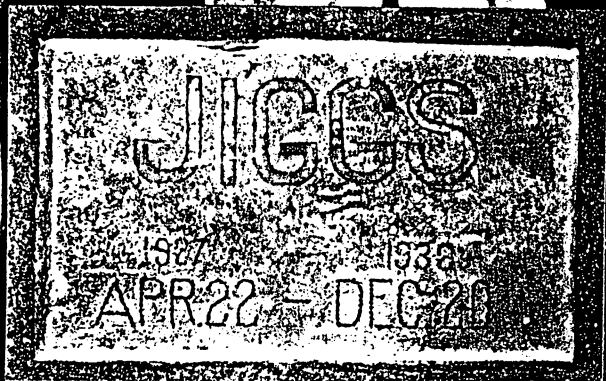


JIGGS



Jiggs, a lighthouse cat, was born April 22, 1927, at Pigeon Point, under the back porch of the downstairs west side quarters. He died December 20, 1936, at Point Sur, in the northwest corner of the kitchen of the Keeper's quarters. His body was entombed in a concrete crypt which was subsequently moved to Point Pinos when Keeper Tom Henderson and his family relocated there.

Memories of
JIGGS
(A Lighthouse Cat)

by George E. Henderson
son of Tom and Verna Henderson

My wife insists on calling Jiggs, *the lighthouse cat*, but of course he was not the only cat to bear the title; nor was he the first or the last to scramble over rocks above a churning sea, but he was the first to creep under my bed covers on stormy nights to sleep on my feet and dispense warmth and comfort.

Mother Nature had carelessly spilled blotches of black ink on his head and snowy white shorthair coat before he was born April 22, 1927, under the back porch of the downstairs west side quarters of the lighthouse station at Pigeon Point, California. It was ten days after my 6th birthday and it was love at first sight for me.

Jiggs slept in a doll bed that had belonged to my sister Fern when she was a child (she was fourteen and past playing with dolls when Jiggs arrived). The doll bed was two feet long by one foot wide and stood beside the kitchen stove, the warmest spot in the house.

One day when Jiggs had entered his 'teens in cat years, he found himself upended into a rubber boot with only his wiggling rear end protruding out the top. In this unseemly posture, he could only feel his masculinity being snipped away by my Dad. Such was the practice of the day. It was, however, the only indignity inflicted on him by us; henceforth his status as respected and beloved member of the family was irrefutable.

On special occasions (birthdays, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter) a place was set for him at our dining table. He would sit on a high chair drawn up to the table, and by daintily pulling morsels of food to the edge of his plate with his paw, he would eat from the dish Mom prepared for him. He never attempted to get up on the table, itself.

Jiggs moved with us to the Point Sur Lighthouse Station, California, in January, 1931, when Dad became Head Keeper there. He hunted gophers with some success. He conducted himself the way a gentleman cat should and was a gregarious fellow, well liked by all but one of the people at the station. At Point Sur, the teacher for the school on the rock resided with the Keeper's family and for a brief while after we arrived she took her meals in

the kitchen with our family. Jiggs had a habit at mealtime of strutting, proudly, tail held high, around and around the table, carving a narrow path between our feet and the front legs of the chairs. As he passed under a skittish Miss Graham, his tail brushed against the underside of her knees. She, alone, was not amused and claimed he was doing it deliberately to annoy her. From then on, to keep peace, Mom delivered her meals to her in her room.

Mom was a superb cook and we ate well, lots of abalone and other bounty from the sea, and an occasional beef roast when she went to town for supplies. On these occasions, she always purchased a package of *ground round steak for Jiggs*. Mom saw to it that Jiggs ate well too!

Jiggs was never called upon to perform a heroic feat like saving shipwrecked sailors which would have put his name in the annals of the sea, but he was brave in his own world and his own way. Although he was neutered, there was a female cat at the station and at times Jiggs seemed to feel he ought to be doing something but he did not know what that would be. Unfortunately, there were wandering intact toms who did know and viewed Jiggs as a competitor for her affections. Poor Jiggs would try to defend the station against the invading forces and would get torn to bits for his trouble. Dad would attempt to drive the interlopers off the rock with a 12-gauge shotgun, and Mom would patiently nurse Jiggs back to health.

Roy Maxon, a radio operator for the geodetic survey, came to the station to run some tests which involved setting off small explosions in the ocean. Roy was billeted with my family for the several months he was to be at Point Sur. When Mom greeted him for the first time at the kitchen door, he asked her if we had a cat and explained that his large terrier dog, Rip, was a cat killer. Before Mom could answer, Rip trotted past her into the kitchen and headed directly toward Jiggs who was asleep on a chair just inside the door. Jiggs awoke; surprised but not impressed when Rip's nose entered his space, he merely reached out and drove a pawful of claws into Rip's muzzle. Rip retreated, *kay-aying* his pain, and in that moment an understanding was reached between the two -- each gave the other a wide berth during the time Roy and Rip lodged with us.

Jiggs died December 20, 1936, on his little doll bed beside the stove in the northwest corner of the kitchen of the Keeper's quarters at Point Sur. It was a terrible night for the family as our little friend was in extreme

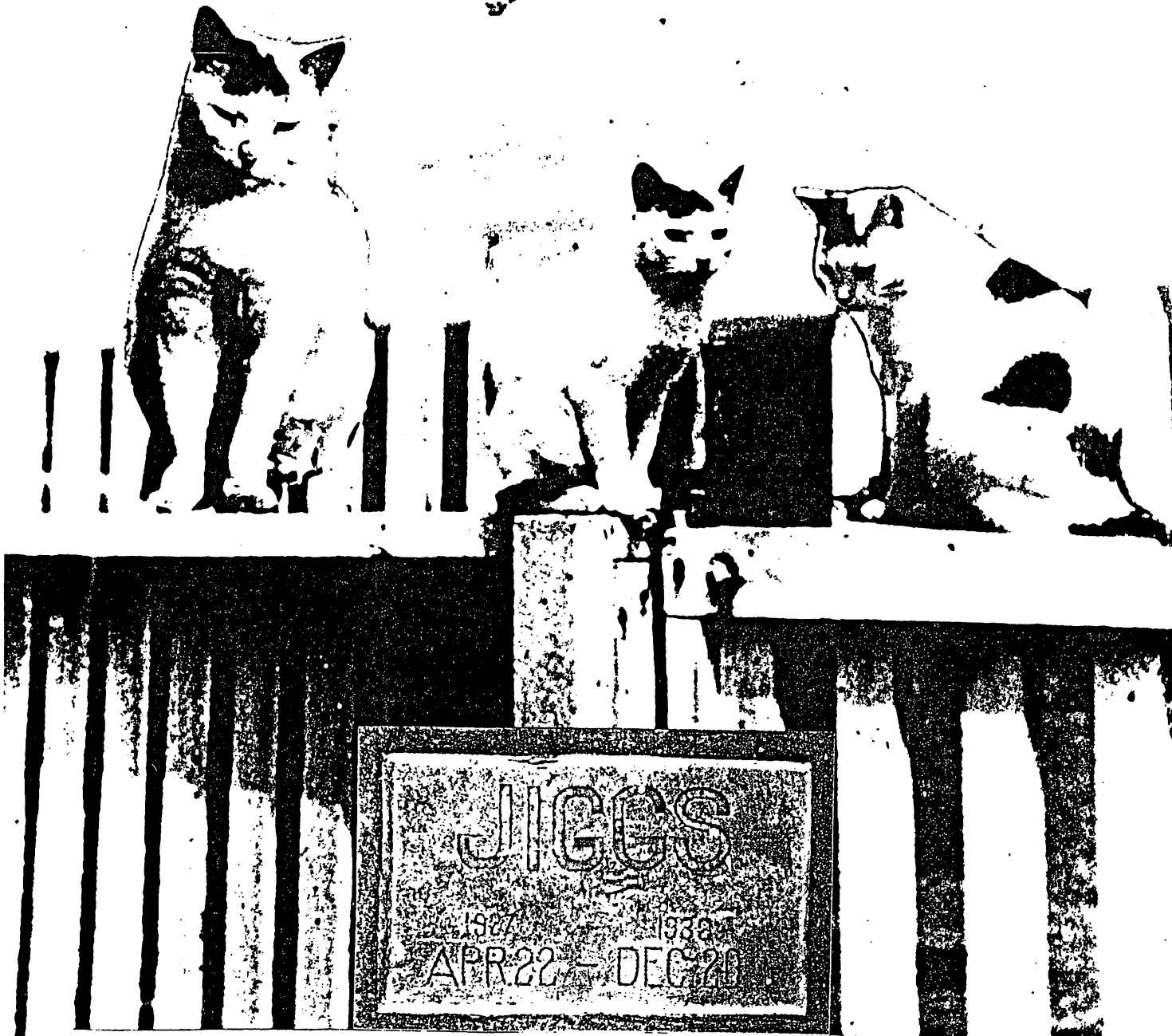
pain. We knew little about feline health matters at that time but, knowing what I know now, I suspect that he suffered a urinary obstruction. His death shattered me. I loved him dearly as did my whole family.

We wrapped him in his blanket, put him in a box, and placed the box in a concrete crypt I built with Dad's help. A finer grade of concrete was applied to form a raised bar, and using cardboard cutouts, I pressed the letters of his name into the wet cement. With the point of a nail, I etched the dates of his birth and death beneath his name.

When Dad became Head Keeper of the Lighthouse at Point Pinos, California, in January, 1938, Jiggs' crypt went along with us to our new quarters. And that is where it stands today, across the street from the final resting place of Mom and Dad.

Dad was Jiggs' protector, Mom was his nurse and nurturer. Till the day she died in 1993, my big sister argued that Jiggs was *her* cat. But I maintain, now without challenge, that Jiggs was *my* cat. Such was the hold this little furball had on all our hearts.

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The Story of Jiggs

The last time Bruce Elster visited Point Pinos was to spread some of his father's ashes in the places he had lived. Bruce was the adopted son of George Henderson whose father was Keeper Tom Henderson. It was George who wrote the story about his family's cat named Jiggs.

Bruce Elster lives in Morro Bay and does volunteer work at Point Sur Lightstation.

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