

**CREATAHOLIC**

# A WARTIME DIARY



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A wartime diary...

By Donna Boucher

*Disclaimer: I am not a veterinarian, pet store owner, or exterminator. I am a mere civilian caught up in guerrilla warfare. The enemy hides, waits, and pounces. You can't see them coming, or feel them until they have left!*

Evolutionarily superior, their tiny coats of armour protect them from many pesticides, not to mention being squished.... The oldest known pest to man invades our best friends so that they may enjoy a full course meal. When they have grown in numbers they begin to explore, looking for new restaurants, only to find unsuspecting ankles and legs of a new breed.... humans!

We spray, powder, medicate, and still, these tiny little vampires continue to dine...

When we see a flea on our four-legged best friend we cringe and reach for the menagerie of products available on the pet store shelves. Little do we know that only 5% of the total population of fleas are comprised of adults. Where are the other 95% you ask? In your carpets, furniture, bedding, and any other cozy little crevice that will serve as a nursery for their young.

How do I know all of this? Been there... done that... have engaged the little soldiers in a battle of will, guerrilla and chemical warfare, and had wounds to prove it!

Let's start from the beginning... On an innocent trip to the basement I discovered a frenzy of black dots on my nice clean white socks. Horrified, I immediately brushed them off and ran back upstairs to what I thought was safety, only to discover... they were there too.

In the midst of my fear... I began to wonder, "How could my house have a flea infestation? I am a clean person...with a clean house... and clean animals... oh the humiliation. What will people think? Do I put a warning notice on the front door?"

Off to the pet store I flew to purchase flea collars and a \$30.00 spray. As it turned out, after reading many websites I discovered that the flea collars are 80% ineffective, but the spray... ahhh the spray! Little did I know that this bottle would contain a precious chemical called a growth inhibitor.

Next, being the chemically aware, green, and environmentally conscious human of the new millennium I consulted with friends to find out if there was a natural way to destroy them.

- Borax, that wonderful box of white powder that sells for \$4.95 at your local grocers, that according to friends dries up the larva... Don't do it! I later found

out that it can cause skin irritations in pets and humans and that it's not "completely" vacuum friendly.

- Lavender, the sweet smell that most of us love and grow faithfully in our gardens does help to repel (the little buggers hate this stuff), but little to KILL! Unfortunately, the same goes for tea tree oil and citronella. Beware of Pennyroyal, as it is toxic.
- Table Salt. This was the latest discovery while surfing the net through 1000's of retail and wholesale sites promising to rid you of fleas, all preaching a 100% guaranteed or your money-back! As a last resort, I feverishly sprinkled table salt around the baseboards. Who knows, but at least I felt as though I was doing something I believed "might" be productive.
- A nightlight, a pan of water and Dawn Liquid Soap was another suggestion, it worked... for the five very clean fleas that I found floating dead...

The best natural defence??? Vacuuming! It gets the adults and the larva all in one shot, but make sure it's a powerful vacuum... and don't steam clean! According to several websites, they love the humidity. It would be like sending them south for a holiday... they'd all be sitting in the rug with sun glasses and drinks with little umbrellas in them... I vacuumed twice, sometimes three times per day. The vacuum didn't even get put back near the end of the battle. Every time I felt creepy or saw one... I whipped out the vacuum and waged my revenge!

Natural methods didn't seem to satisfy the need for total destruction, so off to the hardware store. I asked the clerk for suggestions and received a blank stare in return. So in my newfound "expertise" of flea control methods I purchased a can of plain old crawling insect killer. I eagerly arrived home armed with my can in its holster. Pets and children out of the area, food off the counters.... Ready, Armed, Fire! I diligently sprayed the entire house; beds, couches, carpet... (spray! spray! spray!) while mildly suffocating from the toxic fumes I felt as if I had just taken my first "hill". I eagerly planted my victory flag... as one jumped on my leg to begin dinner.

Another piece of masochistic advice... tuck your socks over your pants and where white socks.... they attract the fleas, which is bad, but at least you can see the little buggers!

Mental note to self... Use "bug off" spray on clothes when in the house.

So ya' wanna play? Well, back to the hardware store to purchase the "bomb". A fumigating bomb that you set in a pan of water and have approximately one minute to run away (RUN!!). For three hours the air fogged and I could almost here them squealing! Key word.... Three hours. Afterwards, I am left with a house that smells like a veterinary office and with the faint taste of toxic waste in my mouth. This was actually quite effective to start with, and through my weeks of battle experience I believed I had found the perfect combination. I set off another bomb on the upper level and vacated the premises for the weekend figuring I would come home to a morbid, but victorious graveyard... or a six foot mutated flea on the couch watching TV.

Number One - learn the life cycle... it's easier to kill them when you know the different stages at which to kill them. On an "icky" note... after you have been bitten the flea drops to the floor and lays approximately 400 eggs... not a happy thought. And last but not least... fleas can lay dormant for up to 2 years... it's the vibrations from your walking that "wake" them up. If you go away for the weekend and take the pets with you... watch out! They'll be extra hungry when you arrive home. After I helped dear old Finnigan pass on (my 11 year old rescued canine), the fleas went berserk! I had taken away their biggest and most docile restaurant and as soon as I returned from a weekend of R&R; the vibrations of my footsteps awoke the sleeping enemy. Back to the hardware store for more spray... and the drugstore for more bug bite cream.

Four fumigator bombs and a brand new can of insect inhibitor spray. It has now been 2½ weeks and the cycle is almost broken. The Insect Inhibitor spray kills the "spawn", and the fumigator bombs kill the adults! The perfect match!

How much money have I spent on this full-blown military attack? I don't even want to know. The result of this military deployment? Well, hopefully in two more weeks I will have completed my genocide, my wounds will have healed, and I will have discovered a use for this third arm growing out of my body...

The moral of this story? You have 4 choices...

- 1) Call the Real Estate Agent and hope nothing jumps on the perspective buyers as you surrender your home to the jumping vampires.
- 2) Visit the local military supply store for napalm.
- 3) Be prepared for a vicious and costly game of chemical warfare.
- 4) Call the Exterminator and be done with it.

May I suggest, that should you choose item number three, you also visit the military supply store to purchase a supply of gas masks?

Prevention?

Listen to your vet when they try to sell you the \$60.00 package of internal flea control for your furry friend or suffer the consequences!

On a mental health note...

You may want to enrol in therapy now... because the "flea dance" you do itching your ankles when you think something is there, or creepy crawly skin when you go to bed at night really does take a long time to leave... I still see a little black dot on the carpet sometimes and my blood pressure skyrockets as I pounce on it with my fingernails... it has now been 4 months of flea free living conditions.