

FUNNY BUSINESS

***The Price I Pay to Wake Up Next to a Male Creature
Who Doesn't Care What I Look Like in the Morning Is***

MONEY WELL SPENT!



By Jane Resnick

In the category of intimate life details that no one needs to know, I offer this: the body that spends the most time next to mine belongs to a dog. Our goofy, adored Labrador is a foot-sitter, lap-lounger, hip-hugger, tongue-kisser and all-over body-sniffer. His name is Duncan; his nickname is Collateral Damage.

On the list of Duncan's accidental destructions, my least favorite is the smashing of a Chinese vase I carried halfway round the world in a box. The plastic string around the cardboard was so vicious that my fingers bled in three airports. My DNA is on the floor in Hong Kong. This is the price I pay for living with a male creature who doesn't care what I look like when I wake up in the morning. He eats money. Well, not literally, but he has crunched off more than a mouthful of the siding on my house.

Pet care is expensive, even if you're

determined to stick to the basics, which I am. At the moment, that's \$400 for his annual check-up and the usual medications that ward off bugs, worms, and other free-loading animals who are closer to my dog than I am. And that's it. Duncan doesn't even get dentistry, which is a major trend for dogs and cats these days, but my husband Dick, an oral surgeon, has an opinion of doggie dentistry that seethes into the unprintable.

This attitude is making me look cheap. According to the American Pet Product Manufacturers Association, last year the total lavished on pets was \$36 billion—double the budget of NASA, more than we paid for candy and even *jewelry*.

Whose priorities are these? Meet the folks at the canine boutique The Wagging Tail in Santa Monica, California, *the* place for canine fashionistas. They've searched the runways of

Paris and Milan and have come up with "Fancy Bones' sapphire, sterling and 18k gold diamond-encrusted pendants to satisfy your pet's bling-bling habit." Sapphires wouldn't do it for Duncan, really. All he needs around his neck is a name tag so that when the scent of a female in heat in the next county inspires him to bear the shock of his electric fence to find her, someone will call me to pick him up. I admit to spending triple digits for that fence because it *almost* always works. Even a good jolt is no match for Labrador lust.

I do know people who take their dogs to pet spas. Somehow this annoys me. It's taken me so long to create a guilt-free spa mentality for myself that I'm not willing to hand that concept over to animals. On the other hand, to begrudge a pet the delight of massage seems not only cheap but selfish. Call me both. The animal-massage community (and it is large) has moved way beyond a feel-good hour for your dog. I've learned that I can sign up for training in several trademarked methods, Reiki, among them, to move the blocked energy and release the life force in Duncan, while awakening joy and caring within myself.

Eight hundred and fifty dollars for a five-day intensive workshop. I don't think so. In fact, Duncan has created his own Nirvana. When Dick sits in a large chair, the dog crawls onto his lap, performs a aerodynamic flip maneuver so that he's lying on his back with his head on his master's shoulder, belly up for rubbing. His head rolls back, his eyes go dreamy, and I am



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extremely jealous.

I *will* cook for Duncan. Marrowbones are my specialty—emerging from the oven like remembrances of things past, rib roasts with all the fat intact. This, however, isn't exactly gourmet, and gourmet is exactly what's being sold for pets today. Or better. In the line of *holistic* gourmet, a business in Wisconsin is selling *four-star* gourmet pet food.

Salmon a La Veg has salmon that is not only wild, but *ocean-going*, a fish so expensive now that restaurants have been caught masquerading farmed salmon as wild. I share my bagel and farmed smoked salmon with Duncan, but I have yet to see it visit his tongue long enough to be tasted.

I suppose I could spend more money on this dog. A fancy boarding place nearby offers baths for a dog Duncan's size for \$50. Or, for just \$15, I could use their facility, shampoos and conditioners and even have a smock and boots to keep me dry. I'd need it. Putting hair conditioner on this dog would be like anointing a hog with oil. Duncan's recreation involves dirt in all its gradations: sand, grit, slime, and mud. His occupation is rubbing his body on walls and shedding hair. For fun, he stretches out, soaking wet, on the Kashmiri carpet I smuggled out of India. If I lived with a person who did this, I'd consign him to a room with a cement floor, a hose, and a drain.

Instead of money, I dish up patience and tolerance for this dog. I love him back. We're even. □

Jane Resnick is currently at work on a memoir called "When I Said 'I Do,' I Didn't Mean That." She is the author of numerous fiction and nonfiction books.