

SMALL ANIMALS

"Let's buy the kids some gerbils. They'll get an introduction to the cycle of life and begin to grasp the responsibilities of owning a pet." So said the Master of the Household in the early stages of child rearing, and you know what? The Mistress of the Household actually bought into this twisted logic. I guess on the farm this craziness never comes up in family discussions, but in populous areas it rings a little bit true.

So we bought some gerbils at Zellers, the pet department guy indicating he'd be pleased to accept any gerbil progeny back in the store for sale. HA! These are mating machines. If they were bigger and people ate gerbil meat, you could forget raising beef or any other kind of animal for food. Gerbils are small, though, and rat like. Not real promising for eating.

We put the first couple in a small animal cage, and they immediately demonstrated that they felt they had moved from Zellers to the privacy of a bridal suite in Niagara Falls. I forget what the gestation period is for a gerbil, something like a day and a half. The next week, six or seven hairless things were suckling on mother gerbil. Daddy gerbil didn't wait for Mommy to leave the hospital before he was looking for companionship. In a short while gerbils were crawling everywhere, and through overcrowding they caught some kind of mange, and became even more unattractive.

The guy at Zellers thought we were foolish to try and place the gerbils back with him, and was puzzled as to where we would ever get the idea he would want them. Now comes the ugly part. The Human Daddy is delegated to assassinate them, the reasoning rooted in the theory that it was the Daddy gerbil that couldn't (or wouldn't) control his emotions, thus the Human Daddy should deal with the outcome because he shares these proclivities (I was younger then).

Human Daddy takes the first batch, entices them into a plastic bag, then hurls them late at night into Lake St. Louis from the porch of the Dorion Hotel bar. Stupid Human Daddy. The plastic bag doesn't sink, but drifts majestically out into the lake with six passengers who believe they're on a moonlight cruise - the male gerbils

undoubtedly feeling there was time for a little romantic interlude before their personal Titanic descended to the deeps. Human Daddy retreats to the Dorion Hotel to drown his dumbness in a couple of quarts of Molson, later telling the children the gerbils were adopted by loving parents in Quebec City. Well come on, it's possible. People find messages in bottles and fall in love. Why not find gerbils in a bag and adopt?

I won't gross you out with the final solution to gerbil overcrowding, but will add that my small animal problems didn't cease forever with this first experience. Later, in another city, one daughter brought home an angora guinea pig she found wandering around an empty lot. I first thought she had stolen it. If you read this column you might remember that the Dad once stole a boat, so you can understand that finding an angora guinea pig is at least as unlikely as finding a boat, thus provoking my suspicion. But she found it for real. It looked like a miniature yak, except I don't know if a yak could squeal like the guinea pig when the dog tried to play with it. Well, we're being kind of generous when we say "play with it". The dog, a terrier, wanted to toy with it like a grizzly bear toys with a salmon. So it came down to keeping the guinea pig or the dog. Tough choice, but we felt that burglars would be more likely to be foiled by the dog, so we kept the dog. Not a particularly good choice because when burglars did break in, the dog did

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SPECIAL CHILDREN'S PERFORMANCE

by Frank B. Edwards

Author of *Bungalo Boys*, *Mortimer
Mooner*, *Frogger*
at Regent Theatre

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