

Bill Rea ? Would you send a cat to the Moon?

Being a pet owner, I can well appreciate the devotion that people show to their four-legged companions.

As any pet owner will tell you, they become part of the family, and that is certainly the case. Family plans, like vacation, have to take the pet into account.

And vacation plans involving the family pet have been very much on the minds of both my wife and I over the last couple of weeks, as we were making the plans for the vacation that we are currently on.

As many of you know, I married a cat lover, meaning I have to share both my home and my time (including vacation time) with Ella.

It's a frequently told story that Beth and I adopted Ella earlier this year. There are some in the community who treat that news as if I'm writing the script for a soap opera. Many, including the spouse of one Caledon councillor, regularly pump me for updates on Ella.

Ironically, I'm writing this at the kitchen table of my home, and Ella has chosen this moment to jump on the table and demand attention.

The fact is Ella has spent a lot of the last couple of months, apparently, looking for ways to lose her happy home. In previous columns, I gave an account of how Ella went after one of the hanging ends of a table cloth while Beth and I were setting up for a small dinner party, sending a wine glass that had come from my late mother flying into that void where fragile items end up after such an experience. Beth was furious with Ella, and I was mad too, because I had to clean up the mess.

More recently, Beth and I celebrated our wedding anniversary a couple of weeks ago. I came home the same way I have come home anniversary day for the last 16 years ? armed with a dozen long-stem roses (you ladies didn't realize I was such a sport, did you?).

Beth put them in a vase, and arranged the vase on a table in the living room. It attracted Ella's attention, but we figured she wouldn't cause much damage. We should have known better.

Circumstances required me to get home a little early a couple of days later, and I was greeted with 12 pretty flowers and a vase lying on a very wet carpet in the living room. I quickly ruled out the possibility that this was the work of a marauding band of vase-toppling home invaders who withdrew after the flowers are on the floor, and started yelling at Ella (as if that was going to do a hell of a lot of good). I picked everything up and tried to arrange the flowers in the vase again, employing the esthetic eye that I know I don't remotely possess. I had no idea how long they had been on the floor, but it was obvious a lot of damage had been done. To make matters worse, I arrived home a couple of days later to be greeted by Beth with the news that Ella had done it again. Beth said she didn't even bother trying to salvage the damage.

I think Tweety Bird put it best ? ?Bad old puddy tat!?

On the other hand, cats do have one big advantage over dogs ? They're low maintenance. You don't have to stoop and scoop with a cat (excepting, of course, the litter box), and I don't have to roam about the back yard with a trowel and bag if I want to cut the grass ? I had to do that a lot as a kid when there was a dog in the house.

And it's relatively easy to go away for a weekend when you have a cat. Make sure the litter box is clean and the food and water dishes are full, and you're good to go for a couple of days.

We sometimes take Ella with us when we go away, and such is the case now, as she accompanied us on our trip north. Needless to say, this piece was composed about a week in advance, but I know Ella, and know what kind of fuss she makes over a two-hour car ride.

Sigh!

So yes, I fully appreciate how pets become one of the family, but that holds drawbacks of its own.

Since humans have much longer lifespans than most animals, there is the inevitable parting that has to be dealt with. When that happens, it's very much like a death in the family.

But there's the question of what to do with them after this moment.

As I indicated above, when I was a kid, we always had a dog in the house (for several years, we had two). Three times we had to go through the ordeal of a dog leaving us. But since they were always well cared for, and not allowed to run in the streets (thus substantially reducing the chance of them being run over), all three pooches lived to ripe old ages (for dogs) and spent their last hours in the care of a veterinarian. They were put down (with the family's approval) and we left disposal matters to the vet. Some years later, I married a cat lover, and twice in the last 16 years, I have buried a feline in a back yard.

But there's now another alternative to consider, especially for those of you with more money than brains (and there are a lot of people like that out there). Why not send them into space?

There's an outfit called Celestis Pets that will send some of your pet's cremated remains in the final frontier, for a cost of course. According to a couple of websites I've consulted, for \$995 (I'm assuming that's in American dollars), some of the ashes can be shot into space and then come back down. There are other attractive packages available (for more money), including having the ashes spend some time in orbit, or being shot to the moon, or being sent into deep space, presumably to encounter a Klingon or someone like that (give them my regards).

I will grant the thought of sending Ella to the moon did pop into my head as I was cleaning up the remains of that wine glass from my late mother's collection a couple of months ago.

I am also aware that a number of people have had their ashes shot into space, including Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry and James Doohan (Scotty in the original Star Trek series), along with astronaut Gordon Cooper and a lot of others.

I agree there is a certain appeal to having one's ashes spend a bit of time (or a lot of time) in the cosmos. I was brought up at a time when space exploration was high on the list of conversation points. I remember the day Apollo 11 landed on the moon, and my mother telling me how fortunate I was to have been around for this monumental moment. She was right, as mothers always . . . er . . . often . . . er . . . frequently . . . er . . . occasionally . . . er . . . once in a while (maybe twice) are. The exploration of space seems to have been removed from the proverbial front burner these days, but it will be back with a vengeance one of these days. I might not live long enough to see it, but I know it's going to happen. Humans are just too damned curious not to let it happen.

But as intrigued as I am with space, I'm no ready to lay out a lot of scratch to have my cremated remains sent into space. For one thing, Beth has told me she won't let me be cremated. Besides, I'd rather see the money spent on something important after I'm gone, like a wake.

As for Ella, . . .

