

NOW AND THEN...

By *Dustin Erickson, AFA Education Committee*

Can time really change you? Well, it can certainly change a ferret – but that's not all it takes. Many new ferret owners find themselves at whit's end with a new ferret's quirky behavior and sometimes undesirable disposition. But what can you do?

As with anything in life, change often takes time – not just with patience but also with perseverance. Helping your new furry friend adjust to its new life with you and sometimes re-learn life apart from where it came is a huge mountain to climb. Remembering that setting consistent schedules and seeing the world from their point of view is paramount to helping your ferret adjust to the loving home you've created for them.

Sometimes a bad habit (like unwanted chewing) can't be broken – it's best to redirect the bad behavior in a way that's safe and less destructive by offering extra (safe) chewing options like durable toys or occasional snacks designed to be digested but thoroughly enjoyed first. Remember that ferrets are full time thinkers – and keeping their little minds busy with interactive toys and cage mates is a great way to prevent them from becoming bored (or worse, depressed) which can lead to those "cage-rage" and excessive chewing behaviors.

I had the distinct privilege of adopting a female ferret which had previously been returned to its original retailer twice for extremely aggressive behavior. In an act of attempted mercy, the store decided they would allow her to live permanently at the store, but then I found her. Against their strictest warnings they agreed to let me take her home.

After a brief introduction to her new cage mate – she settled right in. I'd like to say that the rest was history, but it didn't quite end that way. Skylar, who we formally decided to name only after realizing that we would be her furever home, lived an exemplary life of lady-like behavior. She was not only a proper ferret but was sweeter than sugar every single day of her life. Years after her adoption I still mused upon the idea that I was taking home a supposed nightmare, and with the birth of our first child it only got better. Skylar seemed to have adopted our son as her own – caring for him in every way she could and became quite literally inseparable from him. Skylar lived for nine long, fulfilling years spending the last two of hers being a surrogate mother to our boy. She never showed any malice towards anyone again.

What do I credit for the change in her behavior? The same thing every pet owner strives to give their animals, love. The love comes easy enough, and informed care comes from the American Ferret Association who continues to educate ferret owners and elevate the quality of life for ferrets all over the country. Knowledge is power – know how to truly love your ferret!

