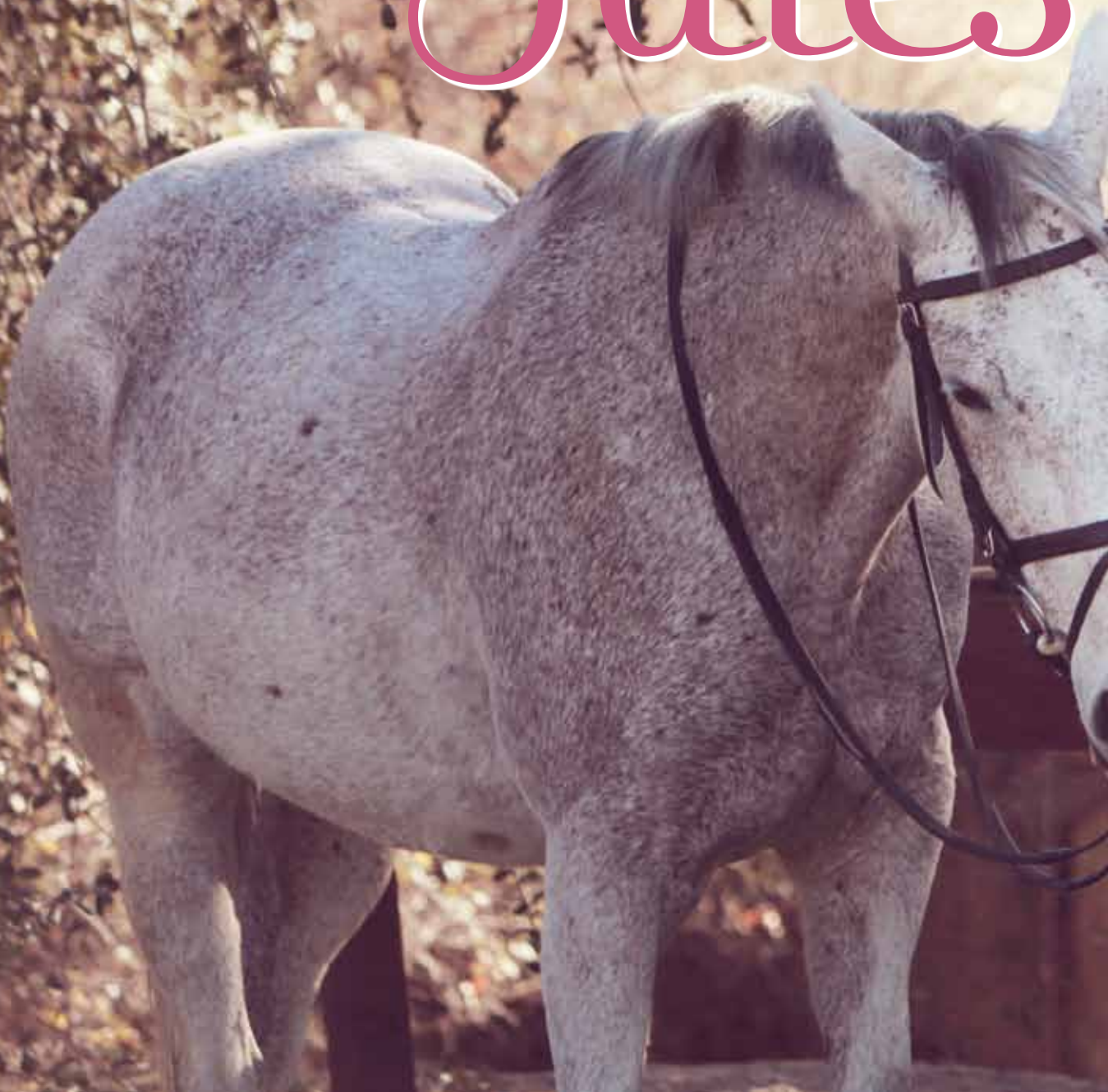


cover story

Pet Jales



Whether four-legged, fur-covered or flight-enabled, pets change lives. Enhancing family lives with a laugh a minute, memories for the ages and unconditional fuzzy love nuzzles, these fur-ever friends add a dimension of happy to our lives at every tail-chasing turn. And they don't have it so bad either. Meet some of our local non-human family members who live—and give—the good life.





A horse is a horse, they say. But Katie Collom knows better: “She is my best friend and always will be,” she says of her sparkly-eyed grey Thoroughbred.

Macy

Macy photos adorn the 12-year-old’s room, locker, phone, but she’s so much more to Katie than a pretty animal. She’s actually a rescued racehorse.

Katie, daughter of Barbara and Tim Collom, competes with Macy in eventing, a three-day sport consisting of dressage, show-jumping, cross-country.

“Because of the danger in this sport, especially cross country, the bond between horse and rider is extremely strong,” Barbara says. “The horse and rider place unconditional trust in each other.”

Sometimes the family travels up to twice a month for Katie to compete, and memories of bonding with family and horse

make the sport Katie’s beloved activity.

“I love this sport and Macy so much,” she says. “I would skip any party or get together to be with her and to be in the ring.”

Nearly every day, Katie exercises, grooms and feeds her, cleans her stall, wraps her legs and prepares her tack for the following day. She even gives Macy her monthly shot and any other medication needed.

“I’ve learned responsibility and many more values,” she says.

Showtime calls for even more sprucing for Macy, like Katie bathing her and keeping that coat as shining as her personality. But not much beats an afternoon taking in the views from the barn’s hilltop.

“As soon as I’m up there, my mind is somewhere else,” Katie says. “We always sit under the two palm trees while she eats grass and I think.”

Sure, Macy eats grass, loves her belly rubbed, nickers instead of chats and will do anything for a carrot. But Katie sees in Macy a soul sister.

“It’s the way she looks forward to her rides and how she tries her best,” she says. “It’s the way she cuddles with me when she’s scared. It’s the way I can come upset and then leave with the biggest smile.”

Babu

Typically, families choose their pets. Babu had different plans.

“Babu came to us!” says Jeanette Ali. About seven years ago, when Jeanette’s neighbors stopped by to show off their new baby kitty, her husband Sonny ended up stealing the teeny feline’s heart.

You could say he was kitten smitten.

“It was love at first sight for the both of them,” she says. The kitten never left their backyard.

Soon, the Ali’s home was also officially home to Babu, a tenacious black and white Maine Coon who Sonny named after the Hindi word for “baby,” or an endearment for a young boy.

“Babu was an integral part of our maturation towards parenthood,” says Jeanette, who now has twin three-and-a-half year old boys, Adam and Zakariya.

“Now,” she says, “we feel our family is complete by having kids and a pet.”

Today, between bird watching, playing house protector, bopping bottle caps and frolicking in catnip, Babu joins in whatever fun the boys are having. Adam races Hot Wheels while Babu swats at the roadsters on the kitchen floor. Zakariya bounces Babu on the trampoline.

“Babu is quite fond of the boys, as are they towards Babu,” she says.

And when the adventures are over, he’ll nap in Sonny’s lap or take in a fine feast of his favorite food from Jeanette.

“Babu loves to munch on organic wheat grass, freshly prepared tiger prawns, baked Ahi tuna fillet or sockeye salmon.”

But just because Babu has a taste for the finer things in life—his favorite spot in the house is the Ali’s Victorian armchair—he still keeps a keen kitty sense of humor.

“Each year,” Jeanette says, “we take a Santa Babu picture!” Cue fuzzy Santa hat!



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Rhone, Bun Buns, Pumpkin...oh my!

Adults think they're crazy and kids think they're cool. The Perez home is a veritable menagerie: one dog, two cats, five chickens, a rabbit, five goldfish, two tadpoles and a cluster of stick insects. Oh yes, and two kids.

"We had chickens before the children," says mom Christina.

Christina, her husband, kids Josie (age 7) and Christian (age 5) live with their mini-zoo on a half-acre in Sierra Oaks Vista. Rhone, a rescued canine companion, and cats Tommy and Pumpkin live in and out of the house. The insects and fish—including food fiend,

Nibbles—live in the kids' room. Bun Buns, the "carbohydrate junkie" rabbit, shares a coop in the backyard with chickens Scarlet, Dolly, Clementine, Leona, Annie and Morgan, some of which are named after favorite novel characters.

"We often give them human characteristics and laugh about what they are thinking or doing," Christina says.

The pets not only inspire hilarity—interspecies games of chase are just the start—but they encourage education and responsibility.

Christina brings many of the pets to visit Josie and Christian's school to teach about sharing the planet with other animals. And

though the chickens and rabbit eat from industrial feeders, the kids nonetheless like to pitch in.

"Collecting eggs and giving them daily scraps are fun to do and often done by the children," Christina says.

As for the other pets, Christian feeds the fish, both kids feed the cats, and Josie is solely responsible for feeding Rhone, with whom she's developed an extra special bond and even reads with in the mornings. Once on a nature walk, he even tried to rescue her when she decided to take a swim in the river.

"The pets fill our lives," says Christina. "We consider ourselves blessed. They bring even more love and joy into our house."



The pets not only inspire hilarity—interspecies games of chase are just the start—but they encourage education and responsibility.





Lizetta keeps all paws on deck to help out Ryan who lives with spinal muscular atrophy. She's been with them for five years, acting as pal, protector and pinch-hitter—stepping in to help with life's daily challenges like picking up pencils or remote controls and giving them to him in his power chair.

Lizetta

Every family needs teamwork. For sixth-grader Ryan Manriquez, his top teammate is a black lab named Lizetta.

Lizetta, Ryan and his mom, Carrie, make up a "Skilled Companion Team." Lizetta keeps all paws on deck to help out Ryan who lives with spinal muscular atrophy. She's been with them for five years.

"I feel like Ryan has a best friend and a sister with him at all times," Carrie says.

Like any typical dog, Lizetta will run around the park with Ryan and Carrie or play in the backyard with Ryan at his dad's house. She likes people food like green beans and strawberries, and

her favorite toy is a good old-fashioned tennis ball.

But unlike other dogs, Lizetta has been trained to be a buddy especially for Ryan, acting as pal, protector and pinch-hitter—stepping in to help with life's daily challenges like picking up pencils or remote controls and giving them to him in his power chair.

"If I was in the shower and Ryan dropped something, he would have to wait for me to get out," Carrie says. "This can be torture for an 11-year-old who is trying to make it to the next level in a video game!"

It's not just her skills that make Lizetta an invaluable and cherished member of the team, but her abundance of love.

"My favorite thing about Lizetta is that she is loving," Ryan says.

"My best memories of Lizetta are when I was little, she would sleep with me every night."

Now with her own dog bed in Ryan's room, her morning routine consists of potty and breakfast, then returning to Ryan's room to be by his side until he wakes up, too. And just wait until he comes home from school.

"Lizetta always welcomes me home by jumping on me and licking me," Ryan says.

And after a rough stint at the hospital or particularly trying day, Lizetta will turn any hug into a group hug! 🐾