

Gerbils – One of the cuter members of the rodent family

Gerbils are like a cross between a mouse and hamster. Maybe just a smaller, cuter version of a hamster. When I was a kid my two older brothers each had one of their own. Rocky and Flash: named for the Italian Stallion and the speedy super hero, although neither of them was very fast and both of them were about as smart as Rocky.

At that young age we didn't know much better and we kind of treated them more like toys than animals. I think our parents preferred that we keep them in their cage, but that never stopped us from handling them and taking them for a ride on our toy train. I don't I know, I think they kind of enjoyed it. I don't remember them ever trying to run away. For the most part they were good sports and fairly docile.

After Rocky and Flash passed away (Flash had a terrible train accident that I won't get into.) my father came home one day with three new gerbils. I was a few years older so I guess pops figured one for each of us this time. Unfortunately, my dad did not pay much attention to the sex of these animals and within a matter of a few months we ended up with somewhere around twenty to thirty gerbils. That's right, twenty to thirty. You see, what my dad had brought home was one male, two females. I know that male gerbil was loving life for a while. Well, at least up until the arrival, check that, invasion of his offspring. He didn't get much attention after that. Most days he sat alone in the corner of the cage morosely sniffing the cedar and pine shavings, which by the way are not such a good thing to use for bedding, I've learned. Neither is newspaper. Aspen shavings or timothy hay are safer.

They were an impressive sight, that little army division of gerbils. They used to freak my mother out. When she'd walk by the cage they'd all stand up together and stare at her. She said it reminded her of the movie Ben. Of course we ended giving most of them away. I think we may have even given some to the pet store if my memory serves me correctly.

Gerbils, like their distant rodent cousin the rabbit don't have a lot of personality. They're docile and sometimes skittish and if you're not careful you might experience something like I did when I decided to give one a ride in my G.I. Joe tank and ended up with him dangling off the tip of my finger with his teeth. But that was the only violent occurrence in all the years of having gerbils (other than that train accident). They're fairly low maintenance. You got to feed them, keep their water dispenser full, change out their bedding somewhat frequently, and just observe their behavior.