

## Kooky Kitty, Odd Duck

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor  
November 2014

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### Their little quirks make our animals more like us



There's much to be said about quirks, but for those things that make us the individuals we are, they're often undervalued, even scoffed at. Early on we long to fit in, to be like our peers. Standing out from the group leaves us feeling like outsiders, vulnerable to criticism, even ostracism.

Unless we're self-confident young people, we run the other way from independent thought or behavior, for fear of rejection. We all dress alike, listen to the same music, hang at the mall. That puts quirkiness on the back burner for later; possibly never, if we wrestle it to the ground, hogtie it, and throw it in the wagon for the long, one-way ride to Dullsville.

Isn't it interesting, then, that when it comes to our pets, we embrace their quirks? We find their off-beat moments to be endearing, hilarious and memorable -- okay for them but not for us. "Gives them character," we boast. Accepting quirks without judgment in dogs, cats, and birds, we come to find that these idiosyncrasies are the things we often value most in them. Quirks make our pets more loveable.

We love pets and their unique qualities so much that we share them with the rest of the world.

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YouTube is testament to the popularity of the quirky pet. Stars are born through animal videos gone viral, like Tyson the Skateboarding Bulldog. Grumpy Cat has gone beyond being a social media darling to having television specials and product licensing of her famous, impossibly frowny face.

Madison Avenue has long understood the value of using animal quirkiness to help sell things. 9Lives's Morris is "the world's most finicky cat"; StarKist's cultured Charlie the Tuna sports a beatnik-inspired beret and black-rimmed glasses; sugar-high hyperactive Silly Rabbit sells Trix cereal. Would we pay attention to the Geico Gecko if he didn't speak with an Aussie accent or walked on four legs like other lizards?

Beauty catches our eyes, but anthropomorphic characteristics move our hearts. We celebrate quirks because they make our animals *more like us*.

Oh, and we go out of our way to make them *more like us*. How many pets did you see paraded around at Halloween dressed as Kim and Kanye, Batman, and giant frankfurters? The following day, pictures of them were uploaded like crazy to Facebook. We get a royal kick out of holiday apparel for them, and the pet industry makes a royal buck from our need to make our furry friends *more like us*.

We buy sets of miniature Broyhill furniture for them to lounge on, fancy gourmet meals to eat, Louis Vuitton designer leashes with matching collars, and satin bows for their hair. We do it because we have a need to humanize them.

I admit I'm guilty of this too. My cat Tim and I do a little front-porch Broadway performance where I stand behind him, raise him up on his back paws and give him voice, singing and dancing to "If I Were a Rich Man" from *Fiddler on the Roof*. Of course, Tim has the Yiddish accent of Tevye; that always makes me laugh and Tim doesn't seem to mind.

Over the years, I've loved pets with cute habits. Snoopy the Cat would flick and flutter the end of her tail whenever I'd say her name in a high-pitched, pig-calling voice. Katy the Spaniel would howl only during the opening theme song to our favorite TV show, *Law & Order*. My couch buddy's wet noodle-like ears would barely stand upright at the first plunky base notes and by the ending's siren, she was in full-out, head-up, spine-chilling

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*aaooooo*

. Gosh, I miss that.

Bo the Catahoula has an odd bathroom routine. He trots around the backyard carrying a giant red Kong toy, gently places it on the ground, then relieves himself of number two. Sugar was a sneezy one-eyed kitty (I could've sworn she was winking at me), and her son Zeus meowed and rapturously flip-flopped at my feet at the mere sight of a metal comb in hand.

My sister has a cat named Moe-Moe that only drinks water by using her front paw as a ladle of sorts. I filmed her for three minutes scooping and drinking, scooping and drinking.

Long after our pets are gone, these are the little things we'll remember with a smile. Zany bits of character that made them uniquely themselves -- and darn near human -- are why they were so dear. Yes, they had many other wonderful and not so wonderful qualities, but quirks really made them stand out as special beings. They say God has a sense of humor; maybe that's why He made them *more like us*.

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