

The Daily Camera

Wednesday, August 19, 2005

Home & Garden

Love me, love my pet

By Mary Butler

For the Camera

Boulder, CO - I haven't seen the new romantic comedy "Must Love Dogs," starring John Cusack and Diane Lane. But the title makes the movie sound like it must have been written with Boulder singles in mind.

The county is, after all, home to more dogs than children.

A friend who's currently looking for love online told me she has a rule. If a potential date has more photographs of his animals than of himself posted, she moves on.

"This is Boulder," she says. "People here are crazy about their animals." And sometimes that's not a good thing.

Most matchmakers say the pet issue shouldn't be taken lightly. Match.com, for instance, asks relationship-seekers in its questionnaire to list pets owned, pet allergies and whether one has an aversion to any pets.

But there's more. My friend does love dogs. And cats. And most animals.

What she says you've got to consider is how the person relates to his or her animal. Some of her red flags:

The bedroom comforter is actually a dog- or cat-hair blanket and it doesn't seem to bother the owner to awake with fur stuck to the inside of his or her cheek.

There's a litter box in the living room or bedroom and you can tell.

This potential love interest bakes a cake for the dog on its birthday (but not on yours).

The cat wakes up at 4 am each morning and stands on your head, and this behavior is considered 'cute.'

And if he or she carries a picture in their wallet of Fido or Garfield, forget it ... do you really want the start of every dinner conversation to be 'You won't believe what Max did today,' my friend says.

Okay, my husband carries a picture of our dog. Is that really so bad?

Dottie Braun, partner of local dating service Introductions of Boulder, agrees that pets - and their role in a person's life - can say just as much about a person as what books they read and the restaurants they frequent.

"Dogs lovers are a certain type of person, cat lovers are a certain type of person. ... It says more about a person than 'We both have dogs and can go for a hike,'" she says. And people without pets - who don't want them - are their own breed. The question of whether someone wants or has a pet should be asked and thoughtfully considered", Braun says.

"In my opinion, it's love me, love my dog," says Mindy Shwayder, who owns Eight at Eight, a Denver dinner club for singles. Shwayder, 35, is single and has two beagles. On a recent date with someone who also has two dogs, she says she couldn't help but wonder whether she could really live with a houseful of dogs if the match worked out.

"I think I can say with a lot of certainty that most people wouldn't give up their pets for a relationship," she says. Being a pet owner - regardless of whether your pet is a dog, cat, hamster, reptile or bird - also implies that you're a responsible person, she says.

You have to plan your life around your pets. You desire companionship. You know how to love.

"If you can't love a dog, look at a dog and not love that face, there might be something wrong with you," she says.

Or if you listen to my friend, if you look at that face and love it too much, the same might be said.