

# Cats

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Written ca. 1990, tells of pet cats the family had during her childhood and young adulthood in Michigan in the 1910s

*Daisy the snoring cat and Mehitabel the witch*

We nearly always had cats: I remember up to eight (2 mothers with 3 kittens each).

## Daisy

One early cat resident was a calico called Daisy, who paid her rent by being very tolerant of a baby's attention. Paul was then only a toddler and loved her hard, but she never harmed him.

Cats used to be put out at night, and I suppose the barn was warm. One of my very earliest memories is of going out there to see puppies, and when we first moved there, it was a barn with horses in it, instead of the garage it became later.

But Daisy knew the house was warmer, and she found that the curve of the stairway provided a cozy corner, dark and concealing. Poor Daisy! She gave herself away! She snored! She could be heard all over the house--and was quickly found and put out at bedtime.

Mother cats that are nursing kittens get the same claustrophobic feeling that human mothers sometimes feel in the early days when Mama is on demand constantly. One of our cats hid her kittens in the coal bin, and when it was time to show them to the family, she brought them to me!

It was early morning and I was in bed, when suddenly this loud kitten-crying was filling the air--and coming nearer! I sat up and looked around, and there she was, with a nice big kitten held by the back of its neck. Before I could say anything, she jumped on the bed and laid it beside me. And there was my mother!

"She brought it to me," I explained, delighted!

"Well," said Mother, "I wondered where she was taking it! All right, for a little while."

And I got to cuddle the new baby while its mother got some rest. What an entrancing honor!

## Mehitabel

[Archy and Mehitabel were fictional characters created by Don Marquis, a newspaper columnist, in 1916. Archy was a cockroach and Mehitabel was an alley cat.]

Mehitabel was a rather strange case. For some reason, we had not had a cat for some time when I was teaching in Rochester [Michigan]. So I went to the Detroit Humane Society and Mehitabel chose me. She leaped out of her cage into my arms. When I got to Minden, I put the box containing Mehitabel on the kitchen table, where she caused the box to do gyrations. "It's alive!" said Mother. Anything alive pleased Mother. So Mehitabel was "in," odd duck though she was.

She must have been in a spinster's house. She streaked for the basement at sight of any man, including Dad or Paul, but even less did she like any male not of the family.

She would not touch real milk, but only drank evaporated milk. She loved corn, fresh or canned, and if we brought corn from the garden, she would chew through the shucks to reach the kernels and nibble them. She also liked fresh tomatoes.

One thing she liked that Mother denied her absolutely: a freshly ironed white table cloth looked to her just the place to sit. As she was jet black, it was a good study in contrasts--or might have been!

I think it was Mehitabel that we had during the only time I was ever a little uneasy of a thunderstorm. She used to lie on my bed, and that night a storm broke after I had gone to bed. The lightning flashes were vicious stabs, and the thunder felt like a monster cat with the house in its grasp. It was shaking the house as a cat shakes a mouse, and directly over my bed!

Mehitabel lay at my feet, with her big eyes firmly fixed on me. Suddenly, I felt victimized! I was scared! For probably the only time in my life, I made the cat go away!