

Daily Breeze

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— JEFF THE RACCOON,
in an Oct. 2, 1995, letter from Marie Meade to her friend Mabel



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Dear Mabel, I hope you had as good a Christmas as we raccoons did. We had a ball from start to finish. ... There were all kinds of cookies, little cakes, candy, nuts and some cute toys for the kids.
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— JEFF THE RACCOON,
in a Dec. 26, 1996, letter from Marie Meade to her friend Mabel



Marie Meade, who turned 100 in September, published a book of letters she wrote to a friend through the eyes of a raccoon she named Jeff. STEVE McCRANK/DAILY BREEZE

A BANDIT-EYED VIEW OF THE WORLD



STEVE McCRANK/DAILY BREEZE

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A BANDIT-EYED VIEW OF THE WORLD

San Pedro woman chronicled her life through letters written by Jeff the raccoon

By Donna Littlejohn

DAILY BREEZE

The masked bandit who scurried into Marie Meade's life more than 10 years ago was blessed indeed.

Meade, after all, never met an animal she didn't like. Well, except for a few cats. More about that later.

But the wild raccoon — named "Jeff" — that took up residence under her house in Santa Barbara soon was living the good life,

dining on meatballs and noodles; melons, apples and grapes; peanuts and beef stew. Soon, the children came along — raccoon children, with names like Tom and Jerry, Tara and Harry — all of them part of Meade's world for more than a decade.

"They got three meals a day," said Meade, a registered nurse who turned 100 in September and now lives at the Little Sisters of the Poor home for the elderly in San Pedro.

Not to mention free medical care and blankets to sleep on.

It's all been chronicled in Meade's book, *Letters from Jeff*.

The 200 letters were written to Meade's former neighbor, Mabel, after she moved away in 1995. All of them were written through the eyes of Jeff the raccoon.

After Mabel died at the age of 100, her son gathered up the letters and returned them to Meade, who had freelanced for

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■ *Letters from Jeff* can be purchased from Little Sisters of the Poor. Checks or money orders in the amount of \$25 payable to Little Sisters of the Poor should be sent to: "Attn: Letters from Jeff," Little Sisters of the Poor, Jeanne Jugan Residence, 2100 S. Western Ave., San Pedro CA 90732.

Find out more

■ Requests also can be e-mailed to HRLSPsp@attglobal.net.

■ Call 310-548-0625.

“
I always loved
animals, and
they like me.
”

— MARIE MEADE,
San Pedro author



For 10 years, Marie Meade wrote letters to her friend Mabel through the eyes of a raccoon who lived underneath Meade's Santa Barbara home. Now, the letters have been published as a book.

STEVE McCRAK/
DAILY BREEZE

RACCOON

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magazines, telling her she must try to get them published.

With some help, Meade published *Letters from Jeff* in 2005 and is selling copies at \$25 each, with proceeds going to the Little Sisters home. (Before moving to Santa Barbara, Meade lived for 33 years in San Pedro.)

Whimsical and sometimes profound, the letters provide a raccoon's-eye view into life with Meade, touching on such issues as friendship, aging, death, forgiveness, faith, football and Meade's Irish heritage.

"They were such nice animals," Meade said, adding that Jeff regularly sat on her lap — "he overlapped" — to be petted and combed. "They were very calm; they'd always wash their hands. They kept themselves so clean."

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"Marie is Irish and they are said to be quite fanciful," reads one of Jeff's early letters to Mabel from Feb. 21, 1995. "Anyway, that's certainly OK with us, as she does set a great table, with plenty of peanuts, grapes, golden apples and often fish and chicken."

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From Oct. 2, 1995: "Never a dull moment around here. Last night, we had just started to eat dinner when Harry came tearing around the corner, practically hysterical, with tears running down his cheeks. When we finally got some sense out of him, he told us his brother George was caught in a trap.

"Now the first thing we raccoons learn is never go into a box with food in it, because the door will shut and you won't be able to get out. But do kids listen anymore? Of course not! ...

"The rest of us followed Harry back to the offending trap and there was poor George, clawing at the door and just beside himself. I told him to pipe down and we'd get him out. After looking at the door for a bit, all I had to do was lift the latch and out flew George. He was in bad shape, shaking and sobbing between hiccups. His hands were bleeding and the skin was torn. We got him quieted down and took him home. I got some Bactine from Marie. It works real well and doesn't sting. Later, we gave

him all the best tidbits at dinner."

In the letters, neighborhood cats are chased off with some regularity, the writer's delight being barely contained. ("Some cats are all right," Meade conceded, "but not those big, fat cats that are over-fed and chase all the little birds.")

The letters record the arrival of new raccoon babies each year — Meade estimates she provided a home under her house for as many as 14 raccoons in 11-12 years — and new adventures. Meade's own day-to-day life is relayed by the faithful raccoon correspondent.

When Meade's health took a turn for the worse in 1996, Jeff wrote: "Last Sunday she couldn't even go to Mass, so I know she must have been really sick. I didn't know what had happened until I heard her tell a friend that the bottom had fallen out of her blood pressure. ... When she missed Mass, I got very nervous, knowing things were bad."

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From Dec. 26, 1996: "Dear Mabel, I hope you had as good a Christmas as we raccoons did. We had a ball from start to finish. Marie hung up an extra large stocking because there are eight of us now. Al and I kept watch so we'd be sure to see Santa, but we somehow missed him again. But when we got up, there was our stocking, as full as it could get. ... There were all kinds of cookies, little cakes, candy, nuts and some cute toys for the kids."

Jeff's sign-off each time? "God Bless."

Letters From Jeff was featured this fall on a KCET special. Ever since, the books have been selling as fast as the Little Sisters can get copies.

Meade said the book's popularity — and its accompanying fan mail — has been a surprise.

"I had no idea," she said.

It's not clear what became of Jeff and clan after Meade moved into the San Pedro home. But her room features several toy replicas of the now-famous raccoon. And, since she's a lover of all wildlife, she still keeps birdseed and a small dish of water on her outdoor balcony for the birds.

"I always loved animals, and they like me," she said.

She recalls the day in Santa Barbara when she spotted a bird whose lower jaw was missing. Soon, she said, other birds landed nearby and helped feed their disabled cohort some of Meade's birdseed.

"The Lord looks after everything," she said.