

KITTY COUTURE

Eugene cat vamps it up in costume

BY JESLYN LEMKE



PHOTO BY DRESS UP CAT / CARLA HERVERT

“Here kitty, kitty. Come put on this rosary and sit next to this golden chalice like you’re taking communion.”

So it goes for BooBoo, a 17-pound Eugene tabby whose dress-up antics have earned him five million views on the website Pretty 52 and his own greeting card Etsy shop (79 sales and counting!).

Feline fashionista Carla Hervert of Eugene dresses her pal of 11 years into all manner of cat-sized costumes. Her Dress Up Cat business sells greeting cards of BooBoo in several stores in Lane County (Florence, Junction City and the gift shop at Sacred Heart Medical Center at RiverBend).

BooBoo is one of those roly-poly dog-like cats who doesn’t jump at loud noises (I checked) and never misses a meal. He is a bona-fide sweetheart. He adores the photo shoots because it means chin rubs and kitty treats.

“He loves sunglasses. Sometimes I put sunglasses on him in the backyard,” Hervert says. “He walks me to the mail every day.”

A year ago, UK media company Caters News Agency contacted Hervert to ask for the rights to her video about Dress Up Cat.

The video, titled “Sassy Cat Will Dress Up for Chin Rubs,” went viral last January, and not because it sounds like a 2001 porn video.

In the video, which now has more than five million views on Pretty 52, she dresses up BooBoo in a slide-by-slide parade of costumes. There is Iraq soldier kitty, beach kitty, the grizzled inmate kitty and rich ski-resort kitty. There is one shoot where he is supposed to be a “secretary” with a miniature typewriter, but the vampy red dress may also cast him as “sexy librarian” kitty.

Hervert also sold the rights to BooBoo’s news story to another UK company, HotSpot Media. She was very surprised when a friend sent her a May 2015 edition of *National Enquirer*, which devoted a full-page spread to BooBoo and Hervert, along with several photos taken by Hervert. The headline reads, “The Ultimate Poseur Puss!”

“They don’t tell me who buys the stories. I have to Google search to find stories,” says Hervert, who receives a small stipend from both media companies every few months.

Here in Eugene, Hervert enjoys taking her greeting cards (retail \$4.50) to various craft shows. She and her husband are avid photographers of Oregon’s scenic views, so her spread of greeting cards includes BooBoo, other cats and animals, as well as Oregon scenery.

Hervert sees Dress Up Cat as her hobby, as she works full time as a nurse at Sacred Heart Medical Center. On a weekly basis, she is always looking for props for the photo shoots. She had a Catholic friend who liked the idea of BooBoo as a priest.

“She’s really Catholic. She wanted him to be a priest. I went to St. Vinnie’s and found a little gold chalice for the priest shoot,” Hervert says. “I used Necco wafers for the communion plate.”

Cards are available online at etsy.com/shop/DressUpCat.

WHO GETS THE PET?

Plan ahead to keep pets out of custody disputes

BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN

Pets are kind of like practice kids for some of us or, for people like me, they are straight up in lieu of bearing children — just please don’t call them fur-babies; that’s gross.

But just like real children, pets sometimes get caught in the fray of a breakup. When my ex-fiancé and I split, I kept Smudge, the dachshund mix I owned before we got together, and he kept Lily, the pit-Dalmatian puppy we got as a couple. I was possibly more heartbroken over losing the dog than I was over canceling the wedding.

Not all pets stay with their people when relationships end. Lauren Merge, Greenhill Humane Society’s communications manager, says the nonprofit gets dogs and cats that are dropped off as a result of couples splitting up or getting a divorce. That’s heartbreaking for the couple as well as the pet that is suddenly in need of a new home.

Merge has some advice for couples. She says, “As unromantic as it sounds,” when couples are looking to get a pet, “have a plan.” She says she and her boyfriend plan to stay together, but when they adopted a cat, they decided if something were to happen, “he takes the cat.”

According to attorney Christine Garcia, writing for an American Bar Association newsletter, “Animal custody fights between significant others ending their relationship are usually highly emotional and charged with leftover personal issues.”

She questions her clients about whether the pet custody dispute could be “about personal healing or other unresolved issues and not about animal care?” And she suggests attorneys raise points with clients such as the animal’s age, quality of life and the stress of long-distance travel if the animal must be moved.

Also to be considered is separating animals from their ani-

mal-friends, she says. And indeed, after we separated Smudge and Lily, my little wiener dog never bonded with another dog again.

Garcia writes, “Animal custody battles can be pursued in regular civil trial court or through the use of a mediator.” If it comes to a legal dispute, the Animal Legal Defense Fund suggests, “Since animals are considered property in the eyes of the law, it may be helpful to offer proof that you were the one who adopted the animal, or if the animal was purchased, that you were the one who purchased the animal.”

ALDF says don’t worry if you were not the person who originally brought home Fido or Fluffy. Vet records, and receipts for grooming, dog training, food and other items go a long way toward proving you were the primary caregiver.

For those who want to keep it out of the courtroom, Garcia says, “Creative shared-custody or visiting plans may be possible if both parties are amenable.”

By the time my next long-term relationship broke up, I had learned from my regret over losing Lily. My next ex and I worked out a joint custody agreement over our dog Rhoda, with my ex even volunteering to pay dog support at one point.

Merge at Greenhill says that when the situation is such that neither partner can keep the pet, it’s good to have a backup plan, like a family member who can take the dog or cat rather than surrender it. “It’s an emotional enough time,” she says, and losing a pet makes it harder.

Greenhill will help owners look for boarding resources in the community, Merge says, and while the humane society’s preference is that animals can stay with their people, “We will keep them safe and find them a new home,” adding, “for some people it’s a relief knowing the pets are well cared for and they can focus on personal issues.”

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Greenhill Humane Society