



Pet Psyches

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FLYMF April 2007, The Play Ball Issue, Volume 4 Issue 4

If a person's pets tell outsiders about them, I shudder to think what that says about my family.

On the face of it, we have two dogs and two cats. But when you dig a bit deeper, what we really have are a set of four-footed, furry psychiatric patients.

Take our cats—and you have no idea how hard my husband begged me to add in the Henny Youngman 'please!' to that. One is, charitably, extremely thin and one is, realistically, the size of a blimp. Yet, we feed them the same and the larger one is not the one scarfing all the kibble.

I put it down to the thinner cat being a cat supermodel. She's a very pretty sealpoint, with long, non-matting fur and large, luminous blue eyes. She's a looker, and she knows it. She's also a bulimic. At least, that's what it seems like, since she likes to barf. A lot. It's her hobby.

I figure it's just because she's got to maintain that rail-thin look that's so popular among the reigning supermodels of our day. She goes by a mirror, looks at herself, thinks, "Have I gained an ounce?!?" and then sticks her paw down her throat. Then she cleans up, heads out to the runway, and dazzles the rest of the cat community, ending up at a cool feline after-party before she staggers home at 5:30 a.m. to demand her morning dose of canned food—loudly.

Whenever I try to speak to her about this problem, she just goes, "Talk to the paw. Heard it, dumped it, moved on. Have to primp now, I've got a shoot for Furcathe in ten."

She eats whatever she wants, including the dog's food, and never gains an ounce. It's difficult to argue with her results, and if you're into great-looking skeletons—as Madison Avenue, Hollywood, and the entire fashion industry seem to be—then she's your kind of cat. I've sort of given up on her seeing the light and, perhaps, choosing to keep down what she eats.

I'd love to say that the other cat is also a model, albeit a plus-sized one, but that would be stretching it a bit. She was a cute kitten, and you can still see the cute in there, but you sure have to look under a whole lot of combo-hairball-and-weight-control kibble.

She seems to eat less than the thin cat, but that's because I think she's a sneak-eater and is scarfing down hidden foodstuffs when no one else can see so that when she gains yet another pound and the vet asks me just what this cat eats, she can look up at me in all innocence and say, "But, you haven't seen me eat nearly enough food to account for this. I'm just big-boned."

She's the weight equivalent of two cats her size, and I just consider her a chronic over-eater. Many visitors to our home have mentioned that if we split the fat cat's weight with the thin cat, we'd have two cats of reasonably normal size, instead of the feline Laurel and Hardy we have currently.

Personally, I think she eats because it's her only solace since we brought home—the dogs.

Ah, the dogs. They are special cases unto themselves. While both our cats seem to have eating disorders, albeit different ones, our dogs share a different problem. They have Canine Attention Deficit Disorder. According to both of them, they don't get nearly enough attention on a daily basis, and it's up to me to remedy that, continuously.

The greyhound is also quite neurotic. He knows he's the low man on the totem pole—the fat cat routinely beats him up—and he feels that while he may not be able to change his place in the pecking order, if he whines about it enough I may come across with an extra treat or two to make up for his lowly lot in life.

He also lives to go for walks. You should see the act this dog puts on in order to impress upon us how much he loves his walkies. He screams, he howls, he leaps. He's broken several vases with his tail-wagging when the likelihood of a walk looms on the horizon. It's like he's just won the lottery, each and every time the leash comes out.

You'd think, with all of that, that he'd be eager to just walk all day, but that's not his thing. It's the going, not the duration, that matters to him. He'd rather do ten walks of two minutes than an hour-long trek. That's just the way he is—quantity wins way out over quality for this dog.

The other dog has no real neuroses. He just wants all the attention, and all the food, all the time. If he doesn't get it, heads roll and much barking ensues. Well, honestly, much barking ensues with this dog whether or not he's getting attention. He barks, therefore he is, that's his motto.

He barks if he's happy, sad, lonely, comforted, bored, fascinated, just ate, hungry, tired, wide awake—you name it, he'll bark for it. He barks in his sleep. He's like the canine equivalent of the guy at the office who just will never, ever shut up, no matter how rude everyone is to him. He's just going to bark until he's done—and he's never done.

He's also very willing to work with the thin cat to garner food from the table. It's the only thing they agree upon—that my food is, technically, theirs. They'll work it in unison and solo, but I get the

eyes, the paws, the begging, the demanding, and the whining for each and every meal.

Considering both dogs are big enough that when I am sitting and they are standing, we are darned close to eye-to-eye, this becomes a truly fun experience. I get the barker staring me in the eye while the thin cat slaps my thighs, both of them suggesting that the best thing would be for me to hand over that ribeye and ensure that no one gets hurt. It's no wonder no one ever wants to come to our house for dinner anymore.

The greyhound and the fat cat don't bother to beg. They just give me sorrowful looks from across the room, guilting me into giving them treats just because they've been good enough not to beg or demand them.

But, I think all of this will soon be a thing of the past. Why? Because there's a pet psychic coming to town. Oh, I don't plan to take my pets to her. I mean, why bother? I can do that schtick as well as the next girl.

Now, before all the real psychics write angry letters about this, let me stop you by saying that I already know what you're going to write and you're wrong. See? I'm psychic, too.

But, back to the pets. I got to thinking that if I merely applied said psychic abilities on them, as opposed to taking them to a stranger to do so, I'd probably be able to get to the root of their problems and solve them on my own.

So, I pulled the dogs aside, put my head against theirs, and sure enough, they licked my face.

So, after I washed up, I tried again, this time merely putting my hand against their heads. I was filled with the power and the clear realization that I didn't give them nearly enough attention, walks, or treats, and they were both very sad.

I did the same with the cats, after I managed to catch them and wrestle them down onto the bed. Amazingly enough, they don't get enough treats either, and they are sad as well. They are also sad that there are dogs in their house, but I let that one go.

So I did what any credible pet psychic would. I looked each pet deep in their eyes, and said, slowly and clearly, "Tough it out. It's hard out there for a stray."

I think they understood me. And now I can spend the money I'd have spent on a licensed pet psychic to go buy more dog and cat treats. So everybody wins.

Except my husband, who has to walk the greyhound, shut up the barker, wear clothes covered in the fur the fat cat sheds, and clean up after the supermodel.

So I got him a treat, too. I promised him no more pets. For now.