

## SUGAR CROSS-COUNTY TRAVELER

Like any cat, Sugar, a part-Persian house pet, lived in her own secret world. She followed her night trails into the countryside. She met up with friends and enemies unknown to her owners. And she withdrew to sunning spots to tuck her paws under her chest and snooze. But unlike any other cat, Sugar was endowed with an uncanny sense of geography, and she would go down in scientific records as the cat who was "guided by a still unrecognized means of knowing. " When she was apparently several years old, Sugar walked into a farmhouse in California. She had long; creamy hair and copper eyes, and soon the owners of the farmhouse were giving her bowls of cream and bits of fish. They also gave her a lot of affection. One day, when Mrs. Woods picked the cat up to stroke her beautiful fur and say nice things to her, her fingers found a deformity in Sugar's left hip. It did not seem to interfere with the cat's stride or agility, but it was there.

Sugar became a permanent resident of the Woodses' home. She took up the cat role of mouser and patrolled the property. Gradually she bonded not with the house, as do most cats, but with Mr. and Mrs. Woods. The relationship between them deepened over the years. The only problem Sugar presented her owners was that she would not ride in cars. They could not take her on vacations; they could not take her on visits to family and friends. Sugar seemed to be saying to the Woodses that her deformed hip was due to an automobile accident, but they could not know for sure. Sugar brought them mice and crickets, told them with a "meow" that she was

hungry, or with a "meow" that she wanted the door opened, but where she came from and what had happened to her remained her secret. Then came the crisis. The Woodses had the opportunity to move to a farm in Oklahoma, and they did not turn it down. Feeling that it would be cruel to force Sugar to ride fifteen hundred miles in a car, they did what they thought best. They gave Sugar to a neighbor who was eager to have her. Although they would miss her, they knew she had a good home, and they drove away satisfied that Sugar would be happy.

Two weeks after the Woodses left California, Sugar disappeared. Fourteen months later, Mrs. Woods was in her barn working when a part-Persian cat leaped through the window and landed softly on her shoulder. Mrs. Woods took her in her arms. She saw the cream-colored fur and the copper eyes. Then she ran her fingers over the hip. "Sugar," she said. "It's you!" Mrs. Woods called her friend in California. "Yes," she said, "Sugar did run away."

No one had given her a ride; no one had reported seeing her. Sugar had crossed fifteen hundred miles of deserts and mountains. She had passed through or around towns. She had eaten well, avoided cars, and had somehow found the Woodses on their new farm in Oklahoma. Sugar's story would be hard to believe if Mr. and Mrs. Woods hadn't known that they had left Sugar in California and that she had arrived a year and two months later on their Oklahoma farm. Even now; scientists at Duke University wonder what signals from the earth Sugar listened to in her long journey across the southwestern United States. Sugar kept these secrets to herself, too.

