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Why Dogs are (Sometimes) Better than Cats

By Camille Dolan
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In my life, I have known some cool cats. “Some” might be an overly generous amplification. Four. I’ll go with four.

Brigitte was my childhood cat, but truth be told, she was actually my brother’s cat. She was so much his cat that one time she chose his bed (upon which he was sleeping at the time) to birth her kittens. My mother – who had grown up on a farm in Iowa – was familiar with animal husbandry and did not seem put off. I grew up thinking it was perfectly normal for cats to give birth on a bed while someone was sleeping there.

Scarlet is my niece's cat. She is the only cat I've ever seen that can be cuddled for as long as you want. She doesn't mind and doesn't suddenly turn into a biting and clawing machine when she wants to get away.

My daughter has two lovely rescue cats: Gola and Phoenix. Gola is about half the size of Phoenix, who has never known a bad piece of kibble.

I mean no disrespect to cat lovers. Cats do have some traits in their favor. They cover their waste. Most of them don't shed enough fur to construct a facsimile of themselves, unlike some dogs. They occasionally vibrate their laryngeal muscles, causing the not unpleasant sound of a purr.

They are soft and generally amenable to being stroked. I would, however, advise against petting any of the six (!) hairless breeds of cats. (I would also advise against Googling "hairless cats" right before bedtime to prevent nightmares.)

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I am not the only one who prefers dogs. The superiority of canines is also evident in the English language. One "puts on the dog" when one wants to impress. One aspires to be a "top dog." Who doesn't enjoy a delicious hot dog from time to time? And what could be better on a "three-dog night" than snuggling with some puppies?

Drilling down a bit further, if dogs are better than cats, then my dog, Nala, is the best one of all.

We acquired Nala from a shelter a few months after we said goodbye to Schatzi, our beloved German shepherd who had hip dysplasia and a degenerative spine condition.

Nala, a boxador (boxer and Labrador retriever mix) was sharing a kennel with a very vocal husky. She seemed submissive. Her information card indicated that her owners had surrendered her because she was rough with children. I melted, fearing that no one would adopt her with such a bad report.

When we brought her home, we understood what her owners had meant. She was bouncy and jumpy and knew no commands. She was an enthusiastic eater, which I aided and abetted because of her hungry eyes. Her frenetic activity was not caused by aggression, however, and after a little training, her friendly, goofy personality emerged.

Currently, Nala has approximately 37 rawhide bone fragments in her toy box, and who knows how many buried in the backyard. She also has the uncanny ability to detect old rawhide under heavy couches, barking at me impatiently until I retrieve her bone. Her relentlessness is part of her charm.

She has ruined my hairbrushes, two pairs of shoes and three pairs of sunglasses. Nala appears contrite when I discover her transgressions; I think a cat would pretend they never happened.

Nala has never met a stranger. Visitors to my house are viewed as potential back-scratchers and lick recipients. We take the same walking route every day, yet she stops to sniff the exact same locations from the day before. It is amusing, perhaps not playing-with-yarn amusing, but it is entertaining.

Recently, however, there has been a development that may cause me to rethink my position about dogs v. cats.

Despite Nala's many chew toys, bones and an exorbitant amount of my personal attention throughout the day, she has begun to eat my house. I was intently hemming some pants and heard Nala chewing on a bone. A crunchy bone. Except it wasn't a crunchy bone. Nala had somehow wrested a corner piece of molding from my living room wall. Bad dog. A very bad dog indeed.

Nala may be having her own reservations about her place in our home. Recent trips to the dog park have seen her approaching other dog's owners, presenting her backside for a scratch. They happily oblige, and Nala follows them around the park, forgetting that her real family is waiting for her.

Eventually, though, Nala remembers that I am the almighty provider of food and comfort and comes barreling back to me at full speed.

A cat would probably just leave forever, or at least until she heard the unmistakable rattle of her cat-food box.

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