

Dr Alan Whitcomb describes losing his tortoiseshell cat during the flood on Canvey Island, seeing the same cat on a PDSA advert on television after the flood, and reclaiming him from a shelter in Hornchurch.

‘When it came to the time when I had to leave home, and carry my brother... we had a cat, like a tortoiseshell cat, and I tried to catch him, and I couldn’t catch him. The lad next door tried to catch him and the cat bit him... and went and climbed up on top of the shed roof. I mean you think by now we’re quite deep in water... so there’s the cat on top of the roof. And I was really distressed about this cat. And obviously everyone said you can’t do anything about it, you’ve got to leave it.

Anyway, going to the end of the story, after the floods, and once we got back to school...we had a little tiddy television, you know the old black and white television – you had to draw the curtains to watch it. And I’m watching children’s television one day after the floods and the PDSA are on the news, and they said we’ve got all these animals we rescued from the floods, and we need people to claim them. So I look on this telly and there’s my cat!

So I said to my mum, I’ve seen my cat on television. ‘Don’t be silly, how can you recognise your cat? You know, tortoiseshell cats all look the same!’. And it was up at Hornchurch which was a long way for us, then, to go. And I was quite upset about this. Mum said ‘No, it can’t be your cat, and you can’t see it on that television.’

Anyway, I had a really old man who lived at the house at the bottom of our garden, and he said, ‘I tell you what I’ll do Alan, I’ll take you up to Hornchurch’. So he took me all the way up to Hornchurch and we went in the PDSA and he said, ‘this lad reckons he saw his cat on television’. And we went along and I said ‘that’s my cat!’. And my cat recognised me and he came running over straight away!’

The interview with Alan Whitcomb was recorded in 2004 [SA481]