

This Clown Has a Way With Cats

A backstage encounter with Gregory Popovich of the Comedy Pet Theater turned out to be a life-changing experience for CAT FANCY Editor Susan Logan.

By Susan Logan

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CAT FANCY Editor Susan Logan greets Gregory Popovich and three of his talented cats at a Southern California performance. When I heard that Gregory Popovich's Comedy Pet Theatre was coming to Irvine, Calif., I knew I couldn't miss it. I sat in an aisle seat about eight rows back from the stage with anticipation before the curtain went up, when someone tapped me on the shoulder. The Barclay Theatre's director of communications, Karen Drews Hanlon, introduced herself to me and told me that Mr. Popovich would like to meet me in the green room during the intermission. I felt flattered.

After chatting with her, I recognized the Irvine Animal Care Center's Director Ron Edwards sitting about two rows back from me. We still had a couple of minutes before the show, so I told him how I had just lost my 17-year-old cat Chamois to kidney disease and my 18-year-old cat Chloe seemed lonely and confused, so I was thinking about adopting another companion. My plan was to get two young cats, preferably siblings, who could play with each other and grow up together since Chloe was already a senior cat. He told me about a couple of 6-month-old kittens who were friendly and that the shelter wanted to adopt them out together. It sounded like the perfect fit, so I ended up adopting Sophie and Madison about a week later.

The house lights went down and the show began. I was amazed to see cooperative cats walking tightropes, pushing a dog in a baby buggy and riding a train driven by Popovich. In between the animal acts, two-legged performers juggled and entertained us with their own amazing acrobatics. Popovich's comedic antics were met by uproarious laughter, especially from the children in the audience. The first half of the show ended with Popovich getting wet from a bucket of water he intended for one of the other clowns.

At intermission, I met Hanlon, who took me to the green room. I bounced a wet Gregory Popovich, who was as friendly in person as he was on stage. His energy was infectious. He gave me his cat training DVD and introduced me to his daughter, one of the show's incredible acrobats. He graciously let me get a picture with him and three of his beautiful cats.

The thing that struck me most about his cats when I posed with them was how calm they were and how loudly they were purring. This was confirmation for me that they were comfortable and actually enjoyed what they were doing.

Popovich told the audience in the second half of the show that he features the tricks the cats do best on their own. "This one does absolutely nothing," he said of one of the Persians who just sat there.

Knowing that he had rescued all the animals in his act increased my esteem for the clown. It's no exaggeration to say the show was life-changing for me. For one thing, it led me to Sophie and Madison. I left the theatre with lifted spirits and quite a bit more energy than when I entered.

I learned later that the show raised \$3,500 for the Irvine Animal Care Center.