



# Living With Cats and Dogs

*Introductions must be made carefully, for the safety of both pets.*

**D**uring September, our big 16-year-old male, orange cat, Buffett, died unexpectedly. Even though he was 16, Buffett was healthy, and aside from an arthritic hip, free of the chronic problems that commonly plague older cats.

On the day he died, Buffett acted normally — eating breakfast, meowing for attention and lounging in the sun in the backyard. He came inside, laid down on the rug, gave two loud cries, and died.

Our veterinarians believe it was either a heart condition or a blood clot because Buffett died so suddenly and quickly. My husband and I were obviously in shock, having watched Buffett leave us in just a matter of seconds. Buffett (whose namesake is Jimmy Buffett) was a friendly, easy going cat who taught the four dogs he shared us with over the years that cats rule.

Although we haven't been without a cat for over 30 years, we aren't yet ready to acquire another feline, as we are still grieving Buffett's death. But another consideration in the acquisition of a new cat is realizing that we will need to plan extra time to oversee the introduction of a new feline to our two dogs.

Introducing a cat to resident dogs can be a tricky business. Dogs that are accustomed to living with cats tend to have a shorter acclimation time than those who aren't, but past history doesn't guarantee things will go smoothly.

Buffett was not afraid of dogs, having lived with them since we adopted him at about four months of age. He was not

inhibited about giving our dogs a good swat when he thought they needed it, and our dogs clearly respected his personal space.

Dogs often behave very differently toward familiar cats they live with and unfamiliar cats they may encounter loose outside. On their leash walks, both our dogs can become quite agitated when they see free roaming cats. Coral, our Irish setter, seems more curious and excited, but we worry our Dalmatian Ashley could hurt a cat if through some freak accident she ever had the chance to chase one down.

We have to assume that, at first, Coral and Ashley would react to a new, unfamiliar cat in the same way they do to outside cats, rather than the way they behaved toward Buffett, whom they both grew up with.

## Safety Comes First

When introducing resident dogs to a new cat, the first concern must be the safety of all. The dogs should not be allowed to see the cat initially, but instead be exposed to just the cat's scents and sounds. Towels rubbed on the cat can be placed near the dogs' food bowls, on the dogs' beds, and even on the furniture where the dogs like to rest.

The cat should initially be confined to a bedroom or other quiet area until he's more accustomed to his new space. When the cat is ready to explore the rest of the house, the dogs can be confined where the cat was to further exchange scents. Once the curiosity and concern



The author's cat, Buffett, and canine pal Coral.

over one another's scents and sounds decrease, it's time to give the cat and dogs controlled, safe exposure to the sight of each other.

There are a variety of ways to micro-manage this initial visual contact, including crating the dogs or putting them on leash and requiring them to lie down while the cat is encouraged to come into the room. The dogs must be leashed or otherwise controlled — and even muzzled — as the introduction progresses to physical contact with the cat.

It can take several weeks to reach that point. When we do adopt a new cat, we know we will have to devote considerable time to swapping animals around so that neither our dogs nor the new cat spend too much time confined. Time will have to be set aside to manage the carefully controlled initial contacts between them on a repeated basis every day until their comfort level — and ours too — increases. It could be months before we feel it is safe to leave the three of them alone together.

For now we are all adapting to life without Buffett, although we miss him much more than Coral and Ashley do. For them, there is one less pet they have to share us with. ❖



Dr. Hetts, a certified applied animal behaviorist, owns a behavior consulting practice with her husband, Dr. Dan Estep, in Littleton, Colorado. Send your behavior questions to: DogWatch, Box 7, Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, Ithaca, New York 14853-6401.

We regret that we cannot respond to individual inquiries about canine health or behavior matters. In this column, we often mention useful products to help with behavior issues, and they can be ordered at [www.animalbehaviorassociates.com](http://www.animalbehaviorassociates.com)