

INSTINCTIVE BEHAVIOR

SEVENTEEN YEARS AFTER HER DEATH, we still miss the extraordinary female cat that came with the purchase of our house twenty-two years ago. Mamma—so named because she was pregnant at the time—was a singular blend of wildness and domesticity. She could absent herself for one or two weeks at a time whenever she felt the urge to go walk-about. Yet upon her return she would lavish upon us the warmth and affection of a pampered house cat. Mamma had the predatory agility to nail two birds at once, yet she possessed an intelligent, loving personality.



Back in those early days, in the winter, when the temperatures began to slide closer to zero and the wind chill shoved the discomfort level even further south, it was our practice to permit Mamma to come into the house. Our philosophy, since our first cat in California, had always been that outdoor animals stay out, and indoor animals stay in; they do not come and go. But when winter strikes in the heartland of America, certain concessions must be made.

During the warmer months, Mamma was perfectly content to stay outside. But cats, like most people, aren't terribly thrilled with the cold, preferring a warm blanket over a snow bank. So soon she was asking to come inside.

As a consequence, during the winter Mamma became domestic. She slept on the sofa next to the fireplace, she methodically cleaned herself until she smelled almost as good as the indoor cats, and she consumed a reliable if monotonous diet of dry cat food. She would rub and purr and play through the house with the other girls—generally letting them win, although with her street smarts and tree-climbing strength she was perfectly capable of whipping any of them.

But in the final analysis it was mostly a temporary charade she was putting on, performed in exchange for a few month's warmth

and comfort. She was not really becoming domestic at all. When the weather began to turn back to temperatures above freezing, when the warming sunlight would melt the drifts of snow, Mamma begged to return to her more customary haunts. And instantly she would return to her natural state: predator.

Mamma only humored us by consuming the dry Cat Chow during the cold months. With the offer of warmer temps and an opened door, she happily turned her back on the full bowl without a moment's notice, for what she really craved was raw flesh—preferably rabbits, but mice and birds would do nicely, thank you very much. Whatever the creature, she would consume all of it—from toe to ear, from tip to tail. And there was no dissuading her; we could offer all manner of enticements, but when she was on the scent, she possessed a level of determination and concentration of singular intensity.



Mamma's natural, instinctive behavior is a reminder that no matter how hard I try—no matter how civilized I become, I will always be a child of depravity.



For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

Romans 7:18-20

Righteousness and purity go against the nature of flesh. We are born of the mud, and some of it still clings to us no matter how long we soak in the spiritual bath. Even under the blood of Christ, I may still revisit old, natural habits—habits I would rather put away for good. But they periodically rear their unsightly visage, injecting themselves back into a life that would prefer that they just go away once

and for all. I have the promise of their eventual demise, but that day has not yet arrived. But it will.

There will come a day when I will no longer be a child of this earth. There will come a day when I will be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. And I shall finally, praise God, be like Him.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Philippians 3:20-21