

DR. DUSTIN STINSON, VETERINARIAN

One time when the children were small, and we were on our way to Florida, we spent the night with our old friends, the Stinson family, in Clarksburg, Ohio. Clarksburg is a tiny hamlet, and Dusty Stinson was the local veterinarian. When he was in vet school, and I in graduate school, our families lived in neighboring apartments in the GI Village at the Ohio State University.

While he worked that evening Dusty told me a story about an event that had just occurred there. It was almost too funny to be true. The mayor's cat had been shot by an irate Clarksburg neighbor. The mayor's cat was definitely shot, but not seriously injured. Dusty stitched it and treated it. But emotions had run high, and there were a few unusual complications.

As we drove along the next day I started humming a little tune under my breath and began to make Dusty's story into a song. Lorrie wrote down the words as I thought them up, and it was all done by the time we got to Florida.

A year or so later I sang the song for Dusty and his family at their home. Dusty appreciated it so much that after we had returned to Michigan he phoned me one night to ask if I would send a tape of the song so that he could play it at an upcoming party in Clarksburg. I didn't get to it right away, and he phoned me again to insist. So I got out my old guitar, sang the song, and sent the tape to Dusty.

The next time we went to Clarksburg we discovered that I had become some kind of celebrity. Every child in Clarksburg had learned the song. The tape was so easy to follow, and adults and children alike had given me a name before they could pronounce "Alex." The small children of the Stinson family had some difficulty pronouncing "Alexander." Dusty had started introducing me around Clarksburg as The Clarksburg Cat. Everyone seemed to know what he meant. But the Stinson children took up the name "Acky" because it was the only word that the small kids eventually began to call it "Acky." And the name "Acky" stuck, and it is still accepted.

The stories to my friends and students made Dusty famous too, in a different set of circles. Several years after I wrote The Clarksburg Cat, I was driving with a carful of graduate students and my daughters, Nancy and Susan, to study 17-year cicadas. As we crossed through Dusty's part of southern Ohio on a small country blacktop road, I began to tell the students some stories about Dusty, my unusual macho veterinarian friend who worked in this general area. As the stories wore on, Nancy, sitting next to me, abruptly nudged me and in a soft voice asked if a white Chevrolet van parked off the road near a creek might be Dusty's. Astonished, I slowed and saw that, sure enough, Dusty, and his son, Drake, were there with an old farmer in bib overalls standing well away from where Dusty was descending a skunk on an old flat rack wagon that had been pulled into a pasture near the creek for just that purpose. Without saying anything I turned the car into the pasture, drove up near the van and parked. Nancy and I got out,

and the students, somewhat perplexed, unloaded behind us. As Dusty looked up, I yelled, "*What in hell are you doing?*" He yelled right back at me as if he'd been expecting us all along, and without taking a breath he started giving us a narrated course in skunk de-scenting. Dusty's oldest son, Drake, was videotaping the surgery, and while Dusty worked he informed all of us that he also had a film of himself castrating a horse and if we had time we could stop at his house and view it. He turned toward the old farmer standing nearby, apparently the owner of the skunk, and told the farmer loudly that I was the fellow who wrote *The Clarksburg Cat*.

Shortly afterward the old farmer sidled up close to me, with obvious respect, and, to my pleasure, said *The Clarksburg Cat* was the best song he had ever heard. He dipped his head admiringly, and looked sideways at me. He turned toward me and said positively, "It's better than any song I've ever heard on the radio!"

By this time my students were truly astonished. When we got back in the car to drive on, everything was quiet for a while, then one student acknowledged that he had been sure I was exaggerating my stories about Dusty. Now, he said, he knew that I was not exaggerating! The rest exclaimed in agreement. Everybody laughed for a long time as we went on our way.

Note: The only thing that is not precisely accurate in the verse is that Dusty charged the mayor \$44 rather than \$40. But he told me he was going to charge \$40, so he made that change after the song was completed.

The Song and Story of *The Clarksburg Cat*

By a tricky twist of fate as I was travelin' down the road
It fell my lot to hear of a peculiar episode
So wrassle down your girdles, girls, and hang on to your hats
And I'll tell you all the story of *The Clarksburg Cat*.

The Clarksburg Cat was scarcely anything to catch your eye
Till the Mayor's nearest neighbor up and shot him on the fly
It was rumored this old tom cat liked his pullets young and fat
And forgot to heed the warning when he heard 'em holler, "*Scat!*"

The Clarksburg vet was readying to treat somebody's sow
Or perhaps he'd just returned from cleaning Alice Martin's cow
At any rate he'd surely donned his Frank Buck Hat
When the Mayor's daughter entered with *The Clarksburg Cat*.

That youthful DVM became a hero then and there
For he patched that wayward feline with the most exacting care
Still old Tom's woes hadn't ended with the bullet's painful zip
For he lost a bit of scrotum when the scalpel slipped.

Now the Mayor's comely daughter still was shedding bitter tears
And our trusty DVM could see his duty plain and clear
I would guess he sent her homeward with a reassuring pat
And instructions for the nursing of *The Clarksburg Cat*.

In court the mayor fined his neighbor fifty-seven fifty
For discharging firearms within the limits of the city
Little did he know the vet's bill would be forty dollars flat
Just for patching up the innards of *The Clarksburg Cat*.

The mayor and his tom cat to this day are still alive
I am told the Mayor's kittens rarely number under five
And although the town is over-run with pussies thin and fat
There's none can hold a candle to *The Clarksburg Cat*.



Dr. and Mrs. Dustin Stinson DVM