

PET PRIDE

In a community that prides itself on being inclusive, nonhuman companions are often included in the rainbow equation

BY ORIANA GREEN AND WILL O'BRYAN

Do you have birthday parties for your calico cat? Do you know every outdoor restaurant in town where you can dine with your dachshund? Does your cockatiel have a Web site? Does your poodle have a wardrobe to rival Darcelle's?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then you may prove the theory that we queers often compensate for being childless by grooming extra strong bonds with our pets.

Denise Warner, who identifies as bisexual, is the owner and operator of Cleopatra's Catsitters. She's constantly observing people and their critters. Of her queer clients, she notes: "There's more of a tendency to treat their pets as more a part of the family.... The community seems to use specialty pet services more than the general community."

Dean Sidwell, a gay Portland-based counselor, has two cats (Jack and Lucy) and a lot of queer clients. He has often noted the significant place animals can have in our lives, and points specifically to the role a pet can play in the life of someone who is ill.

"My experience is largely working around people with AIDS/HIV," says Sidwell. "They tend to feel more protective of their pets. One man said the most important aspect of his life was his cat."

Sidwell adds that he's helped patients who are forced to part with their pets when they move to apartments or health facilities. Perhaps the worst part of such a situation, he says, is when the separation is minimized by others.

Speaking as a health professional, Sidwell says that pets can add greatly to a person's well-being. With a companion animal, Sidwell observes, "certainly one's stress levels are lower. There's a sense of connection, of feeling safer in the world, more grounded, less lonely."

Then there's the stereotype that gay men keep cats while dykes have their dogs. And though there are surely plenty of examples to reinforce that theory, we found plenty of exceptions to the rule.

Just Out went in search of members of our community who share their lives with exotic pets—llamas, lizards, lorikeets and the like—instead, what we mostly found were cats and dogs, dogs and cats. We really love our four-footed furry friends.

Perhaps, living in a society that can be especially hostile to us, we need an extra dose of good old unconditional love. When's the last time any human greeted you with the doggie dance of joy? And there are other good points about cats and dogs: The worst social disease you can get from them is fleas, their parents never visit, and they'll forgive you for playing with other dogs.

Lovers come and lovers leave us, but Binky, Winky and Spot are here to stay—at least as long as veterinary medicine can extend their lives. So curl up with your significant other species and enjoy some queer tales.

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Marco waits in vain for a Scooby snack

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