
Lisa also worked at Lafayette College where she was the Director of Human Resources. Her specialty was employee relations, i.e., she hired and fired people. Although she and I have similar core values, we hold different opinions on many issues. One of the lessons I've learned from her is how to deal with those differences (and our occasional points of agreement). For example:

- Lisa drinks martinis, old fashions or whiskey sours; I drink beer.
 - They have both at the pub. Problem solved.
- Lisa is always well dressed and well groomed; I have no fashion sense and am a slob.
 - There is no dress code at the pub. Problem solved.
- Lisa prefers chicken; I prefer beef.
 - I've learned to (pretend to) like chicken. Problem solved.
- Lisa has always known that she didn't wish to have any children; I have three daughters.
 - Three kids is more than enough. Problem solved.
- Lisa loves cats; I was a dog guy.
 - She trained me to like cats. Problem solved.
- Lisa is an extrovert; I'm an introvert.
 - At the pub, people talk to her and ignore me. Problem solved.
- Lisa likes to travel; I like to travel.
 - No Problem.
- Lisa is a fan of Duke Basketball; I love Duke Basketball.
 - Let's get married!

To know Lisa is to know her devotion to her cats. She has a sign in her home office that says *My Kids are Furry and Have Four Feet*. One of the first lessons Lisa taught me was that my needs are subordinate to those of the cats. They get rescued first in a fire. Their feeding and litter box care come before our feeding and home care. Saving for their health care trumps saving for our health care, which makes sense since their vet bills are higher than our doctor bills. My chair in the living room is most certainly my chair, unless one of the cats wants to sleep there.

Allow me to introduce you to the amazing Miss Bella. For our first date, Lisa invited me to her place for a meal. When I arrived, she handed me a martini (see above). While she finished cooking, I spent quality time with the cats. It was clearly in my best interest to appear to enjoy my opportunity to get to know Bella, Gabe, Taylor, and Sam. After a lovely hour having them scratch me when I tried to pet them, dinner was ready. Lisa served chicken (see above). Bella joined us on the table. How lovely. She watched as I sliced off a pad of butter for my freshly baked roll, and then kindly offered her support by sitting on the butter. How lucky for me, I never had brown butter before. I wisely pointed out how cute she was.

My introduction to Bella required me to choke down the rest of my martini. Given the state of my dinner roll, I even ate one of the seven olives on the skewer (I hate olives). Recognizing my discomfort, and trying to acknowledge my floundering efforts with Bella, Lisa asked if I would like another drink. Yes please. Then, in what may be the most critical moment in our relationship, she asked if I would like another martini or perhaps something else. Do you

have any beer? She pointed to a refrigerator in the utility room. I opened it to find a dozen types of beer and went from *how can I get out of here* to *do you want to get married* in a nanosecond. I might have popped the question right then, but Bella ran in front of me and I tripped over her. I'm sure she was just trying to show me the way back to the table.

From Bella I learned my place in the home. From her brother Sam I learned toughness. Sam was raised in a barn. When he was young, he got caught in a trap and had to have one of his hind legs removed. His owners were not excited about taking him back, so his vet inherited him. As soon as Lisa met Sam, she took him home. Lisa lived in a single story home and Sammy was able to get from his food bowl to the litter box and into the living room (where Lisa picked him up so he could sleep on the sofa) without difficulty. When Lisa moved in with me, we were worried about how Sam would deal with the steps to the second floor. We figured one of us would carry him up the steps each evening and then back downstairs each morning. On the first night, when it was time to head upstairs, we couldn't find Sammy. He had already climbed the stairs on his own. What a tough dude.

While Bella's preferred way of interacting with me was to sit on my dinner, Sam loved to watch baseball. We eventually agreed on a game viewing strategy. I laid on the sofa and Sammy laid on my chest and went to sleep. He got annoyed if I had to use the bathroom or go to the beer fridge, so I didn't use the bathroom or go to the beer fridge. Sam also like to watch golf.

Gabe taught me that some cats have a wonderful fashion sense. He would come in the closet with me and paw at whichever flannel shirt he thought would best match my jeans. When I put the shirt on the bed to hop in my jeans, Gabe took a nap on the flannel. Very helpful. He also helped Lisa select her clothes. He thought she looked great in velvet, but it was necessary for him to nap on the velvet before it was ready for her to wear. Lisa brushed the cat fur off her clothes before going out. I didn't, because I'm a slob (see above).

Taylor taught me that some cats like subs. He preferred Italina subs or anything with pork. Since subs are not the healthiest food for cats, Taylor only got one a year, on his birthday. Other days he ate regular cat food, but he was too lazy to sit up to eat. Instead, he stretched out next to his bowl and used his paw to scrape the food directly from his bowl into his mouth. (It looked like a good idea so I tried it, but I couldn't get it to work for me.)

Cats live for ~15 years. Whenever one of our little buddies passes on, Lisa heads to the rescue shelter to find a new friend. Over the 20 years we've been together, Charlie, Andre, Peter, and Maisey have joined our family. From Charlie I learned the joy of flopping. Charlie had his own blanket on the floor next to our bed. Each night before I settled down to read, I sat with him on his blanket and scratched his ears. He got so excited that he spun around in circles, like a dog chasing his tail, and then flopped down on his back for a tummy rub. Charlie could do 10 or 12 flopping cycles before getting tired.

When Queen Bella passed, a very sad day in Rexland, Andre became king. The major advantage of being the cat monarch is you get to sleep closest to Lisa. Andre was also known as Bobo (you don't want to know why) so when he ascended to the throne, he became King Bobo the First, abbreviated KB1. All cats are excellent nappers, but Bobo was the best napper I've ever known. He could sleep anywhere, at any time, under any conditions. His preference, however, was to sleep on the largest pile of pillows, cushions and blankets he could find. When Sammy and I prepared to watch baseball, we moved the half dozen extra pillows on the couch (why do we have those?) over to the loveseat. The pile of couch pillows on top of the loveseat pillows was a Bobo magnet. He climbed atop of the whole mess and immediately passed out for the rest of the afternoon. Nothing but dinner could get him to move.

Peter is an excellent butler. Every morning he jumps up on the counter while I'm brushing my teeth. As soon as I finish, he helps me continue my morning toilette by allowing me to pet him. He can't stand still, however. Instead, he walks across the counter, allows me to pet him for ~10 seconds, walks away, and then returns. His record is 22 petting cycles. After KB1 passed, Peter became king of the realm. There was a slight problem, however. Peter rose to the throne at about the same time as did King Charles III of England. While Petey graciously invited Charles to Pete's coronation, no return invitation was received. Since then all ties between the two kingdoms have been severed. Their loss.

Maisey, from the same litter as Pete, enjoys sitting on the back of my chair while I'm reading. (By my chair I mean the one I'm allowed to sit in if the cats don't need it). Periodically Maisey will give me a head bump. That's her signal that she wants to be brushed. We've been experimenting for a few years and have mutually agreed that the optimal number of strokes in a session is 108. As you know, 108 is nine dozen. Maisey has three brushing positions: one that presents each side and one that presents her back. She rotates positions after each dozen strokes and we go through the entire cycle three times. We both like symmetry. Like Sam, Maisey enjoys sports, but she prefers to be an active participant. She stands in front of the flat screen TV and swats at the ball, any ball. A baseball moves a little too fast for her and she has trouble following a football since it is often hidden from her view. Her best sport is basketball. The ball speed is just right. Maisey leads the world in blocked free throws. She's a big Duke fan.

Cats have no concept of delayed gratification. They want what they want, when they want it. No wonder Lisa and Maggie love cats.

Which one of these pets is different from the others: a cane corso, a chihuahua, a mini poodle, or a teacup yorkie? Clearly, the first could eat the other three for snacks. My daughters have noticed that I've given preferential treatment to cats over dogs in this story. That's because I'm more scared of Lisa than I am of them. But it's time to redress my species discrimination. Max, a mini poodle, was our family pet when the girls were young. Max was a fine lad and a friend to all. Ellie's canine buddy is Gunner, the cane corso. Nobody messes with her when Gunner is around, and the way you know he is around is everything is covered in drool. But he's a gentle giant and a good buddy for my youngest daughter. Abby has a teacup yorkie named Olive. Olive enjoys sitting on the back of her sofa in front of the window barking fearsomely at everyone who walks by. She also enjoys chicken and steaks for treats. Maggie has a chihuahua named Taco, who lives with a couple of cats in her NYC apartment. Taco has been to the beach, the pool, and on long walks through Central Park. But he's not really a fan of any of those activities unless his "walk" takes the form of sitting on the street corner in front of his apartment building in warm weather watching the cars go by. Ok, everyone happy now? That was about as random as it gets.
