



## Cherished Family Members Solutions for Pass-Around Pets

by Rebecca Ryan

Animal companions provide entertainment, comfort and unconditional acceptance and become part of the family. When major changes affect the lives of owners, they also affect pets. What happens to them when family dynamics shift?

When Kaitlin Crocker arrived in North Grafton, Massachusetts, at Tufts University Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine in 2006, she met up with another new arrival, a 3-year-old beagle named Daisy. Usually such dogs are acquired from research facilities so that students can perform physical health exams and work to socialize them. Crocker notes, “Daisy might never have been outside before; she was afraid of the door, the steps and big dogs. I was glad to see that once her nose took over, she decided a walk was kind of fun.”

Tufts dogs are typically available for adoption afterward, and Daisy moved in with Crocker’s parents, until Crocker finished school. “Daisy got along well with our family dog, Hawk. She adjusted to home life, especially after we added lights in the back yard, because she was afraid of the dark,” recalls her mother.

After graduation, the newly minted veterinarian married and found a house with a nice yard for Daisy. The dog’s only apparent problem so far has been with a hissing feline called Gracie, whom Daisy has decided to ignore. Daisy’s next adjustment will be the arrival of a human baby; one of Crocker’s girlfriends is aiding the preparation by bringing her baby to visit, so Daisy can learn about bottles, diapers and crying infants.

After Jessica Albon’s apartment building was sold, she and her Labrador retriever, Izzy, relocated to a 300-square-foot apartment on her parent’s property, with shared kitchen facilities. “It caused some friction,” admits this Winston-Salem website designer and owner of Thrive Your Tribe. “Two-year-old Izzy was full of energy, and our ideas of training differed.” Albon couldn’t find an apartment willing to

take a large pet, so her answer was to buy a house.

Business travel from New York also takes Steven Rice, a vice president at public relations firm Harrison & Shriftman, away from his rescue dog, Samantha. Then, "My parents get the fun of having a dog around without the full-time commitment," says Rice, "while Samantha enjoys the change from a city apartment to a large backyard." The dog has favorite toys, her regular food and her own bed nearby, so she feels right at home.

In the case of divorce, courts routinely treat pets as property, rather than family, although attitudes are changing as judges recognize the emotional attachment of both parties. Attorneys encourage couples to decide where the pet will live.

"During our divorce, the issue of who would get custody of our beagle almost took us by surprise," says David Bakke, the Atlanta-based online editor of *Money Crashers Personal Finance*, headquartered in Chicago. "We were so involved in the issues of child custody, alimony and child support that we didn't discuss Rocky until late in the process."

"My wife got primary custody of our children. We decided it would be in the best interests of both our dog and our kids that they live together," Bakke

says. "When they visit me, they bring Rocky with them. I miss him, but I also know this is best for everyone else."

When children are not an issue, pets can become a primary concern in divorces. "We never had children and our Yorkshire terrier, Clover, became our substitute," says Courtney Karem, marketing director at the Bougainvillea Clinique, in Winter Park, Florida. "My ex-husband eventually moved a few hours away, but we arrange for him to see Clover, who lives with me."

In acrimonious divorce cases, matrimonial Attorney Rachel Weisman, founder of Weisman Law Group, in New York City, has dealt with pet ownership. There have been occasions where a spouse denies rightful visitation before custody is determined or even gives the pet away without consensual agreement. If there is a possibility of abuse, a protective order for the animal can be obtained, advises Weisman. The core question is what is the key to the pet's health and happiness?

Times of change are stressful for all concerned, but can be made easier for pets by keeping their interests in mind, just as one would with beloved children.

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## Helpful Tips for Shared Custody

- ✓ Visit the new location together. Give the pet sufficient time to explore and become comfortable.
- ✓ Pack a doggie suitcase with familiar items, including food, leash, bedding, favorite chew and other toys, yummy treats and an item of unwashed clothing with the owner's scent on it.
- ✓ Provide written instructions about feeding, activities, likes, dislikes and any fears, plus the current family schedule, especially if a former spouse has a new partner.
- ✓ Stick to the pet's regular daily routines as much as possible.



*Source: Linda Michaels, dog psychologist and owner of Wholistic Dog Training, in San Diego, CA*