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# A TALE OF TWO BEAVERS

**B**eaver kittens are usually born in May. The average number is four. But our mother beaver, October, followed a different plan. She had a single kitten each year, and she had him late in the season.

One year on the first of September, P.S. was born. He came swimming out to get acquainted with us when he was a month old, which is the usual age for beaver kits to leave the home pool. (They emerge from the lodge at about two weeks.)

The following year, after May, June and July had passed with no beaver kittens, we gave up expecting any. Then in mid-August a tiny figure swam from under drooping water willows, lay still on the water and observed me with alert eyes. With a swish of her paddle tail she dived. A row of bubbles showed her progress underwater to the shelter of another overhanging bush. Up popped her head, and once again she studied me intently.

An apple piece on the end of a stick failed to impress her, but she circled closer and before the evening was over came near to snatch leafy poplar twigs from my hand. I had threaded them through chunks of apple so she might acquire a new taste.

Two days later, this beaver kit was swimming right to me and taking pieces of apple from my hand. I named her Julie, for she must have been born in July.

Julie was the friendliest beaver kit I've ever seen. Although alert to natural dangers and wary of strangers, she had never known fear of man and seemed to trust me implicitly. Climbing into my lap she settled down to eat, giving a contented mew now and then as my hand stroked her soft fur. Early on I stood in deep water



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with Julie circling around me. As she dived smoothly with a frisky slap of her tail, I realized that if I were at home underwater as she was we could have had rare fun together. I had to resign myself to being a clumsy, over-sized spectator at her skillful water games.

Beaver families are close-knit and affectionate. Julie dived under her parents, teased for food, and cried like a human child when she didn't get her way. Her long-suffering mother put up with a lot, but on occasion gave a hiss of protest and pushed the baby away with her hand. P.S., Julie's big brother, was more tolerant. He wrestled good-naturedly with his younger sibling and let Julie snatch bits of food from his mouth.

But P.S. had given up his own baby ways. Like Julie, he used to roll and dive for fun after eating. Now he dived to gather mud and debris from the bottom of the stem and, carrying it in his hands up against his chest, he swam with powerful strokes of hind feet and tail to push these materials firmly against the bank. In this way he helped keep underwater roads deep and open and prevent erosion of the shoreline. He also

gained experience which would aid him in building a lodge when he grew up.

P.S. retained his trust in me and still came to my knee to be fed. One of the misconceptions about beavers is that they are dangerous to man because of their big sharp teeth. Certainly a beaver with one chomp could take off a finger. But he takes care not to. With the apple flavor strong on a finger, one would think a beaver might make a mistake. But a beaver is cautious about what he bites into. Even though teeth sometimes closed on a finger, they were withdrawn without doing injury.

During August, bees still hummed in the water willows, song sparrows sang good night and kingbirds, robins, redwings and yellowthroats called. Each evening three bluebirds flew overhead to some mysterious roosting place. And long before the sun went down, Julie came swimming briskly to my feet, giving a joyful mew of greeting and anticipation. P.S. came too. Thanks to the friendliness of these two beaver kits I found peace, happiness and contentment at the beaver dam.

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