

Axolotls in the Second Grade Chapter Two*

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In February, 1997, two of our adult black axolotls mated and produced 164 live embryos. Of those, 120 were adopted by children from Spencer Elementary. Of those babies, we estimate there are some 70-75 still alive. The deaths of the others have been duly recorded along with the stories of their demises, most of which have been attributed to cats or jumping out of the tanks. Very few have been reported as dying of a disease or noticeable physical condition. Many have spent some time in somebody's refrigerator, but then recuperated. Large numbers of kids reported that their axolotl did not eat much at all over the summer this year. Many owners floated bags of ice in their tanks during the summer, which the animals seemed to like to hide under.

At present, we have five adult animals at Spencer Elementary including the parents of the 164 babies. At least seven faculty members have some of the babies, who have grown amazingly well. Fred Walden has one black

that is at least 12 to 14 inches long. It grins all the time. The kids say it is because it knows it is the biggest one. We have been hand-feeding one baby who was returned to us this August that we felt sure we would lose. It had been put in a fish tank since its adoption, and, when we got it back, it had little or no gills, malformed front legs, and a big chunk taken out of its tail. Most likely the goldfish in the tank were responsible for this atrocity (let alone the humans). It measured less than three inches at 19 months of age. The children and I and even the custodian set up an every-three-hours feeding schedule over 18 hours a day, and it has slowly begun to recuperate. The tail has not regenerated, but the front legs and gills look much better. The torso is more rounded, and it eats 12 to 15 small pellets a day. Its name is Peewee, but I do think it is gaining ground. The children and the custodian consider this a huge life-saving venture!

Since we have two adult pairs in my classroom at this time, Mr. Walden and I plan to mate both pairs around Christmas, but we will probably keep only enough eggs for all the kids in our two classes.

We have shared axolotls with at least five other schools, who keep in touch regularly. It continues to be an exciting adv

* The first "chapter" appeared in Axolotl Newsletter number 24, pages 4-5. A related article by Fred Walden followed on page 6.