



Pet Tips 'n' Tales

by Mary Ellen "Angel Scribe"

The Kidnapped Chinchilla

It is not just cats and dogs with fluffy tails and interesting tales! Meet Charleigh, a four-year old Chinchilla, the first to grace this 10-year-old column!

When Kristen and her BFF walked into a pet store, they had no idea what was about to unfold. Being raised with myriad pets — turtles, dogs, cats, birds, guinea pigs and hamsters — Kristen was window shopping. "I had never seen a Chinchilla before or since," said Kristen. "But the minute I saw Charleigh, I was in love!"

The sales purr-son handed the dandelion-like-grey-fluff ball to her, and the minute her hands sunk into its incredibly soft fur, it was all over!

"I fell in love with the ridiculously soft love bug and had to have her," purr-actically squealed Kristen! "I have always had pets, but never a chin. Being an exotic animal Charleigh was expensive and neither of us could afford her, so we did the only economical, heart-led thing — 'share' Charleigh's parenting and cost. Our deal was to alternate months and shuttle her, and her cage, back and forth. I was elated! We bought a book and asked a million questions on Chinchillas and their health tips."

Chinchilla's resemble an oversize, fat squirrel with adorable Mickey Mouse round ears, button noses and expressive brown eyes. They are native to the South American Andes and live in "herds" of 100 at elevations up to 14,000 feet. They can live for 20 years and are 16-20 inches long, which includes their bushy tails.

"Charleigh is easygoing," said Kristen, "and has no problem with car rides. But, after eight months of house swapping, I realized my friend was not a fit pet parent — or a good friend."

So Kristen made the agonizing decision on behalf of Charleigh to keep her. "My friend's smoking was only one of her habits that were not healthy for a small pet's tiny lungs," said Kristen. "What irked me the most was that she handled 'my' Charleigh roughly. Since the day of my 'kidnapping' Charleigh, I've never heard from her!"

Everyone marvels at how soft Charlie is. Touching her is like putting your hand in a warm cloud, or having it disappear into a bowl of dandelion fluffs. She weighs two

pounds and 1 3/4 of that appears to be luxurious fur!

Kristen's boyfriend built Charleigh an amazing hutch.

"Up is better than long for their habitats," advises Kristen. "Chins are jumpers so they appreciate shelves at different levels. Her wide chicken-wire home-hutch has added ladders and includes her favorite green-fluffy hammock for her to chill in or nap."

Charleigh's all time favorite thing to do is take dust baths! The silty bathing dust is purr-chased at pet stores and she uses it to clean her fur.

"Charleigh loves her dust baths so much," shares Kristen, "that when I can't catch her, I trick her by popping open the dust can's lid. The sound reveals her hiding spot as she runs over to me."

Chinchilla's are nocturnal, so they are not a good pet for children, but great for those working night shifts or insomniacs! Charleigh's favorite toy is her large guinea pig dome. "She enjoys rolling around in it," said Kristen, "and it is the cutest thing to watch her joy! Charleigh also hops around her 'own' room and exercises on her large hamster wheel. Having her own room restricts her tiny mouse type poops to a small area. But luckily, similar to rabbits they are litter trained. Her litter pan is filled with guinea pig bedding that I change once a week."

Chinchillas resemble a small rabbit in size and temperament. They like a buddy, and in the wild they have family groups. It is best to have them "fixed" if you have more than one so you don't end up with 100 in your home! Charleigh is a small pet, which fits perfectly into Kristen's small home.

Chinchillas don't "talk" like dogs or cats. So they are a quiet pet, good for apartments. Kristen would not recommend Chins for children. "Don't get a Chin unless you are prepared for their 20 year life span!"

Some Chins are cuddly, some not. They are focused on being active, running, bouncing and playing. Chinchillas are independent. Like a dog, they scamper over to you and jump in your lap. Then like an inquisitive cat they run off to investigate every drawer and piece of furniture. It is cruel keeping these gentle-curious mammals caged for hours, days, or years as some cruelly do.

"Looking at Charleigh's cute and adorable



Photo by Mary Ellen "Angel Scribe"
Kristen and her kidnaped Chinchilla, Charleigh!

face and feeling her soft fuzziness makes my heart happy and my insides giggle. She is a wonderful stress reliever in all that is good, sweet and gentle on the planet."

TIPS

Bees can fly 12 miles without getting lost. Albatrosses fly 25,000 miles. And flying insects, without eyes, have no trouble whatsoever finding their "soul mates." Humans need GPS tracking and dating websites, leaving us to ask which species is the smartest?!

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