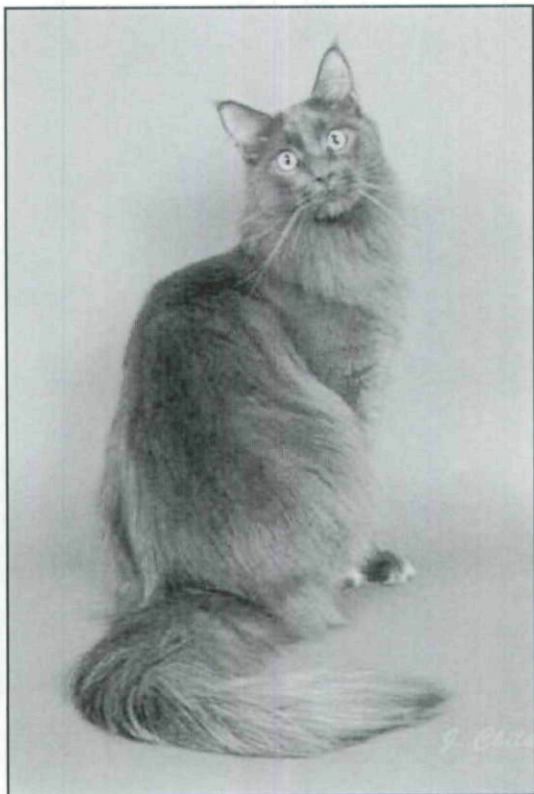


BEAMER'S STORY

Qitah Blue Moonbeam II (Author) and Marjorie A. Smith (Typist)



Beamer. Photograph by Jim Childs.

Have you ever loved anyone so much that you would follow them to the ends of the earth? Well, I have had that experience. I have followed Margie [Mom] to school, to horse shows, to visit friends and families, and I have just been there with her to start and end each day. You see, I am a Maine Coon cat. And who is Margie? Well, she is one of my special people.

I guess I had better introduce myself. My name is Beamer, Qitah Blue Moonbeam II, to be more specific. I am registered as a solid blue Maine Coon premier.

Mom didn't bring me to school because she was missing Goldie (her classroom goldfish who died), but because her principal, Annetta, had lost three cats within five months. Annetta was feeling sad and wanted to meet the kitten Mom always was ranting and raving about—that would be me. So on the teachers'

work day, Mom took me to school with her. I spent most of my day with Annetta as Mom was busy packing up her classroom for the summer. I had a blast. I got to play with her pencils and pens, walk all over her keyboard, and even help her answer the phone. Later, Mom came down to Annetta's office to see how I was doing. Well, I was sprawled out all over Annetta's desk and had made myself quite at home.

Mom came into the office and sat down to discuss the possibility of getting a rabbit for her classroom for the following school year. Meanwhile, the supervisor of special education, Ellen, came in. Ellen thought that I would make a great pet for Mom's classroom. Mom, for once, was speechless—like she hadn't even thought of me in her classroom—geez, what was she thinking? Well, after many phone calls and approvals, I became the designated classroom pet. At the age of five months, I had a job!

For the next year Mom and her colleagues used me to help the urban children they taught to read my body language in order to someday avoid confrontational situations. You see, before I arrived in her life, Mom and her team had documented physical fighting in the playground. The teachers noted that nearly all of the physical fights were started when students did not pay attention to the adversarial body language of other students. Mom was now on a mission. Her first goal was to teach the students to pay attention to my body language—the tension in my muscles, the direction of my ears, the sweep of my whiskers, and so on. Mom and her colleagues wanted the students to be able to play indoor games without conflict and physical confrontation. So I went to work. We had Beamer-time every day. That was when I played with the students. We had three Beamer-times throughout the day—two short times of a few minutes and one longer time during recess of about 30 minutes. My job was

to show through my body language when the students made me feel good and when I felt threatened.

I have to say that I did my job very well. Soon, my students were able to play with me for 30 minutes without any peer conflict. Matter of fact, I hated for the time to come to an end each day, so rather than taking my usual naps, I started interacting with the kids at the collaboration table. The kids knew that if my tail started flopping or if I left the table, they would have to go back to their desks and complete independently whatever work they were supposed to do as a small group. While I kept my kids from getting off task, Mom was then able to have another group working with her on specific reading and math skills. We worked like this for almost two years. Teachers who inherited any of my kids knew where they came from and with whom they had worked because my kids were often the ones who were able to control themselves during indoor peer interactions and teaching games.



Beamer at summer writing class. Photo by Hanover Evening Sun.

The rest of the teachers in the school used me to help calm weeping children. I was also used as an incentive for students who didn't misbehave. Some teachers themselves would come in my classroom for a moment of snuggles. I really enjoyed the visits from the children sent by Ellie, the guidance counselor. Ellie and I had a special relationship. She had cats and obviously they adored her since she knew how to speak my language. When she brought me a child, I knew that child was in need and I would put out the purrs! It always brought a smile and eventually the child would relax with me. Talk about feeling like a king—kids did that to me—well, actually, they still do.

Beamer is a registered CFA solid blue Maine Coon cat. He currently resides with Margie and her husband, Lynn. Although he no longer attends school, he is a certified therapy cat with KPETS (Keystone Pet-Enhanced Therapy Services) and previously with the Delta Society (the guru of pet-enhanced therapy services) delivering Animal-Assisted Therapy to a local rehabilitation center. He does Animal-Assisted Activities with local libraries and senior centers. Beamer is often invited to give presentations on the benefits of his work, especially when it comes to talking about animals in the classroom.

Margie is a special education teacher previously in the Harrisburg School District in Pennsylvania. She currently teaches in the Upper Adams School District. She has written many stories about her animals, but especially about Beamer. Margie lives with five Maine Coon cats, two Rough Collies, one horse, and her husband. Comments concerning this article can be sent to: margiesracking@earthlink.net

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