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An ex-teacher's pet project

By Muhammad El-Hasan, Staff Writer
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A recent visit to Shannon Benecke's backyard found dogs scampering on the grass, cats in an adjacent area and a duck named Klaus Von Duckers.

Needless to say, Benecke is an animal lover.

In fact, her love for little critters motivated her to give up her career as a school teacher to start her own business.

Benecke, 31, runs BocMeow, a pet-sitting service she started last year out of her El Camino Village home.

She takes care of some animals at her home, where her clients' pets play with her own furry friends. To care for other pets, she goes to their homes.

What does your job entail?

I'm a caretaker for people's pets. I walk the dogs. At a client's home, I also bring in the mail and take care of the plants. I take notes so the client knows what their pet did. I send e-mails to owners about their pets. I also sell supplements for dogs and cats.

What pets have you cared for?

Dogs, birds, cats, rats, hamsters, rabbits, turtles. Mostly dogs here (at the house). I take care of just small dogs here, not more than 20 pounds. But when I go out on my daily visits to clients' homes, it's mostly cats. If clients have birds at their home, I take care of them there.

What was the most unusual pet you've cared for?

One of the most unusual animals I've taken care of was a raccoon. In this situation, the client asked me to come in and take care of her house cats, but to

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also take care of the outdoor critters, which involved a raccoon and a stray cat. So every day I would feed the raccoon, and the raccoon would come and eat right in front of me. Not aggressive at all.

Which pet is the easiest to care for?

I would say the birds. They don't need as much attention as the cats and dogs. Some people who hire me are hiring me to give the cats and dogs attention, not just to feed them.

What area do you service?

The beach cities, Torrance, Hawthorne.

How much do you charge?

For a 30-minute visit, \$20.

What kind of dogs do you have?

Radar is a Chihuahua mix, Dasher is an Italian greyhound and Noah is a rat terrier mix.

Where did you find Klaus Von Duckers?

I'm really involved in rescue, so we rescued him. He was abandoned in a channel. It's a Pekin duck, and they can't fly. So he was left to pretty much die. Occasionally, I foster. Right now I'm fostering a cat. He was a neighborhood cat with a big wound on his face. So I'm taking care of him until he gets adopted.

Where did you get the idea to start this business?

When my husband and I went on our honeymoon, we didn't want to leave our dogs. So we went camping and took the dogs with us so we could make sure they were alright. And that's how we got the idea.

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What's the best part of your job?

I get to see the different animals. I actually don't dread any part of my job.

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What about dealing with the rats?

I don't have a problem with the rats. I used to have pet rats as a kid.

How do you care for rats?

Clean the cage. Give them fresh food, fresh water. Let them climb on top of their cage if it's OK for them to have free time and there's no cats around. Every visit is based on the pet's needs according to the owner.

What's the worst part of your job?

Every dog, cat, bird, I give a piece of my heart to them. So it's always hard when my client says their dog has passed away.

Do you ever get emotionally attached to rats?

I've become attached to all my clients' pets. Every single one of them has a unique personality.

Have you ever had a dog and cat fall in love with each other?

I have several clients who have dogs and cats that rely on each other. They follow each other around the house, and I've seen them cuddle with each other.

Do you make them stop?

No. I try to keep their environment the way their owners have it. If the owner says it's normal, I'm not going to disturb the dog and cat from cuddling each other.

Would society approve of that relationship?

I think so. I think that's something society wants to embrace. It's not something they see happen a lot, where two opposites would connect like that.

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