

If You Give a Mouse a Cheez-It

By Carol Band

Mommmmmm!!

I raced downstairs and found my daughter, Perry, standing on the kitchen table. "MOUSE!" she gasped, pointing to a corner.

Sure, my housekeeping standards are what some call "relaxed," and it's true that our obese cat rarely ventures from the couch, but I blame the recent rodent invasion on my kids.

"Take the dirty dishes out of your room," I yell as they toss popcorn toward their heads while they do homework in the dining room. "Throw the pizza boxes into the trash!" I plead when they have friends over to play video games. "Those leftover crusts will attract rats," I predict. "We'll have vermin." And now we do. OK, we don't have rats, but we have mice or, at least, a mouse.

"We'll get a mousetrap," I assured my daughter. "We'll catch it."

"Trap?" Perry cried from her tabletop perch. "How can you be so cruel? It's a living creature. You can't just murder it."

Lewis wandered into the kitchen, his arm deep into a box of Cheez-Its. "Who's Mom gonna murder?"

"You, if you don't stop dropping food all over the house," I said. "We have a mouse."

"Cool! Can I have it for a pet?"

My husband and son headed out, in search of weapons of mouse destruction, and returned with a Havahart trap. The theory behind the Havahart is that you catch the mouse unharmed, then set it free at your neighbor's house, where it becomes their problem.

That night, I baited the Havahart with peanut butter and placed it behind the stove, ironically out of the cat's reach. In the morning, we had a mouse.

"Let's call him Nibbles," Lewis said as I dumped our tiny captive into an empty aquarium. Frankly, I could think of more accurate verbs to describe the creature now cowering in the corner of the fish tank. The cat, intrigued by the concept of a pre-caught mouse, got off the couch and pawed at the glass.

I'd like to say that Nibbles looked like a Disney character with big brown eyes and a little pink nose. But he didn't. He was black and kind of greasy looking - like he had been hanging out with a tough crowd behind the stove. He was fat, too, with a belly that testified to the bounty of Cheez-It crumbs in our house.



"Can I keep him in my room?" Lewis asked.

"No," I said envisioning bubonic plague, hantavirus and rabies. "Let's put him in the basement."

Lewis ripped up a newspaper and stuffed it into the aquarium along with the cardboard tube from a brand new roll of paper towels. Then he added some Cheez-Its and an apple core. It was plush accommodations for a mouse who, had he been trapped by a more clear-thinking family, would be dead. But, tomorrow morning, while my kids were still asleep, I would simply walk down the street to my neighbor's house (the ones with the obnoxious leaf blower) and let Nibbles go. Problem solved.

"I just want to stay here and watch him for a while." Lewis leaned on the washer and stared dreamily at the mouse that was burrowing into the newspaper.

Now, it's unusual for anything, other than Halo 3, to hold Lewis' attention for more than 15 minutes. So I was surprised when I went downstairs an hour later and saw him still concentrating on the mouse.

"Mom, there's something wrong with Nibbles," Lew said. "I think he's gnawed off his leg. There's a bloody stump."

This is why I hate pets. I gingerly lifted the shredded newspaper to get a better look. "It's not a bloody stump," I reported to Lewis. Turns out Nibbles' belly wasn't from a diet of junk food crumbs. In fact, he wasn't overweight at all. He was pregnant. "It's a baby mouse. Nibbles is a mom."

"Sa...wheet!" Lew breathed. "Wait. Don't mice eat their young?"

"They do if they're smart," I told him.

In just a few hours, Nibbles had produced a pile of writhing, slug-shaped newborns. "Let's give Nibbles time to be alone with her babies," I said and, while Lew went online to research the care of infant *mus musculus*, I put more peanut butter in the Havahart trap.

Carol plans to release her brood (both the kids and the mice) on the neighborhood as soon as they are weaned. Write to her at band_carol@hotmail.com. To read more of Carol's A Household Word columns, visit the [Household Word Archives](#).