

Fur Babies

By Leslie Elsaifi

Have you ever noticed that pets can be amazingly similar to children? I don't have children yet so I am not fully qualified to make this statement. However, I do have lots of younger siblings and several friends with small children who I've spent numerous hours around and I've listened on more than an occasion or two to my mother's anecdotes of raising three children all under the age of 4 and the craziness that ensues.

My husband and I plan to have children in the not too distant future, but in the meantime, we often feel as if our fur babies are training us for parenthood. My husband even commented once, "Hey, we've got these two cats, so kids can't be that much more work!" I think he may have been forgetting a few details like the fact that cats can stay home alone while children require years of constant supervision. We do often feel like we are taking care of small children with our two cats and we certainly love them like they were our real babies.

I think the biggest similarity between my cats and newborn babies are the midnight feedings! Our male cat is ALWAYS hungry and no matter how late we feed him dinner, he wakes me up between the hours of 2 and 5 AM for breakfast! He doesn't enact the power of his vocal cords like a baby would do though. Instead, he slowly reaches one paw under the covers, where I've sought protection, and proceeds to scratch (not enough to break the skin, but enough to wake me from my pleasant dreams quite annoyed). I suppose that 4 years of this behavior will make it much easier to manage the late night and early morning feedings every two hours that come with the responsibilities of taking care of a newborn baby.

Our female cat is much nicer when it comes to sleep. In fact, she loves to cuddle and will sleep for hours without any kind of commotion. However, she makes up for her lack of mischief during slumber in other ways. She quite reminds me of a toddler. She LOVES to open up cabinets in the bathroom and kitchen and climb into them creating her own little kitty fort. This behavior reminds me of the various stories I've heard many mothers tell of their toddlers' interests in opening cabinets and exploring their contents. She also loves to dart out the door and run away any chance she gets. This always paralyzes me with fear but luckily once she gets far enough away from the front door, she seems to get scared and returns home very quickly. I can remember my mom telling me that she started putting me on a child's leash when shopping after I ran away from her one day at the mall. I can now see her reasoning and only wish that cat leashes worked better in reality than they do in theory!

In general, we are constantly cleaning up after our cat children. If we're not emptying litter boxes, then we're vacuuming up dirt they've dug out of plants or throwing away Q-tips that have been displaced from the trash can. I know my mom friends are always telling of the endless cleaning that follows the trail of messes their children leave. Perhaps, my future children will at least avoid digging in the dirt and exploring the trash can, or will they?

Regardless of the responsibilities and frustrations that come with being a pet owner, having our cats in our lives is very rewarding and I would imagine that being a parent is just as rewarding if not more so than being a pet parent. Despite their little quarks and messes that they make, we love them so much and could not imagine our lives without them and I'm sure one day their mischief won't hold a key to the mischief our children will manage to find themselves in!