*Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong*

**The special bond between pets and their owners**

Our good friend’s puppy was recently killed in a freak accident. He is so devastated that he started to cry when I was hugging him and giving him my condolences.

Growing up without a pet, I never understood the joy of having pets and the comfort and happiness they can bring us. My wife loves animals and her sister goes far beyond “love.” It just drives me crazy, wondering, how can one have so much passion for animals? I guess one never knows till you actually own a pet and develop a relationship.

Growing up in Hong Kong, when the whole family lived in a cramped apartment, to have pets was impossible and unheard of. I had a fish tank while growing up.

I had all kinds of fish and I knew their special habits. I spent all my pocket money gaining all that knowledge from the fish store owner.

He had aquariums with different species in a 300-square-foot shop right below where we lived. I would ask the owner all kinds of questions about how to maintain an aquarium properly: what temperature the water should be, the acidity of the water and all kinds of conditions to keep the fish healthy. He would patiently explain to me all the details.

I guess I’ve hit a right chord, thinking of his passion — owning a pet shop is not just about selling pets, but to share the joy and pleasure of owning pets and how to take good care of them. Ah, so much to learn.

Anyway, my wife loves animals, and she has three cats that she owned long before we were married. In human age, I guess the cats are over 100 years old by now and they would be happy to live another 20 more years. Lordy, what am I going to do?

I don’t find it too troublesome feeding them every morning and making sure that the water dish is clean and full. But I just can’t stand cleaning the kitty litter. I will clean them when Colleen is gone for a few days as I have no choice.

But, why would the cats do their business outside the litter box? It drives me crazy when I stepped on their “business” in front of my bed. Not realizing what has happened, I would be walking around the house all day with a foul odor following me; just to find out that there’s cat business in my loafers which I accidentally stepped on.

No point in complaining to my dear wife. “Oh, they’re old,” she would say. “They don’t know what they’re doing.”

What do you mean? I am old too, and can I do anything I want, wherever I want? No. Now I am comparing myself to some old cats. Ah! Looking at our expensive furniture which has become the cats’ scratching posts just keeps me steaming.

“But they are so cute!” Yes, they are indeed (to my wife). But another 20 more years? What did I do in my past life to deserve this?

Living in cities before we moved to the Northwoods, owning pets can be a hazard indeed. Cats, birds and fish are fine; but owning a dog is more than a chore.

We used to live in a suburb that totally forbid dog waste on the sidewalk. One can be heavily fined if they let the dogs do their business on someone’s lawn.

Lots of the residents are well-known attorneys, doctors and CEOs of big companies. It is just funny to watch these big shots walking their dogs in the morning, all carrying a small plastic bag. They may be big guns at their work, but they still have to bend down and pick up the dog business on their morning walks.

I don’t know which is better, to have a litter box in the house for the cats or to clean up after the dogs in your yard or someone else’s.

I am not stone-hearted, as my heart has melted a thousand times watching how folks having so much fun with their pets. No, they are not just animals, they have become part of the family, as they share their daily lives with their families.

There is a bond between the human and the animals that is beyond words to describe, and I guess it will take me a while to understand all that.

For years, I tried to connect with my wife’s cats; but somehow, I failed. My wife had three cats: Wakely, Connan and Maxine.

Wakely was found on the roadside by her son and named for the street on which he was found. He was a black kitten who found nature most adventurous.

Connan and Maxine are siblings, yet they are totally different. While Connan would sit on your lap the minute you sat down, Maxine would be hiding somewhere and show up later when everyone had left.

When Colleen’s son moved out of the house, he naturally took his cat, Wakely, with him. He moved to an apartment three to four miles away. Then one day, when the apartment door was left open, Wakely escaped and was not heard of for two to three weeks.

We all felt bad, but life went on. Then one morning, I heard a faint “meow” in the kitchen entrance. When I opened the door, there was Wakely. He went straight to the food dishes and had a field day.

He was never meant to be a house cat; he just hated to be indoors. After the move to the Northwoods, it was obvious that he loved to be outside. Well, who wouldn’t? If the door was left open just a crack, he would disappear.

My wife was so worried, as our area is most populated with eagles, vultures and all kinds of predators. Well, he finally died of old age. It was a relief; but there was a twinge of sadness that I felt.

I remember as a kid, I cried when I watched Disney’s “Old Yeller,” even though I never owned a dog. In a way, I love companionship with animals; but in a sense, I just resent the nuisance that I have to live through on a daily basis.

My life is busy and chaotic the way it is. What to do? So I’ll just live with my pet fish and will keep on learning more about peace and harmony with the cats.

What is 20 more years, if I ever live to be 100?