



TV and radio personality
Suzy Cato is SPCA Auckland
 children's animal ambassador.
 On these pages, she shares
 her love of all animals,
 great and small, with the
 younger generation ...



A fish called Meatball

A NEW MEMBER has been added to our family, much to the amusement of MooMoo, our tortoiseshell cat. I'd just finished producing the third series of the TV programme *Bryan & Bobby* and the pretty little comet goldfish who starred in an episode came home to our place when filming ended.

MooMoo finds having "dinner in a jar" great entertainment. My kids love having a new pet and found it all very funny, especially the goldfish's original name – Meatball – which he'd been called by Bobby.*

Once we knew Meatball was going to be living at our house a few changes needed to be made. His name for one. Goldy proved to be the favourite option. We also needed to change his bowl. He'd had a smallish round bowl for his home on telly but it really wasn't suitable for a growing fish. And another change took place in my daughter's bedroom – the dressing table had to be tidied!

We decided to do our homework, too, to make sure Goldy's life with us was going to be as comfy as possible. We borrowed a book from the library, we surfed websites, we visited pet stores to look at tanks, plants, filtering systems and food options.

Goldfish can live up to 20 years so we wanted to get it right for him from the start.

We were all set by the time the programme production finished. We had a tank big enough to hold Goldy and a friend. We cleaned it thoroughly, created a pebbled bottom, filled it with water, put the correct amount of water conditioner in and set the plants and toy castle in place. Then we gave it a week to settle with the filter running.

We even did as the information suggested and added a wee bit of food to the tank to help create the right level of good bacteria for when Goldy was introduced to his home.

Goldy arrived home one Sunday morning in a plastic bag of water. After a night in the bag inside the tank to get him used to the temperature and new surroundings the bag was tipped so he could swim out.

Talk about swim. After a few moments to get his bearings and to gulp in the water and taste the changes, he whipped along the side

Some fishy facts

- A fish tank needs to be cleaned once a week. You don't need to change all the water, though. Remove around one-third of it and also scoop out any left-over fish food, leaves that may have fallen off the tank plants, and any other rubbish. Replace the water with tap water that has had drops of water conditioner added to it.
- You need to keep the tank out of direct sunlight because warm water helps slimy algae to grow. But don't keep your fish in a dark place because their colour will fade.
- It's important not to overfeed your fish – they won't necessarily get fat but food that doesn't get eaten drops to the bottom the tank and goes slimy.
- Apparently it's a good idea to give your fish a thawed pea every now and then. Just remove the skin and mush up the soft pea so your fish can fit wee bits in its mouth.



of the tank, through the weed and the bubbles formed by the filter. He spent a great deal of the first few days checking it all out.

A couple of weeks later we introduced a new fish to the tank. Pepper – named because of his cool colouring – was popped into the tank in his plastic bag for a day to acclimatise him to his new home, too.

We'd made sure that we'd chosen a fish as close in size to Goldy as we could and one that could swim just as fast. These two things are really important when you're choosing a goldfish because a smaller, slower fish can be picked on by a larger, faster one.

Yes, you can get bullies in the animal world and because scientists have yet to hear a fish say "Stop it, I don't like it, get away" and ask for help from someone they trust, we thought it best to ensure there was little chance of bullying in our tank.

There hasn't been any that we've seen but we did laugh as the two fish got to know each other. Although Goldy had come from the same pet shop and from a tank just as busy as Pepper's, he'd been in a bowl by himself for about two months by the time Pepper came to join him so he seemed to find having

a new friend a bit strange.

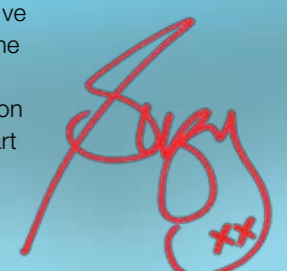
Pepper found it a bit strange, too. Having been taken out of a huge tank with at least 50 other fish he wanted to swim close to his new friend – but Goldy wasn't having any of that and would shoot away.

It took them only a day to get used to each other, though, and soon they were swimming around the tank together, stopping in the bubbles from the filter to be tickled and then darting off to the other end of the tank.

This tank will probably last them for about another year or two but as they grow we'll need to get a bigger tank and maybe we'll move the tank out of my daughter's room.

We know what we'll do next because we've done lots of research and the folk down at the pet shop have been very helpful.

It's just that they have a wonderful selection of other pets, too ... hmmm, we'd better start some more research, I think!



To talk a lot and not say much is like climbing a tree to catch a fish.

– ADAPTATION OF A CHINESE PROVERB

[* Meet Meatball on *Bryan & Bobby*, 7.15am Saturdays on FOUR. In one episode he's supposed to die, but no animals were harmed in the making of this programme – we found a fish at a pet shop that had died of natural causes.]