



# LOVE AND HATE AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

As a child, I took comfort in being surrounded by animals, generally cats but as I grew, I began accumulating quite the menagerie in our two-bedroom city apartment.

Due to my shy disposition and ability to make myself seem invisible at school and other events I wasn't very good at making human friends. Instead, I spent most every waking hour outside of school with my animal companions.

Volunteering my every weekend and school holidays at the local pet store to clean out the small animal cages and clean the fish tanks were some of the best years of my life.

It was the cats and mice, ducks and guinea pigs, dogs and injured pigeons who occupied my space and time as a child. I would talk to them, read to them, dress them up and snuggle with them before falling asleep at night. I would write them letters and draw pictures for them. This was my normal and up until recently, I thought most kids treated their animals with this kind of affection (or for a better word, madness).

It seems my affiliation for animals passed on to my daughter, who is now 8. In our home we have one large dog, two cats and two chickens. She spends hours playing with them, just as I used to do. Her detailed drawings always incorporate animals of some kind and if she is away from home, it's generally the animals she asks after rather than the humans of the household. She has over 300 animal gifs downloaded to her phone and is constantly making cutesy sounds when she sees animals in books or on the television.

Then there are the children who don't really pay animals much mind, like my partners 7 year old son. He's been surrounded by

animals all his life, but tells me quite openly that he'd prefer an Xbox over a fluffy kitten, or a robot over a dog.

There have been mornings where he's jumped into our bed and manoeuvred his legs into helicopter blades in aim of our sleeping cats head. Other times I've walked into the lounge room and his hands have been around the cats neck only to explain that he was petting her. He's a passionate and spirited child, with a deep connection to computer games and keeping active. It's not that he doesn't love the animals, I figure it's just that he doesn't really need them. He is content enough within himself without the need for animal affection.

Noticing the contrast between these two children got me thinking; What is it that distinguishes an animal lover from an animal hater, or from someone who feels ambivalent or indifferent toward them?

I have friends who cower in the corner if there is a dog in the room, or become extremely puzzled and confused as to why the cat has jumped onto their lap. Others simply avoid coming to visit because of the anxiety involved in seeing a dog resting on our couch. Some of those people never had exposure to animals as a child, it is not even that they were taught to be afraid of them; it was just that they were never taught to adore them.

Some of them have little feeling for the environment or natural world, therefore pets are of little importance to them. Fear plays a huge role for some people and their relationship with animals. Whether they have had a terrifying experience with a dog or other animal, it can be difficult to let that go. And some people just aren't interested.

However, there is not a day that goes by when I do not take comfort in my animal companions. Whether it be nestling with my cat on the couch at the end of the day, bushwalking with my dog or feeding the chickens and having a bit of a yarn with them. In all of their innocence they bring a deep sense of peace, laughter and companionship to those of us who adore them. ■