

At the Zethraus household in Dallas you'll find a Bug and a Pug.

There's also a pair of showbiz cockatiels named Tina and Bing. Yep, named for Tina Turner and Bing Crosby.

Miss Bug, known more formally as Lady Bug, is a six-pound, rescued black Pomeranian. The pug is Greta, a "portly 15- or 16-pound" dog who chases TV horses. Seriously. More on that later.

Their people are Roy and Lee Zethraus and daughter Marjie. Roy owns Bear Wire Video, a TV/video/audio/webcast production company. Lee is a longtime Dallas journalist now in corporate communications at Hunt Oil Co. Marjie is a junior studying finances and investment banking at Washington & Lee University in Lexington, Va.

This family has a history with critters. When Lee was a little girl, she had a pet duck named Evinrude. For years, until old age claimed them, the family had a pair of lively Malteses, Rita and Lynda. (Several years ago, Roy attempted to introduce tiny Lynda to Tina the cockatiel and Lynda thought what she usually thought, "Snack!" Fortunately Tina was not "snacked." From then, on, however, Lee says Lynda would sit on the arm of the sofa and look wistfully at Tina in her cage.)

Lady Bug may be about six years old. She came to the family via Best Southwest Humane Society. Her foster mom, Sherill Killebrew, says the Pom was already called "Miss Bug." She'd arrived as a timid ball of jet black fur with a pointy nose and pointy ears. When Roy first saw her, he was moved to ask, "What is that? A bat?"

Greta is not timid. She's charmed such folks as media personality Jody Dean. He stopped by one day to do some audio work with Roy, met Greta and wound up fawning over her on the air the next day. Lee says "Greta's reaction was more like 'Of course he had something to say about me'...She's secure in her 'Gretaness'."

Lady Bug "lived under the bathroom dresser for a couple of months," Lee says. They didn't press her to be congenial. "One day she came out and jumped up onto the sofa," Lee says. "I had my hand laying there beside me on the couch and she put her little paw in my hand like she was saying 'I've got to trust somebody. I guess I'll trust you.' It was almost like her little 'fingers' kind of grabbed on."

After that, she and Lee were rock solid.

Did you pick your pet or did your pet pick you? Tina came from a pet store when Marjie was in middle school. "She picked us," Lee says. "It was like 'I'm going home with you.'" Two or three years later, while Lee was in the volunteer office at Children's Medical Center, a recently widowed colleague was wondering what to do with her late husband's cockatiel. "We'll take him for you," Lee told her. And now Tina and Bing live in the same cage. Neither talks, but they do offer their own form of gibberish. Bing "has a song, but we're not clear what it is," Lee says. "Tina sings the *Raiders of the Lost Ark* theme."

When it came to getting a pug, Marjie knew she wanted a girl and she wanted to name her Greta. The family drove to Oklahoma to visit a breeder who had three that were ready to go. One was too small. One was a little too aggressive. And Greta was just right. She rode back to Dallas with her head happily resting on Marjie's shoulder.

Does your pet have any tricks? "Tricks?" Roy bristles defensively about Greta. "She's not a trained monkey!"

"Somewhere—we don't know what the moment was," Lee says, "Greta totally bonded with Roy. They have their own little language. He has been totally transformed and is quite taken with her."

"Her favorite game is the Jungle Cat Sneak," Roy proudly begins, urging listeners to "envision a jaguar...in search of a lone antelope. The cat's belly is dragging the ground as she puts one foot in front of the other as she creeps toward her prey." Greta will do this the entire length of the backyard, he says. "If you are at one end of the yard and she's at

the other, she freezes, puts her head down and begins the sneak....Sometimes she sneaks up to your leg, then turns her head away and continues on like she hasn't seen you, then she turns and jumps on you."

And she actually watches TV, he says. "It really bothers her if she sees something that doesn't look natural. Cartoon characters make her nuts.....And if she's watching a show and the horses exit to the right, she jumps off the couch and runs to the right barking and crying like a baby." She's convinced the horses are stampeding into the house, and she's off in a dash chasing horses down the hall.

What celebrity does your pet look most like? Greta looks like Frank the Pug in *Men in Black* "but prettier," Lee says. And Lady Bug looks "elegant" as if she's in "formal black all dressed up for the Oscars."

Whose hairstyle costs more? "Recently it's been theirs," says Lee, noting that "we've had help." She cites the anti-shedding system called the Furminator. When they (and the dogs) drove Marjie to Washington & Lee one semester, they discovered the Furminator at Gayle's Grooming in Lexington. When they got back to Dallas they found one at Sue's Doggie Doo's Mobile Groomer (www.suesdoggiedoos.com). Greta the Pug is the bigger shedder. "How we're spending more money for grooming on a shorthaired dog is beyond me," Lee says.

Does your pet have a job? "The birds are the best watchdogs in the house.....They pipe up before the dogs will," Lee says. "Lady Bug will chime in if someone's at the door—but it will be from the bed. She's not going to exert herself for just anything."

The favorite treat? The pups like a little bowl of milk each.

Does your pet have powers of persuasion? "They will stand there and do this bark and back-up thing—that is the signal for the milk. They'll do a half-bark and backpedal a little bit. If it's real late at night and they've had their treat, they'll do that because it's time to get in the bed."

At bedtime, besides the humans, your bed holds how many animals? Two. Greta stretches out next to Roy and Lady Bug sleeps on the pillows.

I have snuck my pet into (a) a fine restaurant, (b) a movie, (c) church, (d) the White House? Into a hotel once "just to get the air-conditioning," Lee says.

Do you kiss your pet on the lips, top of the head, nose or do you do a Hollywood air kiss-kiss? "All of 'em," Lee laughs, and confesses that she's even seen Roy plant a kiss on the horse-chasing, sneaky jungle cat Greta.

(To suggest someone for the *Part of Our Family* feature, e-mail dallrp@aol.com.)