

The Reluctant Traveler

By Dolores Marie Patterson



My name is Smokey Bear. I am a long-haired domestic cat. My brother Tipper and I live comfortably in a house with our adopted parents Zane and Dolores Patterson, or at least we did until they decided to start traveling in a motor home. I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me start my story at the beginning.

When I was three days old my mother decided to move our family from the room where I was born. She could only carry one kitten at a time and when she came back for me the door was closed, whether by accident or on purpose I do not know. I also don't know how long I was alone before someone found me. I do remember I was scared, hungry, and yowling at the top of my lungs. Dolores was sitting at her computer when the man brought me to her office. She immediately plucked me out of his large hand and put me on her chest. When I heard her heart beat I settled down and snuggled in. Dolores realized I was hungry, but she didn't know what to do. She wasn't used to baby kittens without mother cats. Soon someone found some milk and a bottle and brought them to her so she could feed me. After my tummy was full I fell asleep on her chest. She continued to work while I slept and I decided I would adopt her as my new mom. I could tell I had already adopted her heart, but she wasn't sure her husband would approve of her bringing me home.

Dolores called Zane, but he didn't answer. She left a message but he still hadn't called back when it was time to go home. She decided to take me with her even though Zane didn't know I was coming. When Zane first saw my soft furry self his heart melted. He said I could stay. Now I was a member of the Patterson family. There was quite a discussion between mom and dad about what to name me, but they finally settled on Smokey Bear because I was a smoky gray color and had a habit of standing up on my back feet and walking around just like a bear.

Since my new parents had no experience with a cat as young as me, it became my job to teach them how to take care of a baby kitten. I taught my new family everything I wanted them to know—like how to wrap me in a washcloth and hold me close while I drank my milk from a bottle. They could tell that it made me feel safe and loved. To this day and 18 pounds later I still like to be wrapped in a towel and rocked. If they did anything I didn't like I immediately showed my displeasure, with a yowl and a coal-black-eyed stare. One thing I couldn't change though, dad insisted on taking me with him when he ran errands. No matter how many scowling stares I gave him he didn't pay any attention because he felt so sad when he left me home alone. Did he think I was a dog? Didn't he know cats like to be left alone?

As I grew older I got bored and cranky. Mom and dad thought I didn't really know I was a cat since I had adopted them at such a young age. My ears perked up when they began talking about finding another kitten to adopt us so I could learn about cats. Were they for real? What did they think I thought I was? I had about decided to get excited about a playmate when they changed their minds. Later I heard them say a friend wanted them to meet her baby kittens. Mom and dad came home talking about a kitten that was white with gray patches on his back and brown tips on his ears. Mom said he adopted her heart on the spot just like I did. She called him Tipper because of the tips of color on his ears. Dad said it was okay to bring him home to meet me, and it was love at first sight. Tipper was so small he had to sit on a box to look out the screen door with me. Now I had a little brother and when I felt cranky, I could take it out on him!

Tipper grew up and we definitely ruled our home. Life was good. Then came the day we heard mom and dad say they had bought a motor home. We looked at each other. 'What's that?' When I heard mom say "We'll take Smokey Bear and Tipper with us on our travels," I knew we were in trouble. I was scared remembering the errands I took with dad, so I complained to Tipper. He looked sad and bumped his head against my shoulder so I knew he understood.

It wasn't long before Tipper and I were looking out the window at a big white thing with wheels parked in front of our house. Our eyes locked 'Is that a motor home?' Mom and dad went back and forth putting house things inside of it. Afraid, we crawled under a table. Eventually in spite of the fight we put up, mom and dad took us into the big white thing where they showed us our traveling cages. Mom was so proud, "This one is for Smokey Bear." I let out a yowl of displeasure as she put me in the cage and zipped it up. "This one is for you, Tipper." He squeaked as she pushed him in. I couldn't tell for sure but I thought he was having fun. I whispered to him, 'now don't go soft on me and enjoy this.' After we adjusted to the bouncy ride we both quieted down. What choice did we have? I hid my face deep in my cage under my furry rug. Tipper pulled and tugged at the bottom of his cage until he found a way out. Just what I was afraid of, before any of us knew what was happening Tipper was in mom's lap looking out the window.

Cats are always on the lookout for clues so we don't get blindsided. Mom and dad are creatures of habit. We can always tell what's coming next—traveling, camping, or sleeping. When signs appear that let us know bedtime is near we immediately eat, drink, and use the litter box before it's too late, because Tipper and I have to sleep in our cages. Tipper loves to travel. He actually grins when he looks out the window. As a brother who is supposed to be supportive he has really let me down. I have a great dislike for traveling. The camping stuff is okay, but when I realize we are getting ready to move I jump outside and hide under the motor home. Mom and dad have me figured out, so they grab me and put me in my cage before I know what's going on. After we get going mom lets me out, but I ride alone usually hiding under the table.

Escaping and hiding are part of a cat's nature. I have to say Tipper's first disappearing act was classic. It was our first night out in the motor home. Mom and dad had everything set up. They were ready to relax, but they couldn't find Tipper! They jumped outside yelling his name. I could hear them asking, "Have you seen a white cat?" They came back discouraged. Dad said "If he doesn't come back we're going home." Mom said, "We're not going home until we find him." I wasn't worried. I knew she was praying—she always does. Right on cue Tipper put his paw out in front of the couch that he was hiding under. Mom got down on her knees and grabbed him. I was laughing to myself. They didn't even know about the cat-sized hole because it takes a cat to find it. My first getaway wasn't so mysterious. I was outside in my cage when the garbage truck came into the park. I hate garbage trucks and this one was really close and loud. It shook the ground I was lying on. I rocked my cage wildly until I got free. Mom and dad were on a frantic search again and of course asking everyone, "Have you seen a big gray cat?" Dad was ready to go home and mom was praying and not leaving until she found me. I told you they are creatures of habit! After a half hour or so I meandered safely out from under our Jeep. Why wouldn't they know that's where I'd be? Not coming out until I was ready to find them.

Yes, I am the reluctant traveler, but what can I do about it? In our family I'm only one against three.