



## This Lab Will Clone Your Pet for \$50K. Would You Do It?

Amy Vangemert shared a special bond with her dog, Buhner. But as her beloved toy poodle aged, the Washington resident began dreading his death.

So when Buhner was 12 years old, Vangemert and her husband paid \$50,000 to clone their dog. “At first I had reservations, like, ‘What is my vet going to think? What are people going to think?’ And then I thought, ‘You know what, I love my dog so much I don’t really care what anybody thinks,’” she told *The Daily Beast*. “I just wanted his bloodline. I knew there was no other dog like him.”



In the fall of 2016, Buhner’s veterinarian took a tissue sample from the dog’s abdomen while he was under anesthesia for a dental cleaning, then sent it to Texas-based animal cloning firm ViaGen in a biopsy kit provided by the company. A surrogate gave birth to three cloned puppies on Jan. 31, 2017; eight weeks later, the Vangemerts welcomed “BJ” (for “Buhner Junior”) and “Ditto” into their home. (A ViaGen employee adopted the third clone.)

Vangemert said she felt an instant bond with the puppies, who look remarkably similar to Buhner—they even have matching lazy eyes. She’s so pleased by the results, in fact, that she plans to clone Buhner “again and again.”

“It really is worth every penny. And especially if you get two,” she said, before adding, “Once this gets around, the waiting list [for ViaGen clones] is going to get long.”

To the dismay of opponents, who consider cloning unethical and frivolous, the demand for pet cloning does indeed appear to be on the rise. In June of 2017, ViaGen had successfully cloned several dozen cats and dogs. By January of 2018, that figure had spiked to “over a hundred,” according to Melain Rodriguez, client service manager at ViaGen Pets, who also said that ViaGen is storing “thousands” of cell lines from which clients could clone their pets in the future.

Rodriguez said many clients opt to preserve their pet’s genetic line or proceed with cloning when the dog or cat is diagnosed with an illness or near death.

“I think they all know we’re not reincarnating the pet—it’s not that exact same pet over again, but it’s really the closest thing you could get to that pet,” she told *The Daily Beast*. “I think that unless you’ve had that special connection with a pet, you may not understand why you would ever want to clone a pet.”

Of course, cloning remains controversial—especially in the United States. A 2017 Gallup poll found 63 percent of Americans surveyed considered animal cloning “morally wrong” (a figure that rose to 83 percent for human cloning). The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) opposes animal cloning, and a policy statement of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) concludes: “The commercial cloning of animals is an abuse of humanity’s power over the animal world. And, like all abuses of power, it should be prohibited by law.”

Accepting that pets have shorter lifespans than humans is part of loving an animal—as is grief. Dr. Beck of the Center for Human-Animal Bonding at Purdue University points out that the human-animal bond has continued to evolve to the point that many people consider their pets family members, and the desire to clone a pet may be an unusual indicator of that deepening bond. But he feels attempting to make a copy of a pet minimizes the value of the original animal.

“There’s nothing wrong with being one of a kind,” Beck said. “That’s what I tell my two mutt dogs.”