

launched the "Missyplicity" project more than four years ago. Now, Missy is dead, euthanized last year because of an inoperable growth on her esophagus.

'This isn't Fluffy'

Sperling has redirected his funding to the Sausalito, California-based Genetic Savings & Clone, which he hopes will one day deliver a clone of Missy. Carlson said the company tells pet owners that cloning won't resurrect their pets and that the company has turned away some customers clearly interested in getting the same animal.

"In the short term, it's easy to exploit that misperception," he said. "But in the long term, it's unethical, and the pet owner will quickly find that, 'Hey, this isn't Fluffy, this puppy doesn't recognize me or know all the old tricks.'"

However, he said cloning could reproduce what a pet owner considers to be exceptional genes, particularly from an animal with unknown parentage or one that has been spayed or neutered.

"A small percentage of the population know exactly what they want and they want to stick with it -- another animal as similar as possible," Carlson said. "That's the motive we've encountered among our clients."

But disclaimers could go unheard by pet owners desperate to duplicate an animal, said University of Pennsylvania bioethicist Arthur Caplan, a critic of cloning and companies that purport to sell it.

He said animal lovers bond with pets because of their personalities and behaviors, not the genetic material that defines the immune system or blood type.

"The new cloned dog won't know the old tricks -- you have to teach them," Caplan said. "It doesn't matter how many genes they have in common."

With the Missyplicity funding gone, Texas A&M will continue trying to break new ground in cloning farm animals, wildlife and dogs, but it is finished with cats and any commercial pet venture. As for cc, the Texas scientists say she has shown no signs of genetic defects.

"She's been perfectly healthy and perfectly a cat ever since her birth," Kraemer said. "That's true of all our clones. You'd have to be told they were cloned in order to know" they weren't conceived the natural way.

Even so, cc has been protected by a sterile environment, a precaution to make sure she is healthy. Visitors are not allowed to pet her. That will change gradually when she moves into her new home with Kraemer and his wife, Shirley.

The Kraemers will introduce her slowly, first exposing her to people who have cats before letting her cavort with their other two felines. In time, they plan to breed cc and let her produce some carbon copies of her own. But they are looking for just the right tom.

"Our geneticists haven't gotten back with that information," Kraemer said.

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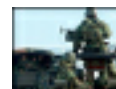


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