

## Sluggo's Con

By Peter Gerstenzang

I absolutely adore cats. However, there was a time when that was not the case. You see, I grew up with dogs. No, not literally. I always thought cats seemed nice, but a bit standoffish and very possibly too smart for me. Of course, if I start making a list of the animals that aren't too smart for me, I'll be left with hedgehogs, trout, lemmings and turkeys. One evening, however, this all changed for the better. My friend, Jennifer, asked me if I would stay at her place and pet-sit for, Sluggo, her Siamese. With about as much enthusiasm as a cat has for a cool bath, I accepted. What follows is the story of a convert.

When I first came to Sluggo's apartment, the signs were positive. He rubbed against my legs. "I've made a conquest," I thought. Immediately following this friendly greeting, Sluggo retired to the kitchen — probably to work on his thesis about the dynamics of nuclear fusion. I sniffled a bit. Then I went into the bedroom and turned on Animal Planet, thinking it might lure him. No go.

About 11 that night, I went into the kitchen to make myself a tuna fish sandwich. It's true I talk to myself a lot, but that night, I really hammed it up. In fact, while Sluggo watched, I narrated the making of the sandwich. "Ooh, yummy!" And, "Oh this tuna! It's so, so ... delicious. So succulent, moist and tasty ... Mmmm. Tuna." I sounded like a demented version of Bob Cratchit in "A Christmas Carol." Sluggo, over in the corner, merely glanced up at me from his copy of *The New Yorker*. He would have none of my silliness. Then he raised a paw. My hopes were high. But then he put the paw against his temple and made a fast, circular motion, which meant to indicate that I had lost my mind.

Fine. I went off to bed.

The bonding was soon to begin.

Around 3 a.m. a yowl from the kitchen startled me. It was loud and frightening — a bit like an angry sea lion or The Clash's Joe Strummer singing "London Calling." I ran into the kitchen to find poor Sluggo in the process of heaving up a hairball larger than many small mammals I've seen. I felt so bad for the little guy. So, while he hacked and heaved, I stood near him and stroked his hind quarters. Accessing my feminine side, I said soothing things to him. Call me crazy, but his eyes seemed to say, "Thanks for being here, dude. I know this isn't pretty." Soon the melon-sized hairball, was, um ... expunged. I gave Sluggo a kiss on the head and went back to the bedroom. The little cat followed me. I got into bed. So did he. When I awoke, he was still asleep, but he was curled around my arm. Did I shed a few tears of delight? Not telling.

So, here's to Sluggo. Soon after pet-sitting him, I made a big contribution in his name to a local cat shelter, started reading about different cat breeds and told everybody I was available for future cat-sitting. The next step is getting one. That's going to happen soon. Will I name him or her Sluggo The Second? It's entirely possible.