



Ideal Bakery owner Mabel Picket received so many flowers at the store after Mickey's death she asked people to donate to the the Cancer Society instead.
Photo-Dan Toulgoet

Cat with attitude had long, happy nine lives

By Sandra Thomas-Staff write, Vancouver Courier

A much-beloved member of the Dunbar Street community who hated and chased dogs has died.

Mickey McGregor, the 28-year-old cat belonging to baker Mabel Picket, died last Saturday after a brief fight with cancer.

Since then neighbours and friends of the orange tabby have inundated the Ideal Bakery with sympathy cards, stuffed animals and flowers. Picket, who's owned and operated the bakery for 55 years, received so many flowers in response to her pet's death, she started to turn them down. People are now being asked to donate money to the B.C. Cancer Society in Mickey's name.

"The cancer clinic called me because they thought it was a 28-year-old employee named Mickey who had died," said Picket, 82.

While Mickey was officially Picket's cat, he had the run of the neighbourhood via an open window in the back room. When the social feline got bored he would slip out the window and visit neighbouring businesses, including Olinda's clothing store on one side of the bakery and Curiosities' antiques on the other. A story of Mickey's life, along with a photograph of the cat, sits in the window of Curiosities.

"He had his own private bed in the dress shop and the antique store," said Picket. "He also liked to sleep on a chair in the window of the antique store."

Mickey also had a chair in the front of the bakery. Last Thursday the chair was still in place but empty. Picket said anyone in the know wouldn't dare sit in Mickey's chair, but those who did were quickly moved along.

"If anyone sat in the chair, Lord help them," she said. "He'd start by walking around them and then he'd harass them mercilessly until they got up."

The very large cat was also famous for his dislike of anything canine and would sit outside the bakery every day between 5 and 5:50 p.m., just in time to catch people out walking their dogs after work.

"He hated dogs and had a passion for chasing them whenever he could," she said. "He didn't really like other cats either. There's a cat that lives upstairs and we call him the fastest runner in Dunbar."

Picket, who was widowed eight year ago, said she and her husband never had any plans to own a cat, but Mickey changed all that. The cat, then known as Hooter, once belonged to a woman who

lived nearby. He was a regular visitor to the bakery until the woman moved to Burnaby. Picket thought they'd seen the last of the big orange cat but the tenacious tabby made his way back to Dunbar Street on his own and never left. It was then the Pickets changed his name to Mickey McGregor.

Mickey made many friends over the years, but made no effort to charm another longtime fixture of the Dunbar community.

Winnie the Dunbar Dog spent almost every day for a decade sitting outside her owner's office, near the entrance to Shoppers Drug Mart-directly across the street from the bakery. When the 14-year-old Labrador was euthanized two years ago because of inoperable heart disease, residents of the area created a shrine to honour her memory. Not so Mickey.

"They used to look across the street at each other and Mickey would stare at Winnie," said Picket. "He hated her. He was a cat with an attitude."

Picket credits Mickey's longevity, at least in part, to his diet, which consisted of six turkey legs a week. Mickey would only eat dark meat. She also suspected the cat might have been supplementing his diet after she received a phone call from a neighbour.

"He told me, 'Mickey could charm any bird out of a tree,' and I said Mickey doesn't eat birds," said Picket. "He said, 'Well you should come over here and look out my window because he's charming them down right now.'"

Olinda Vreind, who owns Olinda's clothing store next to the bakery, said Mickey will be much missed.

"It was a bakery so Mickey really wasn't supposed to be there, but everybody knew about him and loved him," said Vreind, who knew Mickey for 25 years. "He was part of the community."

Picket admits Mickey was the best kept secret in town.

"I guess if the health inspector had ever found out he was here I'd have been in trouble," she said.

The cat seemed in great health right up until the day before he died when Picket noticed something wrong with one of his front teeth.

"I thought Mickey just had a bad tooth and I would take him to the vet and they'd pull it and that would be it," said Picket. "But it turned out to be cancer and it was closing in on his mouth."

With no hope for a cure and a painful prognosis for Mickey, Picket did what she believed was best for her old friend and arranged to have him euthanized the next day.

"That was really hard. The vet told me just walk out and don't look back," she said. "But I still look for him every day."

posted on 05/02/2005

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