

The Name Game

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor
July 2014

In search of what to call your pet

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hen it comes to naming a pet, there are really no right or wrong choices to be made. It's a matter of personal preference, like deciding what to call a baby, and sometimes the vetting process has been in the works long before the pet comes home.

Lists have been drafted and updated; books have been consulted; names have been scrawled on backs of envelopes when something worthy is overheard. These contenders are stored up, squirrelled away for years, ready for that big day when a new bundle of furriness finally becomes a part of the family and is given (drum roll, please) a name. Simple and plain or out-of-the-box: anything goes, right? Maybe -- it all depends.

Long-winded titling is a practice that's better left to the royals and the racehorses. Sir Arf-Arf Conan Doyle is so begging for a nickname! Keeping it short and sweet is smart, especially for dogs that should come when called; otherwise, they get lost in the morass of too many syllables. Pedigree-registered names are lengthy to ensure uniqueness on paper, but shouldn't be used in everyday interactions with pets.

Children should be cautiously allowed to name pets. Target and Christmas Tree are real dogs named by young kids. Why not K-Mart or Menorah or Festivus Pole? Come to think of it, I *did* work with a dog named Festivus, named by a Seinfeld fan, though far from being a youngster.

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Maybe Seinfeld fans should be cautiously allowed to name pets, too.

Many of us adopt pets that already have names. When an animal's been called Roscoe for years, it's not wise to change his name to Buddy; but if you're Norwegian, you'd be happy to learn that Oslo is a sound-alike alternative that works. Last year I adopted Candy -- a Cocker/Schnauzer mix. She was plucked from the euthanasia line by a wonderful rescue group.

Turned out Candy is no sweet confection. I could barely get the word out; it felt flat-out wrong to continue calling her that. Since she had a diva's attitude, I decided to rename her Queenie, which matched her personality, yet retained that hard "k" consonant and long "e" vowel sound she recognized.

My biggest beef when it comes to naming pets is the recycling of names: one pet dies and its name is resurrected with the next pet that joins the family. To be fair, it's similar to how we name children after a beloved relative. Unfortunately, I've met people who latch onto a single pet name and use it over and over and over. Are they forgetful people, or simply uncreative?

I like to think of myself as being a creative type, but at times, for some reason, my own name-selection process comes straight from the gut and bypasses the right brain altogether. Take my litany of stray cat names over the years: Dark Kitty, Light Kitty, New Kitty -- need I go on to illustrate my lack of imagination? Luckier ones got character-appropriate monikers like Sugar and Chatterbox. Some got decent people names: Tim and Monty. But what was I thinking when I blurted out "Tabby" and let that boring name stick? Am I as bad as the name rehashers?

Maybe it's like eating comfort food, that nutritionally barren junk that makes us feel good. These go-to comfort names lack substance. We know better, but we use them anyway.

In 1993, I unknowingly entered into a naming disaster -- a pet name that I had to explain for the next 15 years. My Malinois Oscar sired a litter, and one was dubbed "O.J." for Oscar Jr. The following year Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman were murdered, and the trial of the century turned my puppy's name to mud. I gave an apologetic spiel whenever anyone asked me his name. For a woman who never believed in Orenthal James Simpson's innocence, it was tantamount to having a dog named Hitler.

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Name trends exist. Lassie, Simba, and Marley became popular because of films. Human names never go out of style. Everyone knows an animal named Lucy, Molly, Sophie, or Jake. Even the liquor cabinet is a source for trends: Kahlua, Asti, Bacardi, and Tequila have all been clients of mine. I must've worked with a 100 Baileys over the years. Others have stood out:

Ribbon: Never heard this before and I like it.

Peace: Optimistic, no?

Lenny Kravitz: I'd tell everyone I trained with Lenny Kravitz. "Really?!!" Yeah, Lenny Kravitz, the King Charles Spaniel.

Booger: Definitely a clunker. I hated calling the dog. Pea-Pea, too.

Dumpling: This name irked me at first, but I warmed up to it. The dog was a terror, though.

Czonka: At least he was named for an ex-football great who wasn't an accused murderer.

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