



Handle with Care

A little girl and her new pets get acquainted—and sick.

On Mother's Day in 2003, three-year-old Schyan Kautzer and her parents went to a pet swap near their home in central Wisconsin. A pet swap is a place to buy and sell pets.

The Kautzer family lived on a farm. They owned lots of animals. But they always had room for more.

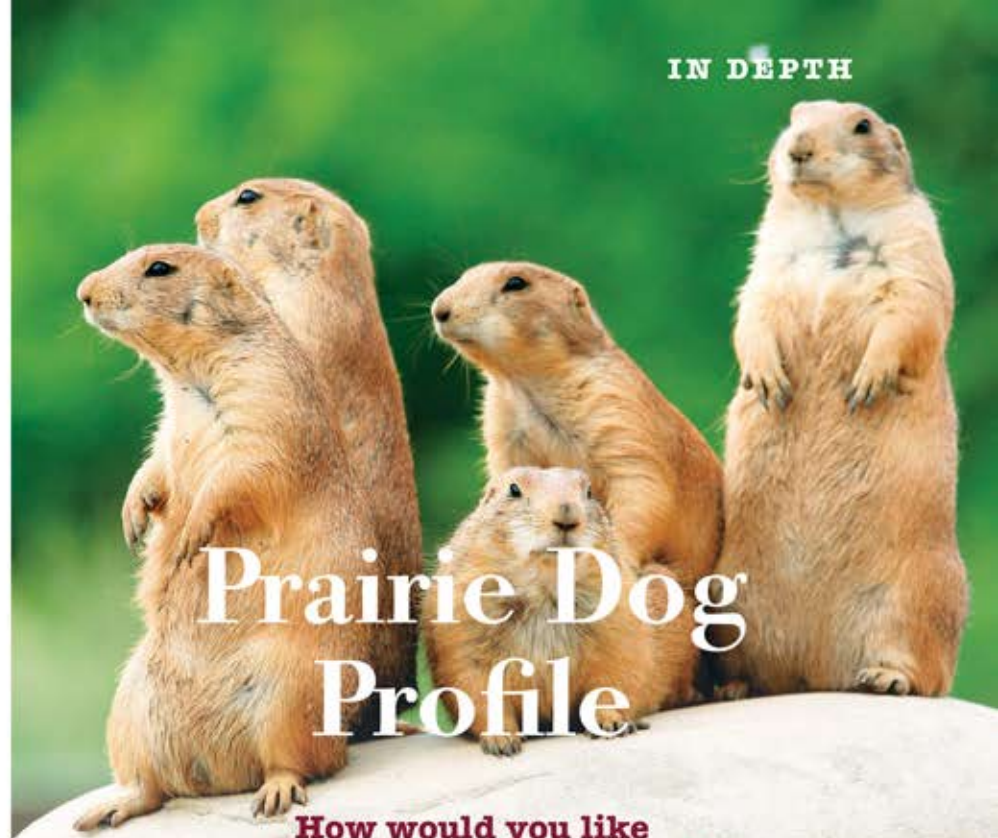
There was a wide variety of animals for sale at the pet swap. Some were familiar pets, like gerbils. Others—like camels and prairie dogs—are not usually kept as pets. But the Kautzer family had made a

decision. If a particular animal caught their attention, they were ready to buy.

New Pets

Schyan's mother, Tammy Kautzer, had owned pet prairie dogs when she was younger. Someone at the pet swap was selling them for \$95 each. The Kautzers thought the sandy-colored critters were adorable, so they bought two. Then Schyan and her parents put the prairie dogs into boxes and took them home.

THE KAUTZER FAMILY
holds one of their prairie
dogs.



Prairie Dog Profile

**How would you like
a barking squirrel as a pet?**

What animal lives in a town, digs tunnels—called burrows—and barks like a dog? If you said a prairie dog, you're right! But prairie dogs aren't dogs. They're rodents. They belong to the squirrel family. Prairie dogs are burrowing squirrels, to be exact.

Prairie dogs are playful, intelligent, and very vocal. They make loud whistles and doglike barks (that's how they got their name). They also use calls to warn other prairie dogs of danger.

Prairie dogs live in colonies. Groups of prairie dog families are called *coteries*. Coteries live together in larger groups called *towns*.

Schyan loved playing with her new pets. But soon one of the prairie dogs started looking sick. It moped around. Its eyes were crusty. It seemed cranky, just like a sick person.

Schyan picked up the pup to put it back in its cage. It gave her finger a nasty bite. Her mother and her father, Steve Kautzer, washed the bite and kissed it.

Over the next few days, the bite mark on Schyan's finger appeared to be healing. But then the bite turned into a dark red bump. A rash of unusual-looking bumps popped up around it. And Schyan came down with a high fever.

Then the sick prairie dog died.

Schyan's parents worried that their little girl might be seriously ill. They rushed her to a nearby hospital.

SCHYAN KAUTZER
shows where she was bitten
by her pet prairie dog.

