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DeeDee, The Educated Rat

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It was the last day of school before summer vacation. The sixth grade teacher busily assisted each student in cleaning out desks, lockers, and storage areas. Volunteers were requested so all classroom pets could be adopted. My youngest daughter Paulie happily raised her hand.

That's how it happened. Without my permission or knowledge or any form of advance preparation, a most unusual rat named DeeDee accompanied my daughter home from school. She came to live with us.

DeeDee was a hooded rat (white body, black head and chest). She was mature, although she had yet to produce a litter. She came complete with cage and water tube wired to one side, straw, and a few food pellets. The older children were horrified to see her, my husband, puzzled; I tried to be reasonable. Paulie begged and begged, promising to take full responsibility for the rat's care and feeding. In that moment of weakness all parents are guilty of, DeeDee was allowed to stay. The spot where her cage sat came to alternate between both kitchen and utility room.

I noticed right away – her habits.

After eating, that rat would tap her water tube with the upright palm of a forepaw, exactly the way a human would use a hand, then she would cup both forepaws to receive the water her tapping had released. She splashed that "handful" of water over her face and mouth and tapped some more, for enough water so that she could clean out each ear with an extended "finger."

I shook my head in disbelief the first time. But it wasn't long before I found myself studying her when she seemed preoccupied with something else.

No doubt about it. DeeDee was an educated rat.

Maybe it was the sixth-grade classroom she had "graduated" from. I don't honestly know. All I know is, that rat was more human than animal. Always she would thoroughly clean herself after eating; and the way she used her forepaws, exactly like hands with fingers. You could think her name in your mind and she would perk up immediately and look at you. You could verbally converse with her and she would cock her head and listen. If you gave her a command – she would obey it. Change the words you used and she might have to think about her response, but she'd still respond – correctly.

She knew the difference between up and down, left and right, in and out, and she knew the name of each member of our family. Paulie said DeeDee had free run of the eraser tray under the blackboards along two walls of the classroom. Although DeeDee had behaved as a regular rat at school (except for her forays along the eraser tray), once in our home she acted as if she had been trained by a professional animal trainer –in

fact, better.

And you could converse with her. I mean you could carry on a fairly intelligent conversation, and the rat would respond appropriately. . . as if she understood every word. Not simple phrases like "Are you hungry?" but long sentences in multiple paragraphs. Naturally, it didn't take much time before all family members noticed DeeDee's unique temperament and her unusual intelligence. She became more than a pet. She became "family."

If one of us became ill, she would mope around and feign illness herself until that individual recovered. How she could pick up on such timing, I could never tell. She seemed to automatically "take on" anyone else's condition. After being bred several times and raising equally intelligent babies (she taught them all she knew), DeeDee became seriously ill and we put her to sleep so she would not suffer. With DeeDee gone, Paulie marched up to me one day and announced that DeeDee would come back. "Just wait and see," she said.

Several decades later, after my youngest daughter and I had moved from Idaho to the state of Virginia, and Paulie had given birth to her first child, she chanced upon a most unusual rat while absentmindedly wandering through a shopping mall pet store. She bought the rat and brought it home with her. Her infant son immediately pointed to the rat and attempted to say the name "DeeDee." Paulie spun around and looked again, then called out "DeeDee?" The rat jumped up and down, ran round and round, tapped her water tube, cupped her hands, splashed water over her face, and with long slender "fingers" cleaned out her ears. After such frenetic activity, the rat sat on her haunches, moved her nose closer to her cage wires, and Paulie swears . . . she smiled at her.

Paulie named her DeeDee II. I went to visit one day. Nothing was said to me about my grandson's new pet. I spied the rat in her cage, and walked over for a closer look. The female was gray-hooded, instead of black as DeeDee had been, so I thought nothing of it and turned to leave. Then the rat started banging her cage and jumping up and down. I bent over and studied her. She reached out a paw to touch me. When our "fingers" met, a chill coursed through me. DeeDee! No doubt about it. The family's new pet was DeeDee come back.

Paulie grinned and the baby giggled.

I didn't know that animals could reincarnate, and with their same owners. DeeDee's return must have taken some doing, for we now live on the opposite side of the country from where we used to and my youngest daughter has become an adult. *Yet Paulie's baby knew the rat, and the rat knew the baby was Paulie's!*

I have no idea how this happened. I only know DeeDee, the educated rat, is back and she is just as clever and just as intelligent as ever.

It is true, at least as near as anyone can tell, that an animal can individualize once it shares life with a human; that is the "gift" we give our pets. But the extent to which animals can be ensouled and evolve is still hotly debated, even in esoteric circles. As a researcher of the near-death experience and spiritual transformation, I can say this: animal pets are often there to greet those who cross over in death. The companionship we form with them is lasting.

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