ounces, she can't take on Silas. He jumps on her and shakes her until she can get away or I protect her in my arms, which I know I shouldn't do. She has slept in my hand after being dragged around by Silas.

Little by little they are doing better, and Starr no longer fears Silas' brutal 1.5 pounds. She'll sleep with Woody, but Silas won't let her in his favorite drawers. She found spaces among toys and my hamper where she retreats to keep Silas from getting on top of her and holding her own. It is just that she is so tiny.

I have to say Starr is sweet. Now she wakes me, climbing into my bed at midnight and 5 a.m. to play and sometimes snuggle. She is very sweet and big on kisses. It took about a month, but Starr now licks the back of Silas' neck whenever she sees him, and is allowed to snuggle with both her brothers.

Living The Ferret Life

My son thinks my ferrets are too much. My kids think they stink, I do not. I think they smell like buttered popcorn. My son said he thinks I am getting senile because I love them so much. But my VA PTSD therapist thinks the ferrets are better for



me than the kids and has told him that. I was suffering from some post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) before I fell in love with these wonderful, comical, sweet creatures.

I had considered myself no longer useful, and I considered calling it quits. But now I know my baby companions need me and will live a better life if I am here to take care of them. So, do ferrets help with depression? Absolutely yes! They have been and are better companions than my past three wives and several girlfriends. I suspect I'd never find a woman to share my ferret babies with, but I am willing to share with them, exclusively.

Joseph Bowker is "daddy" to Silas, Woodstock and Starr, and they live in Texas.

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