

Dog Children

I love dogs as much as the next person, but things have gotten a little out of hand in the pet department lately. Have you seen the pet clothes section in PETCO recently? There's just no good excuse these days that any dog should appear naked in public!

□ Americans are now spending \$16,400 on average to raise a medium size dog to the age of 11! That's twice the amount we were spending just 10 years ago.

Remember when our dogs were not children? Call me old fashioned but I don't think we loved our dogs any less when we only bathed them twice a year and fed them out of a sack instead of gourmet meals. And I don't think our dogs loved us any less because we made them sleep in the pump house instead of their own doggie mansions.

Some of the products being marketed for pets are great. Certainly locating your lost pet using Hi Tech's GPS locator is preferable to riding around urban neighborhoods calling its name or repeatedly calling the animal shelter.

□ If you want to spend \$15 every month to get text and e-mail messages notifying you every time your dog leaves the "safety zone," hey, it's your money. And I'm sure Hallmark is pleased that half of dog owners buy birthday or holiday cards for their pets, although I hasten to add that there is no reliable evidence to indicate that Rover has fully developed reading skills.

In the old days if we wanted to give our pet a treat it was usually a ball, Milk Bone, pat on the head, flea collar, or, in the case of our goldfish, a clean bowl of water. Now you can buy a soccer game for goldfish, a self-flushing cat box called the Cat Genie and a Jog A Dog treadmill for \$3,000! There is breath freshener for dogs and wigs for cats! Seriously. I kid you not.

Back when I was a kid, pets just lived together in sin but now they can get married in an official ceremony complete with a wedding cake. I know for a fact that sizable trust funds are being left for pets and I'm sure there must be lawyers somewhere willing to write pre-nuptials for wealthy cats. There are pet therapists, pet travel agents, dog acupuncturists and doggie day care so that your pooch can network with other upscale mutts.

The urge to splurge on our pets knows no bounds and nowhere is this more evident than in the pet food aisle. More dog food is sold in America now than baby food! You can buy pet pate, soufflé, brulee and Kibbles and Bits Brushing Bites to freshen their breath. Rather than just throwing their dog a bone, people are buying all-natural premium jerky and low-fat rawhide treats with turkey stuffing.

I'm sure it will not come as a news flash that California has really gone to the dogs. In San Diego, Calif. dogs can attend a surf academy where they get lessons, room service meals of beef tenderloin and salmon, a pair of doggie board shorts and a surf bandana. If they are good enough they can compete in the annual surf dog competition. If surfing is not their style they can go "dog paddling" in a kayak to Fiesta Island, a leash-free paradise for pets.

There are Easter and Halloween pet parades and a doggie bus in Orange County, Calif. to take them to a doggie beach. All the while listening to a music CD compiled just for them with pop hits like Who Let the Dogs Out.

□ When they are done partying, the pets can be buried at the Los Angeles Pet Memorial Park where cremation, grief counseling and special rooms are available for final good-byes. If the thought of life without Fido is just too unbearable, you can have your pet cloned for just \$150,000.

I'm not making this stuff up. Every pet product I mentioned is real. A dog's life indeed! Some dogs these days are sleeping on \$395 Burberry doggie mattresses while single mothers are sleeping in cars and veterans are living on the street.

It's the Pitts

Written by Lee Pitts

And the poor moms and the old soldiers probably have dog children too!