

ELLI'S BACKSTORY

Elli's story, though starting off miserably, has only happy endings. She is still young and strong, and living with Harley and me.

When Splotch, the younger half of Dudley and Splotch, died at the age of seventeen, I had only Bianca. We mourned him together, but after we got through a Christmas season that kept us busy with pet therapy, we agreed that we missed a feline presence. So in January I called the Humane Society to find out what cats they were fostering. As it happened, they had one cat they especially wanted to place in a good home.

She had a story: during a particularly cold and snowy night she approached a farm house out in the county. When they opened the door for her, she ran off, but came back with three kittens, approximately ten weeks old. The next day her rescuers brought the little family into town and left them at the shelter.

The mama cat was practically skin and bones, but her kittens were strong and healthy. Somehow she had managed to feed and shelter them in the winter weather until she found people to help her. Clearly she had once had a home, and trusted people. We will never know her whole story, but obviously it included someone betraying her trust and dumping her far out in the country instead of simply taking her and her kittens to the shelter. I will never understand why people with unwanted animals choose to do something cumbersome and cruel, instead of easy and kind.

The shelter volunteers pieced together her story from the evidence they had: the mama cat was loving and friendly, but the kittens were wild and frightened of people. So they must have been dumped very soon after the kittens were born, and probably much farther from town than the farm where mama sought help.

Fortunately the kittens were young enough to tame down quickly when humans fed them and treated them kindly. Soon they were all adopted.

But their valorous mother languished at the shelter, regaining her health and strength but not finding a new home. When I met her, I could see why she hadn't stood out at the shelter, where almost all the adult cats are equally sweet and loving. It's the beautiful ones that can compete with the kittens, not the brave ones. This little mama was still scrawny, and her coloring didn't make her stand out.

But Bianca approved of the stalwart little cat, and we adopted her. My friend Shirley looked at her and said, "Her name is Ellie!" The cat seemed to approve, so that became her name, even though it didn't feel quite right to me. And then I happened to run across the fact that Elli is the Norse goddess protector of old people! I had recently passed 80, so felt that that made her exactly what I needed.

Elli's coat color is called "dilute tortoiseshell," which is a sort of faded gray with streaks of light orange, light rust, and peach. It was very faded when I adopted her, but even now that she is back in full health she doesn't stand out in a crowd.

But she does among cats! Elli is the first cat I have ever had that I could not persuade to live completely indoors. She just has to get outside for at least a few hours every day, and has made herself the boss of all the neighborhood cats. That settled, over the years she has come to spend more and more time indoors, except when the weather is perfect. I don't really like the fact that she is a hunter, but that skill clearly saved her kittens, as well as being a part of her nature. Dudley and Splotch hunted mice and crickets in the garage in their day, as Elli does now. It's just part of being a cat.

And now she has a dog to train. Elli and Bianca were good friends, and never, ever fought. Harley, though, can't seem to learn that she is not one of his toys! I don't know why she doesn't bite or scratch him when he plays rough. She just complains, slaps him, and wriggles away.

Elli has become my most used model since I lost Bianca. The first year I had her I challenged myself to make a portrait of her with colored pencils. I entered it for the Janice Mason museum show, and it got juried in, my first ever museum exhibit. It was early in my art career, and I was just starting to show at PAPA. I needed enough pieces to fill in the requirement for the next show, but I really didn't want to sell Elli's portrait. So I put an especially high price on it. Well, you guessed it—it sold! My first big sale. I then decided I would make a new portrait of her every year. You can see all of them in this show, but the first (2022) is not the original, but a museum-quality print.

I frequently use Elli as a model in disguise. I will turn her into a tabby cat or a Siamese, with her face and expression. She was "Goldie Has Her Eyes on You," wearing an orange and white coat, in the entry with which I won my first—and so far only—first place in an art show. That little portrait then sold, too.

Altogether, besides being my protector and companion, Elli is my model and my good luck charm. In return, she now has a safe home and proper care. And just in case, she is left in my will to someone who wants her and will take good care of her if I can't.

MY HEART'S IN THE HIGHLANDS

Grady Pennington is one of the PAPA artists. He specializes in abstracts—beautiful abstracts that everyone loves whether or not they like abstracts in general.

One day I was at a workshop at John and Cindy McLaren's studio, and Grady offered to show all of us a new technique he was trying. Of course everyone there jumped at the opportunity, and even though everyone followed the same instructions, none of our finished paintings looked alike.

In my case, when I was putting the final touches on by scraping a credit card dipped in paint over the surface, I twisted my card to make arcs—and suddenly I was in Scotland!

Okay, I have to tell you that I am dyslexic, so I cannot learn by stringing elements together linearly. I start with the whole, and work down to the parts. As I let the colors blend, I was just mechanically following instructions, my mind desperately seeking something to give me a way in.

Now—if this were Grady’s painting, it would be heresy to seek a picture in it. But this is a Jean Lorrah painting, and I could not stop working on it until I saw a picture. It’s an abstract picture, but I see images, the dark woods in the background, clan colors across the middle, and bagpipers in the foreground. You don’t have to see them. Because of the way my brain is wired, I have to see them to see a painting rather than just blobs of paint.

But now you know why the painting has that title!

APPROACHING THE STATION

One of the PAPA Gallery challenges was a cityscape. Although I admire beautiful, detailed, realistic cityscapes, what sprang to my mind—Florence—was definitely above my skill level. I also did not want to spend the hours it would take to dig through boxes in storage to locate my photographs of Florence, taken in the days before digital cameras.

Despite my age, I’ve only been a working artist for three years—two at the time of the challenge. I still flip through art tutorials online, seeking new ideas and techniques. As I did that, looking for an idea that would allow me to accept the challenge within the time I had, I ran across an artist who paints cities in a bright-colored primitive style. I loved her work, so I decided to try my hand at something similar.

It worked well. I loved the wealth of colors, I loved creating designs, but when I finished my buildings I felt the painting wasn’t finished. I put it in my living room and let it take my attention from time to time as I went about my day. And then suddenly I realized what my buildings looked like!

In Europe people take trains instead of driving, and so do tourists. I have been on hundreds of trains in the past fifty years, and seen thousands of cities that fly by until the train slows if it is going to stop at a station. Then the details emerge from the blur and you see neighborhoods like this. If it’s a fairly large city, as you get closer in you see other tracks converging, and closer yet there are trains on those other tracks. So I added the train on the other track, and realized those Americans who have not yet traveled in countries that have kept passenger trains would not get it, but all my fellow tourists would!

THOMAS A BECKET

I built my very first trip abroad around a Shakespeare summer course being taught in Stratford-upon-Avon. Such courses always include three-day weekends, and students are encouraged to spend them exploring other parts of the country. On one of my weekends I went to Canterbury, one of the best-preserved medieval cities in England.

I knew it, of course, as the destination of the pilgrims in the *Canterbury Tales*, one of my favorite works of literature. The pilgrims went to visit the shrine of St. Thomas a Becket, who was murdered while at prayer in the cathedral. It’s a great true story of a friendship gone wrong when two powerful men become divided over politics.

King Henry II wanted to weaken the power of the Church in England. (If you know much English history you know that practically every king wanted to do that until finally Henry VIII achieved it). Henry was already best friends and drinking buddies with his Lord Chancellor, Thomas a Becket, who always did what he wanted at the secular level. So Henry had the bright idea to make Thomas the Archbishop of Canterbury. Thomas was actually a deacon in the church, but he had abandoned his religious studies to become Lord Chancellor.

Henry didn't know Thomas as well as he thought he did. Thomas refused and returned to his ecclesiastical studies. Still the king insisted, and Thomas finally decided that if he accepted the king's plan, he might be able to rein him in. Strings were pulled, Thomas was ordained and then jumped some ranks in the church, and Henry had his own man as Archbishop of Canterbury.

But Thomas was no longer the king's man. He overturned every plot and blocked every plan to weaken the Church. Even though Thomas had warned him, Henry felt betrayed. Famously, he asked his nobles, "Will no one rid me of this meddlesome priest?"

Hoping to gain favor with the king, some of the nobles rode to Canterbury, found Thomas at the altar, and murdered him in cold blood.

Thus ended Henry's political power. Thomas was an immediate martyr, and within three years the Church made him a saint. Henry had to do public penance.

If you visit Canterbury Cathedral today, don't miss the guided tour. One of the deacons will not only show you all the usual things to see in a cathedral, but when he comes to the altar he will act out the murder of St. Thomas a Becket as if he had witnessed it!

Today one of the Cathedral's stained glass windows represents St. Thomas a Becket. Probably every tourist photographs it, and so did I. And found it to use as the reference for one of the PAPA challenges last year. It took me back to that first trip to England, and memories I will hold forever.

SCOOTER CAT IN ATHENS

Back in the 1990s, I made a trip to Athens, Greece. At that time the country had such clean air and water that we were encouraged to fill our canteens at any of the springs we encountered on our journey. The water was clean, clear, and cold—delicious! It is now thirty years later, and I can only hope it has stayed the same.

Something else I hope is the same is the number of cats in every city. Healthy, beautiful cats running free, and begging from tourists at the many outdoor restaurants.

We spent our first day in Greece exploring Athens on foot, so of course we climbed up to the Acropolis. The way led through shady streets with lots of local traffic. And local cats. This one was just asking to have his picture taken, posed on what he obviously thought of as "his" scooter.

I'm not sure if he had found a good place to watch the tourists go by, whether he was guarding his person's scooter, or just hoping to beg a ride when the owner returned!

BIANCA

“Bianca Laughs” is one of many portraits I’ve made of her, but this one shows her wonderful attitude, and her love of life. I captured her at her best, mature, beautiful, self-assured. Bianca was my soul dog.

People like me have numerous pets through their lives, all of whom they love, but there are certain animals who, even among special animals, are unique. In my long life, I have been incredibly fortunate to have had three soul animals: Cuddles, a small, unprepossessing terrier mix who was my companion through the 1980s; Dudley, a gray tiger cat I called my Zen cat because he was so laid-back and willing to do everything from pet therapy to walking in the Christmas parade; and most recently, Bianca.

A purebred Maltese, Bianca was part of the dump of small white dogs in Murray that included Fancy. Because she was recognized as purebred, the Humane Society put her on a 30-day hold, expecting someone to be looking for her. But no one claimed her, and as I had lost Dudley, and then my beautiful cattle dog Kadi, I was down to just my old cat Splotch (who was still a popular therapy animal as The Cat in The Bag).

The Humane Society is always especially helpful to people who do pet therapy, so that is where I went when the dog-sized hole in my heart cried out to be filled. The Director told me, “We’ve been fostering a Maltese, looking for her owners, but no one has claimed her. The hold expires tomorrow, if you’d like to meet her.”

I met her the next morning. Bianca came straight into my arms as if she knew she belonged there, and I took her home.

It quickly became apparent that Bianca had never had her own person before. She bonded so quickly that she couldn’t let me out of her sight. Unfortunately, she also developed separation anxiety so bad that if I left her with a friend just long enough to go to the restroom, Bianca screamed so loud that people came to see if she was being tortured!

It so happened that within two weeks I was going to a very pet-friendly fan convention to which Cuddles and Dudley had accompanied me before. Bianca was delightful, charming everybody as long as she was at my side or on my lap. But during the times that she inevitably had to be in her crate in the room set aside for pets, she made her annoyance—actually, of course, her terror of abandonment—known to all and sundry.

It was not a propitious beginning, but things went up from there. Bianca turned out to be a voracious learner, something that she continued for the rest of her life.

Soon after we got home from the con, my friend Lois fell and went into the hospital. Her little dog Fancy came to stay with me, as we were planning to train our dogs together for pet therapy. Bianca and Fancy were already friends, used to walking together every day. Now they bonded even more.

I took Fancy to visit Lois, and we made our plans to enroll Bianca and Fancy in the next Canine Good Citizen course. Lois went into physical therapy, determined to be ready to handle Fancy—but then, unexpectedly, she had a massive stroke and died.

When Fancy came to live with us permanently, Bianca became a grief counselor. Over time the two little white dogs also sorted themselves into the delicate princess and her stalwart protector. You can see the rest of Fancy's Backstory elsewhere in this presentation.

Bianca, meanwhile, was the focus of attention wherever she went. Another friend, Shirley, took over training Fancy, and both dogs passed the Canine Good Citizen course. A combination of practice-practice-practice and making sure Bianca got to know everybody and their dogs associated with the course got my little girl over her separation anxiety in time for the testing. While that was a bit of nail-biting, on every other test you could see the "I got this" in her reaction to every command. Without Lois, though, Fancy refused to do therapy work, not even with Bianca. Instead she appointed herself the guardian of our household.

Bianca went on to become a popular therapy dog. She only weighed eight pounds, so people had a habit of picking her up and handing her around, especially among groups of seniors in nursing homes. She was always the smallest dog there, and many people treated her like a toy. One time we were invited to a nursery school, where none of us knew exactly what to expect. I will never forget the image of my tiny dog disappearing under a pile of two-year-old children! But she soon emerged, still wearing her Maltese smile, tail wagging wildly.

Bianca was especially popular among the staff at the hospital. I don't know what some of the doctors and nurses told her, but even she was sobered sometimes, letting people hug her and whisper their secrets. There were times when she came back to me wet with tears.

But as time passed, I could see Bianca was missing something. She didn't complain, and she eagerly participated in everything we did, but there was nothing new for her when fandom faded out and the last of the conventions closed. And then we lost Fancy. So when a world class dog trainer moved to our area and began offering classes in herding and scent training, Shirley and I decided to train our dogs.

Both Shirley's Bailey, a beautiful Springer Spaniel mix, and Bianca took to scent training as if they were born to it. Well, Bailey with his hunting dog heritage WAS born to it. But Bianca? She was an elegant toy, born to lie on a pillow and look beautiful!

But no one ever told Bianca that, and she considered herself a working dog. So she dived into learning scent tracing, happily competing with Bailey, but doing it in her own way.

In scent competition, each pair of dog and handler enter the test area with a judge. There is a bait hidden somewhere in that area. The handler tells the dog to "Find!" and when the dog finds the scent it signals. Each dog creates its own signal. Bianca's was to reach out a front paw and tap the area where the bait was hidden—a very clear signal. To progress toward a title, the dog must find the scent within a specified time. First, second, or third for that search group is decided by time, but doesn't count toward earning a title. Bailey thought it was a race, and often won first or second—but sometimes he didn't take time to be sure he had actually found the scent. Bianca was careful, and only ever won timing ribbons when faster dogs failed the test, but in her whole short career, she only once failed to find the scent.

Dogs of many breeds participate in scent trials. Bloodhounds, Beagles, and other hounds are very popular, as are the utility dogs, like Labs and Golden Retrievers, and German Shepherds. Many other working dogs

add scent training to their repertoire. But my little white fluffball? At her first trial, we were placed at one end of the crate room. Bailey's crate was normal size; Bianca's was half the size of any other. The big dogs came out and sat beside their crates; Bianca sat on top of hers. People came by and smiled, and Bianca smiled back, not knowing she was being dismissed as unserious.

As the day passed, dogs who passed each test received green ribbons as an indication of steps toward a title. Speed winners received blue, red, or yellow bows. People clipped all their ribbons to each dog's crate. At the end of the day, here is Bianca in her crate:



She won both titles that she came for (the orange bows), and one third for speed. The red and blue ribbons are on Bailey's crate. He also won both titles, but no one found that very surprising. Bianca became the surprise of the trial.

We were able to attend another trial a few months later. Unfortunately that one was all outdoors at a venue of steep hills during the heat of summer. Both dogs and people were exhausted just getting to the tests. Bianca passed three of four tests that day, winning one new title, but we were all so tired and miserable from the heat that even wins felt like losses.

And then COVID shut down the trials.

Those three years are the same blur for me as for most Americans. Travel stopped. Classes stopped. Meetings stopped. Life became vaccinations, carefully plotted grocery shopping, dog walks where, instead of meeting up and having a chat, we had to pass on opposite sides of the street while our dogs wondered why they couldn't greet their buddies.

We lost Splotch, our sweet old man cat, and acquired Elli, a fierce mama cat who took over Fancy's role as Bianca's guardian.

Bianca still loved the very few pet therapy events we were able to do, but she began slowing down and losing weight. Her beautiful fur tangled up, until I couldn't get a brush through it. When the groomer opened again, they couldn't do anything but shave it close, so she looked like a puppy, and her weight loss was even more obvious.

She started to have pain. The vet was able to treat her so she could come home. But we knew she was dying.

All Bianca wanted was to be with me. She ate because I asked her to, let Elli clean and comfort her, and took short walks in the yard. Weeks passed, she faded, but she was not ready to go.

All of you who have had pets know that it's inevitable that every story ends sadly. Bianca had always been such a practical little dog that I expected her to tell me when she was ready to pass on, as so many of my previous pets had done. I had never allowed a pet to linger in pain, but had been there to hold and comfort them at the end (with one sorely regretted exception). Each time I felt their relaxation when the pain was gone, saw and felt the "thank you" sigh for the end of suffering.

That was what I wanted for Bianca. At the beginning of a week, the vet and I agreed that it was only a matter of days, but she was not ready yet. I took her home, held her, was surprised to find her alive each morning, still wanting to cuddle, still forcing herself to eat and drink, and showing none of the signals previous pets had given that it was time.

So on Friday I decided for her. I didn't want to have to call the emergency vet over the weekend. On Friday the vet who had cared for her her whole life was there.

Bianca knew exactly what we were doing, and she didn't want it. For the first time in her life she fought getting an injection, and as the first medicine that was supposed to put her to sleep coursed through her veins she fought it with all her might! She wouldn't stay on my lap, but got down and walked around until she keeled over. I picked her up—and she opened her eyes one last time and stared at me until finally she couldn't fight it any longer and succumbed to sleep, very much against her will.

When the vet came in I told her, "She opened her eyes just a minute ago. I've never seen an animal fight so hard!"

We were both in tears as she tested to be sure Bianca was beyond feeling anything before she gave her the shot that stopped her brave, proud, stubborn little heart.

HARLEY

Harley has only happy endings so far. He is the most recent addition to my household, though he is now about three years old.

After Bianca died, I let several months go by while Elli and I mourned her. But as usual, I began missing having a dog, so in the late Spring I went to the Humane Society to see what they had in small to medium dogs. I didn't feel up to handling a young puppy, as I had hit my eighties and was getting weaker despite all my efforts with diet and exercise.

I also wasn't up to taking care of an older dog with health problems—I had just done that.

So they introduced me to Harley, a cute Fox Terrier mix just under a year old. He weighed about ten pounds, and was eager to cuddle, a definite plus. When I took him to meet Elli he was on his best behavior, so she gave her approval.

Things started out well. Harley turned out to be housebroken and crate trained. But he also knew how to lie! Soon he started treating Elli as a chew toy. Fortunately Elli can take care of herself, and hasn't let him

pull her ears off. She has tried to teach him formal cat fighting, which results in the two of them tumbling through the house, but just when I think they've finally got it, Harley tries to pick her up by the scruff of the neck, and she has to teach him his place again.

On the other hand, Harley loves all the delivery people who come to the house, and they love him. You know how Amazon drivers sometimes send you a picture of your delivered package? Here's one I recently received! (Note the dog biscuit bribe.)



Meanwhile, just over a year ago I found out what was making me so weak and tired: one morning I had a stroke. Fortunately it was a mild one. It paralyzed my left arm for a few hours, but I had regained control of it by evening, even if it was still weak. When they let me out of the hospital after two days, I was able to take care of myself. Then it was back into physical therapy until I got my strength back to where it was before the stroke. I wasn't satisfied with that—ever since I have been on a high protein diet and more weight-bearing exercise, trying to get back to climbing stairs and walking steadily. It's working, but I am a work in progress.

Harley is settling down now, and wants to be in the house whenever the weather is not in his Curlylocks sweet spot. He sleeps at my feet when I'm at the computer, and on my lap to watch TV in the evening. He no longer tries to pull me over. I wish I had the strength to really play with him, but Elli takes care of that.

This is the first formal portrait I have made of Harley. I plan to make more art with Harley in it—I made some miniatures and greeting cards when he was a cute puppy, and those were very popular. He has become a comfortable dog, an accommodating dog, loving and lovable. But I don't know his full story yet. We still need to figure out exactly why he was sent into my life.

FANCY

Fancy's portrait is the only one I have made of her, but I think it captures the unique combination of wistfulness and toughness that made up her character.

Little dogs are generally happy creatures if they are fortunate enough to find homes. Poor Fancy, though, had the hardest life of any dog I ever knew. She began as a stray dumped in Murray. My friend Lois and I first saw the little terrier/chihuahua mix running down the street in our neighborhood. We tried to coax her to us, but she was too terrified. The next day, though, Lois and her grandson were able to capture her, starting the best time of Fancy's life.

I had just adopted my Maltese, Bianca, and Lois and I decided to train our dogs together as therapy dogs. Except that Fancy turned up positive for heartworm. Lois would not let her be put down, but nursed her through a course of treatment. Fancy bonded with Lois, and with Bianca as her best dog friend, she was happy. She survived the heartworm treatment and we signed up for the next available obedience classes.

And then Lois had a fall and had to be hospitalized. I took Fancy to visit Lois as soon as allowed. But fate was cruel: Lois suffered a massive stroke and died. Lois' children wanted her two beautiful friendly cats, but they didn't want Fancy or the feral kitten she had rescued, Blue. Blue was no trouble to take in, and I saw no reason to deprive Bianca of her best buddy, so my household grew by two.

Fancy missed Lois, and on our walks would try to drag me to her house. Any time she could slip her leash, she would dash off to her old home. The people who bought the house soon knew that as soon as I missed her I would come and get the funny little dog who kept turning up on their doorstep.

Then one day the new owner said, "Bring her in. Maybe if she can't find Lois she will accept that we're not hiding her."

They had completely remodeled the house. Fancy searched and searched, but found no trace of Lois. We went home, and she never tried to find Lois again.

Fancy chose a new persona: our protector. As the years passed she never returned to carefree puppy, but developed into a guardian, content with loving me, but especially Bianca. Small as she was, Fancy was ready to defend her family. One day as we walked down our familiar street a pit bull dashed out of a house and confronted us, growling. We stopped, and Fancy positioned herself in front of Bianca and me. The pit bull bit her, just as its owner came dashing up, clipped a leash to its collar, and dragged it off.

My mind was on Fancy. Fortunately she was not badly hurt, just a small bite that healed cleanly, not even leaving a scar. I never saw that pit bull again—the owner may have been visiting, or decided she didn't want to keep that kind of dog in a neighborhood with children. I did not know the incident was a foreshadowing.

Fancy may not have been happy, but she was contented. More years passed, and on a hot summer evening we set out on our walk as the sun set. There were people in yards and on porches, as well as taking walks after the day of being shut in by the heat. The street lights came on, and it was full dark when we turned the corner two blocks from home. And it happened again! A screen door slammed and a dark shape hurtled out toward us!

This time there was no pause, no challenge—this pit bull hit me behind the knees so that I collapsed. As I struggled to get up, letting go of the leashes, I heard a dog fight going on to my left. I couldn't see what was happening—it was full dark and we were not under a street light. There were growls and screams of pain, and I didn't know what was happening to my little white dogs.

A boy came out of the house wailing that it wasn't his fault—he was dog sitting! He made no attempt to restrain the attacking dog. I got to my feet, and turned on the light on my phone. The attacking dog ran away as a police car pulled up.

I couldn't see Bianca anywhere. Fancy was in the ditch, alive but obviously badly hurt. The policeman wanted me to go to the hospital. I persuaded him that my scratches and bruises could wait—I had to find Bianca and get Fancy to the vet!

My friend Shirley drove up—and she had Bianca, who had run home, unharmed.

With the policeman's help, we got Fancy into Shirley's car, and I called the emergency vet. Fancy was somehow still alive.

The vet was not hopeful. He eased Fancy's pain and settled her in with fluids to see if she survived the night. She did, so the next day they did more. She had lost a leg, but if that had been all, she would have learned to manage. She woke up for me, licked my hand, and lived through another night.

In the morning the vet was hopeful. There was little more he could do surgically, but she clearly wanted to live. We started talking about how I could take her home. The next morning she was still hanging in there, so they planned to release her to me in the afternoon.

But late morning I got a call: Fancy had suffered a massive stroke. The only thing to do now was put her down. Did I want to be there? Of course. I drove right out to the vet. Fancy was very small, but so very brave. The doctor was there with a needle, I told Fancy what a good dog she was, but now it was time to go to Lois. I held her as best I could ... and she died. No needle. She died of the same thing that killed Lois, a massive stroke. She had done her duty to Bianca and to me, and now she is with Lois, both of them whole and healthy. I like to think that at last Fancy is happy..

SURVIVORS: MOTHER AND CHILD

Florida—the busiest tourist destination in the U.S. We visited there when I was a child. At that time Florida was an exotic destination with its beaches and swamps and incredible forms of wildlife. One form that I've never seen in the wild is the manatee. I had to visit them in an aquarium, where they are safe from humans.

We don't hunt these gentle giants. No, they have been driven almost to extinction simply because they are in the way! Their habitat is natural waterways and canals along the east coast of the Americas.

Manatees are vegetarian and easygoing. Unfortunately, human beings are not. Early settlers hunted and ate them, but never in numbers to endanger the species. It was the 20th Century that increased the boat and ship traffic all through their habitat, with the most dangerous weapon against them the propeller!

The Florida Manatee, pictured here, is no longer safe simply because humans want to propel their speedboats through the manatees' homes. There are speed limits on many such waterways, but just as on the highways, too many people don't take them seriously.

This mother and her baby are now safe in a refuge. They make a lovely picture until you look close enough to see the many deep scars on the mother...and the pattern of scars beginning to mark the baby as well.