

# Clara's Corner

By Clara Simone  
Berrigan Scott



Hello, everybody! My name is Clara and I'm a woodchuck -- or groundhog, if you prefer. I'm writing this special column to introduce myself to subscribers of *The Rodent Reader Quarterly* because, like the rats who occupy most of the magazine, I'm a rodent -- and because I've come to live with Mom and Dad for the rest of my life...which only just began on March 25th -- I'm going to be sharing lots of adventures with them and all my rat, cat, rabbit, guinea pig and various other brothers and sisters. Since folks seem to enjoy reading about all of those family members, Mom thought they might like reading about me, too. She also said that because I have such a big personality, she thought I should share a little of it firsthand instead of letting her just tell you about me. So, here's my first try at journalism. I must say, though, I think I'm a little young to have to do so much work -- and I hope Mom's listening when I say that because I'm sure I'm going to deserve lots of treats for taking on such a big job...and I'm sure I'm going to need at least a few of those long before I'm finished. (Peanuts in the shell will do nicely, Mom, and maybe one or two nice ripe cherry tomatoes...)

Hmmm....let me see where I should begin. Well, the way I understand it, my story actually starts long before I was born, way back when, rumor has it, another very young groundhog crawled into Mom and Dad's life by way of the road behind our house. They tell me his eyes weren't even open yet -- but here he was on a very hot late spring day, heading for the dumpster (that was about to be picked up by a huge truck at any moment), past a group of stray cats, and facing all kinds of other dangers that would have surely led to his ending almost before his beginning if Mom and Dad hadn't happened along just when they did -- which they wouldn't have if they hadn't changed a vet appointment for two rat brothers' checkup from 9AM to 11AM only the day before!

Long story short, they took him in, started feeding him Esbilac puppy milk replacer, and the next thing you know he grew into a big, strong beautiful groundhog. (That's him with one of Mom's special rat friends named Kenny in the picture below.) Of course, aside from farmers who consider us terrible pests, who knew what that meant? What's a groundhog really like, anyway? It was all a very new experience. Well, as it turned out, the way I heard it, it was one of the greatest experiences of Mom and Dad's life...just like finding Molly under that mailbox. It seems they learned (which I could have told them, of course!) groundhogs are incredibly nice people...I mean, well, not really *people*, although Mom says we're the nearest thing she's ever seen to little people running around the house... But, I digress. Anyway, it seems this other groundhog grew up thinking Mom and



Dad were pretty nice people, too. He also grew to love food -- like the dandelions growing in the back yard, and tomatoes from the plants Dad kept in big pots by the garage -- as well as the foods he found indoors, like cooked sweet potatoes and vanilla flavored yogurt. Now keep in mind, this groundhog -- who I think was actually named something like Simon or Simone or Simeon, but who Mom simply called Mony -- was never caged or restrained or in any way held captive. He was free to do anything and everything he wanted, which included roaming through the place he'd come to know so well in his first few weeks of life, Mom and Dad's house -- his favorite spot being their bedroom. He'd use a litter box every single time he needed to take care of, umm, business -- and often crawled up to relax next to Mom when she was working on her laptop. As Mom tells it, he was unbelievably domestic. Of course, I could have told her that wasn't unbelievable at all -- that's just the way we are. Unfortunately, I wasn't born yet.





Also, unfortunately, Mony passed away last year. Though Mom and Dad were very, very sad about this, Mom soon determined she would honor his legacy the same way she'd honored that of Molly and her boys -- by helping others learn how wrong are all the negative impressions surrounding his species...and, if at all possible, by caring for another of his kind. After all, like getting to know rats, becoming closely acquainted with a groundhog changes one forever -- in the best possible ways. So, Mom and Dad immediately began looking into the state's permit process for adopting one. And, finally, many months later -- voila! Here I am.

So, now I'll get to tell you all about my life as it unfolds. And, I can't wait! Already I've had some really fun times -- and I've tasted some really great food! My favorite main course is a bowl of those blocks that are made for rats -- but I like lots of other things as well. I haven't developed much of a taste yet for the dandelions Mony enjoyed so much. Maybe when I get older that will change. But, I'm still on the lookout for new foods to try -- and when I see something that looks interesting I beg Dad until he gives it to me (which generally doesn't take very long.)

Sometimes my interest in new treats does get me into trouble, though. Last week, I sneaked something from the pocket of Mom

and Dad's lunch cooler that turned out to be what's called a brownie. Mom caught me after only a few bites and got all excited. She started calling for Dad and they rushed me to the vet's office. It seems brownies are made of chocolate, which is bad for most animals -- but how was I to know that, I ask you??? It sure didn't *taste* bad. Well, anyway, the vet gave me this awful concoction that made me forget all about the taste of the brownie and wish I'd never tried it.

But, there was something really good that came of the experience. You see, while the staff at Doc's office all loved me and said how cute I was (naturally!), there was this lady there who heard them exclaiming over me and scoffed. She said groundhogs couldn't be anything but a nuisance, there was nothing cute about us, etc., etc., etc. Then she saw me for herself and how playful I was and such -- and she actually admitted that in just one visit, I'd changed her mind! She said she never thought *anything* could do that -- but there was just no way she could keep herself from liking *me!!!*

I'm not surprised. But, to get back to stealing that brownie -- I should point out I don't make a habit of getting into things I'm not supposed to. Mom (not realizing Dad hadn't eaten all of his dessert) left the cooler sitting on the floor, with the pocket unzipped, right at my level. It was basically an invitation. But, I don't open the kitchen cabinets myself or crawl up on the countertops or table or anything like that. In fact, one of the reasons Mom says groundhogs are so domestic is that, like I said before, we're like having small people around. We make our own bed, use our own bathroom, and generally mind our own business. She says a groundhog is the friend you never knew you always wanted. But don't take her word for it. Keep reading my adventures in my own words, and decide for yourself.

Of course, I'm pretty sure it won't be long before you agree

