

The Cat Whisperer



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For Erika.



To all the stray cats out there,
may you find love, warmth,
and a forever home where you
are cherished and cared for.

Grandma Goppie's Journey

Everyone who knew Grandma Goppie told stories about her heart of gold. It had been Grandma Goppie's pleasure to care for her mother to the very day she passed away. When her sister and brother-in-law fell on hard times, Grandma Goppie found space for them in her own home, where she lived with Grandpa Jobbels and their daughter and grandchildren.

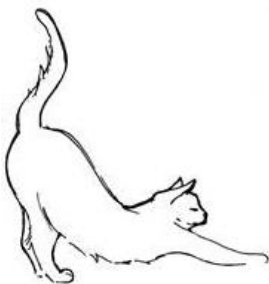
Grandma Goppie had two more members of her family whom she cared for alongside everyone else. Their names were Pietie Piet who was grey with a white moustache and socks, and Rooies who was ginger from head to toe to tail. Both these beautiful cats had been 'rescues' and now lived in the lap of kindness and contentment. For their part, they helped keep Grandma Goppie's toes and neck warm in winter and frequently sat staring at her with a slow blink of the eyes. In cat language, a slow blink means 'I am happy in your good company'.

Grandma Goppie hadn't always lived in a house that was big enough to accommodate her extended family. She had worked as a design artist all her life creating marvellous pictures and designs, but most times it had been hard to keep up with all the bills. Then Grandpa Jobbels had landed a job in the Middle East and things had mightily improved for nearly a decade before he became ill and had to return home to undergo heart surgery.

In the long months of Grandpa Jobbels's convalescence, it became harder and harder for Grandma Goppie to meet the bond repayments on their house.

Even when he did recover eventually, Grandpa Jobbels was at retirement age for the job in the Middle East, and finding a job at all became a concern that drove him crazy with anxiety at night as he lay awake tossing and turning.

Through it all, Grandma Goppie never lost her kind and caring nature and was steadfast in her belief that sooner or later things would take a turn for the better. Even so, after many months of hoping against hope, the bank foreclosed on Grandma Goppie's home loan. She would have to sell and find somewhere else to live.



The big move

Packing up the house was a story on its own.

Where had all the clutter come from!? How would she ever find a home that would fit in all the members of her family? Where to look? What about Pietie Piet and Rooies? After all, everyone knows cats hate being moved to a new place to live, and often run away, never to be found again.

Finally, after weeks and weeks of searching, Grandma Goppie found a small flat in which to live. It was part of a huge housing estate, and the flat would fit in herself, Grandpa Jobbels, and the two grandchildren. The others would have to find their own way.

On the day of the big move, with all the boxes packed and labelled, and the truck parked in the driveway to load them ready for storage, it seemed to Grandma Goppie that it was the darkest hour of her life. Not even Grandpa Jobbels's arm around her shoulders could comfort her. She took off her glasses to mop up the tears that ran down her cheeks as she closed and locked the front door, from the outside, and handed the key to the estate agent.

Neighbours came out to hug Grandma Goppie. Some watched her sad departure as inconspicuously as possible. They didn't want to show their pity. How sad, they said to one another that in her time of need no-one had been able to help Grandma Goppie who had spent her life caring for everyone else.



Yet Grandma Goppie kept her faith.

Amazingly, Rooies and Pietie Piet didn't run away in fright when she opened the box in which they had travelled from old home to new home. So that night, she left a window a little ajar to allow some fresh air into the small flat. As she lay awake that first night, she heard rustling noises coming from the kitchenette, but she didn't think twice about it. It was obviously Rooies and Pietie Piet exploring their new abode under cover of darkness.



Stranger in the night

In the morning she was surprised to see that the plastic wrapping on the loaf of bread in the kitchenette had been bitten open. The bread had been nibbled right into the middle of the loaf. How strange. Rooies and Pietie Piet didn't eat bread. It surely couldn't have been a mouse or a rat because Rooies and Pietie Piet would have pounced and put an end to them!

Later, as she watched dusk fall from where she stood at the front door of her new abode in the housing estate, she glanced in surprise at Rooies who was at her feet. A low growl was coming from his throat and the fur along his back right to the tip of his tail, stood upright. Grandma Goppie followed the direction of his hostile stare and caught a glimpse of a small whiskered face peeping out from behind the wheel of a car parked in the estate's parking lot nearby.

"Oh my goodness" murmured Grandma Goppie to herself. "That's not a good place to hide, little cat!" She called Rooies to come back into the flat and then filled up a bowl with cat crumbs, and another with water. She placed both bowls nearby and then went inside to watch from the window. Her mind went back to the mystery earlier that day of the loaf of bread with a hole in it. "I think I might have solved the mystery of the hole in the bread," she told Grandpa Jobbels.

Could it be, they wondered, that the thief in the night had been an emaciated feral cat!?

"How wonderful that our flat is right next to their hiding place and we are here to help them," they agreed.



Grandma Goppie wrote a note on a folded piece of paper and placed it under the windshield wiper of the car.

“Please be careful when you reverse out of your parking space. A feral cat and her three kittens have chosen your car to hide under. The mother cat is very fearful.”

Soon the other flat residents became friends with Grandma Goppie and Grandpa Jobbels, and she learnt that fortunately, the owner of the car was away on holiday overseas for several weeks. Grandma hoped it would give her enough time to gain the trust of the cat and her kittens so she could rescue them from a life of homelessness.





An unanticipated thrill

Gradually, over the weeks, with Grandma Goppie stepping out each evening with bowls of crumbles and water, mother cat built up enough trust to actually come out of hiding and wait patiently and expectantly for Grandma Goppie to appear.

Sometimes, Grandma Goppie caught glimpses of three pairs of shining eyes peeping out from behind the tyre, tiny wisps of life, as fragile as dry twigs, anticipating their mother's return.

It delighted Grandma Goppie to see mother cat gaining trust little by little. In fact she would remember, to the end of her days, the thrill it gave her when mother cat eventually allowed Grandma's out-stretched hand to stroke her head.

The day finally came when Grandma Goppie put her mind to choosing a name for mother cat and started looking for good homes for the kittens. She advertised on Facebook that three beautiful kittens – one ginger, one tortoiseshell, and one black with white socks – were up for adoption by people who could offer them 'forever homes'.

Today, if you were to visit Grandma Goppie, you'd find three beautiful cats in residence. Rooies, Pietie Piet and a sleek pitch-black beauty called Trippelkie.

When Grandma Goppie's neighbour from the old house came to visit for tea recently, she exclaimed: "Oh my word! You've rescued another cat!"

"No", smiled Grandma Goppie happily, the old twinkle back in her eye, "she rescued me!"



Trippelkie's Journey

The beautiful black cat whose name was Trippelkie, had a story of her own.

When she was just a kitten, she had been rescued from an animal shelter by a family with two young children. The parents had thought it would be wonderful for their daughters, Anna and Dolly, to have a pet kitten to care for in the hours after school when their homework was done.

But Anna and Dollie were only 8 years old and had never been taught how to care for a pet. They didn't intend to harm their new pet, just to have some fun with her, like standing close together, and tossing her back and forth between them in the garden, as if she were a ball.

However, what was a game to Anna and Dolly, was something terrifying to the kitten and finally, when the girls were distracted for a moment, she managed to slip away down into the storm water drain at the side of the road, and hide there.

"Where's Blackie?" Mother asked when she returned home from work that evening. Anna and Dolly both shrugged. "We don't know," they said sadly. "We were playing with her outside and then suddenly, she disappeared. We called and called but she didn't come back. We don't know where she went!"

“Oh my goodness,” exclaimed Mother. “Come. Let’s try and find her”.

It was already dusk by this time and although Mom roped Dad into helping to find the kitten too, and although the family called and called for her all around the neighbourhood, peering up into every tree, and down into every street drain, soon darkness fell and they had to give up.

“Honestly,” complained Mom crossly, “you should have looked after her better than this. But let’s leave a small dish of crumbles outside our front door, and some water too, in case she comes back during the night.”

The girls felt despondent. Safely tucked into bed that night Anna whispered to Dolly: “We should have played a nicer game with Blackie. I think we were too rough with her.”

“I hope she comes back,” Dolly murmured as tears welled up in her eyes. “Perhaps we’ll hear her little squeaky mew,” suggested Anna. “Mom’s left the windows ajar so we can keep an ear open all night long.”

By morning though, the dish of crumbles remained untouched.

Mom put a picture of Blackie up on Facebook and asked everyone in the neighbourhood to look out for her.

Resilient scrap of life

In the days and weeks and months to come, the underground network of storm water drains became home to Blackie. Occasionally, neighbours reported that they had caught sight of her catching the sunlight next to the storm-water drain on such-and-such a street. When this happened, Mother would return home from work as early as possible, and dash over with her two girls to peer into the drain where the sighting had been, calling the kitten's name over and over.

Mother would leave a handful of crumbs next to the drain and a small plastic dish of water. But after a while, people complained that although Mother picked up some of the plastic bowls, others were blown into the drains and probably ended up in the river or sea, causing plastic pollution and possibly even causing harm to water creatures who might mistake the plastic bowls for something to eat, and end up with blockages in their intestines.

Finally, Father, who had joined in on many of the searches for Blackie, asked his wife please to stop this incessant search now, and said that when the time was right, the family would adopt a new kitten for the girls. In the meantime, they could take online lessons offered by [Nature-based Education](#) on how to become the best guardian to a companion animal.

As for Blackie, somehow she managed to eke out a survival in the storm water drains that served the neighbourhood.

She felt safe there - safe from fast cars, fast bicycles, barking dogs, humans trying to catch her, and a host of other potential dangers.

Occasionally, a mouse or lizard found their way down into the network of underground tunnels too, or were washed there by rain. Blackie found she could survive on these small pickings – enough for her to grow slowly into adulthood.

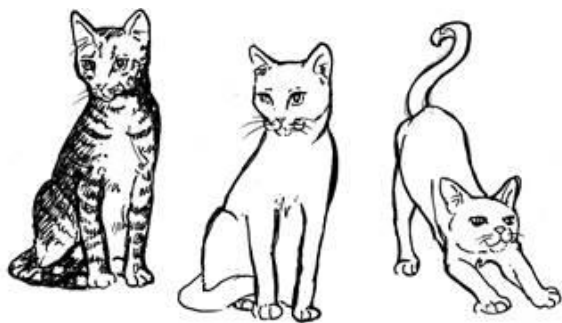
Sometimes she met other cats down there, not that they were friendly. Instead, they hissed and spat at each other. Then one night, a handsome ginger fellow set up a caterwauling that reverberated deafeningly along the dark, dank tunnels, and Blackie couldn't help but follow him up and out of the drain, onto a garden wall where the screeching and howling continued, to the excitement of barking dogs all around the neighbourhood, and to the annoyance of neighbours who found they couldn't get back to sleep after such a rude awakening in the middle of the night. One neighbour set up a petition on Facebook asking the owner of the ginger cat, whoever that might be, to have him neutered so that he would do less of the awful caterwauling at night.

It was around this time, that the rainy season started and, with almost no warning, the drains suddenly turned into torrents of water.

Blackie narrowly escaped drowning when she was caught unawares by a rush of gushing water that drove her along the underground pipes until she managed to claw and cling and pull herself up onto the bars of the grid at street level.

Her thin body was drenched to the bone; her fur stuck up in tufts of wetness... and her bulging abdomen was all the more obvious.

She knew then that the drains were no place to give birth to kittens.



That's how it happened that Grandma Goppie found her and befriended her in her time of need.

As you know, Blackie's name changed to Trippelkie. She found herself in the lap of kindness and contentment, but that's not the end of the story!

Would you believe, a family with two young girls named Anna and Dolly responded to the advert Grandma Goppie had placed on Facebook about kittens looking for a forever home.

"Oh my word!," exclaimed Dolly, "Look, this one's exactly like Blackie was."

"Yes she is," agreed Anna excitedly. She looked up at her parents and Grandma Goppie. "Can we take this little one?" she asked.

"And this time around we're going to be the best guardians ever!" said Dolly happily.

Somewhere in her distant memory, Trippelkie felt sure she had seen the girls before. She couldn't quite remember but their vibe was so loving, she knew that her kitten was lucky to be going to this new family. She sat on a cushion on one of Grandma's chairs as the sun streamed through the window. She had been licking her fur to make it glisten. Now she stared at the girls approvingly, and slowly blinked her eyes.



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