This interview explores the story of a lion cub purchased at Harrods department store in London in 1969 by friends Ace Bourke and John Rendall. The cub’s parents, inmates of Ilfracombe Zoo in Devon, had their first litter of four cubs taken from them – two were sold to a circus and two to Harrods ‘Zoo’, in reality an exotic animal section of the shop. Ace and John, after graduating from university and working to save money to travel, had not long arrived in London from Australia, and on a sightseeing trip around the city, they went to Harrods where they, very unexpectedly, saw two lion cubs in a small cage. The young men sat with them for hours. They found the male cub ‘irresistible’ and decided to buy him. They called the cub Christian and for the next eight months of his life he lived with them in London.

They worked in a shop on the King’s Road, Chelsea, coincidentally named Sophistocat, and while Christian lived in the basement, they lived in an apartment upstairs. A local minister let Christian exercise daily in the large fenced churchyard near World’s End. But as Christian grew quickly, the men could not guarantee they could always control him, and although initially he had the run of the shop, he had to spend more and more time in the basement. They sought a long-term solution that would give Christian the best life possible. Through extraordinary circumstances they eventually took him to Kenya where George Adamson of *Born Free* fame gave him the opportunity to take his chance to lead a natural life. Two documentaries were made about Christian’s life and return to Africa, and the pride of lions George assembled around him at Kora in Kenya. Ace and John visited a year later, and nearly forty years after that, in 2006, a clip of their reunion
with Christian in Africa was first posted on YouTube and subsequently went viral. Captured on film the real-life moment when Christian recognises Ace and John and runs down the hillside and into their arms triggered an emotional reaction around the world. Christian’s life, like the lives of countless animals who find themselves caught in the exotic animal trade, could have taken a completely different path.

**Melissa:** Department stores, like museums, were a nineteenth-century phenomenon, their rise linked both to modernity and to imperial collecting and consumption. It seems that the presence of imported ‘exotic’ animals for sale in Harrods in the late 1960s was a lingering trace of that era – the idea that anything and everything from the four corners of the world could be displayed and bought, and that ideas of taste, style and class could be acquired by shopping there.

**Ace:** Yes, Harrods ‘Zoo’ as it was then called, was a part of that lingering element from the past, but in the late 1960s it was one of the best known stores in the world, and they did boast that they could provide anything. It sure beat David Jones [a department store in Sydney]. Our fateful first visit was more as tourists rather than shoppers. We were aware of the Zoo, and a friend had told us about someone who had inquired about purchasing a camel and was asked ‘Would that be with one hump or two, Sir?’

In the 2009 TV Special *A Lion Called Christian*, vintage footage from the zoo I had never seen was included with rare animals and birds. It was less exotic when we visited in 1969 with dogs, cats and fish etc., and the two lion cubs were there primarily as an attraction in the lead-up to Christmas. It was a shock to think you could actually buy a lion, and that a price could be put on it. It was something we had never thought about, and we later came to realise and acknowledge that we had encouraged and participated in the trafficking in exotic animals by purchasing Christian. The *Endangered Species Act 1973* offered better protection from this trade.

In 2009 while promoting our revised and updated 1971 book *A Lion Called Christian* (See Figure 3.1), we were interviewed in Harrods in what was now more of a pet boutique. There were very few animals, but many totally unnecessary bejewelled accessories for them, miniature four-poster beds, snacks and beauty treatments – I was just horrified. We had just seen similar pet boutiques in Los Angeles. I suppose it means people love their animals – but couldn’t that wasted money actually help animals in need?