

Picturing the Paw-fect Pet Photo

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A picture taken at the Lafayette Community Park, one of Barbara Brady-Smith's favorite locations.

Photos provided

While taking pictures of people was good, she stated, "It was photographing animals that I really loved." Share the Joy Photography, a boutique business dedicated "to photographing pets" was created and Brady-Smith was off and running.

"Boutique' is a good word for it," Brady-Smith says, "because it's so specific to pets and their families." She takes pictures in her Lafayette home studio, in clients' homes and outdoors – "from Half Moon Bay to Bodega Bay," she says. "Most of what I do is local and the Lafayette Community Park is one of my favorite spots." She knows the park inside and out and knows "the best place to be at every time of day and every time of year" to capture the very best picture.

While Brady-Smith mostly photographs dogs and cats, she has taken pictures of just about every type of pet – birds, horses, bunnies and turtles.



One of Barbara Brady-Smith's favorite photos, showing off the personality of this family of pups.

Her most unusual pet photo was of a snake, she reported, "one that actually disappeared in my yard, only to be found several months later, just lounging in the sun." She's never been bitten or scratched, she states proudly. As one very satisfied client said, Brady-Smith's "compassion, kindness, patience and humor... make her a pleasure to work with. From the moment she met my dogs, they had a bond."

Brady-Smith also offers memory sessions for animals diagnosed with a fatal illness. "Often the animal isn't expected to live much longer and its owner wants a great picture to hold onto," Brady-Smith said. "We do whatever the animal is capable of – some dogs have had to be carried but they're still having fun, getting treats. And I'm creating an image that the owner will love forever.

"My process is very customer-oriented," Brady-Smith says. "I start with a consultation, meeting both the pet and its human, learning about the animal's personality and what types of pictures are wanted. After the photography session, I edit, again meet with the client and do the post-processing work." The final products are all top of the line, "museum quality," she said. "These photos are an investment; they are pictures that will last a lifetime."

In addition to photographing pets, Brady-Smith, a certified professional and master photographer, teaches others how to do the same. She typically teaches five sold-out classes a year, many of which are sponsored by various professional photographer organizations. She is also in the process of producing a book, "Hug Tails – Portraits of Therapy Pets," "documenting the amazing peace and joy these animals bring..." Additionally, Brady-Smith volunteers her photographic talents to non-profit animal groups to help them find forever homes for their residents.

Brady-Smith, who has won numerous international and national photography awards, acknowledges that she's absolutely reinvented herself, stating "I wake up every morning, so excited. I never would have imagined myself doing this – and loving it so much."

Tips and Tricks for a Great Pet Photo

A quick look at social media tells the story: everyone takes – and posts – pictures of their pets. Professional pet photographer Barbara Brady-Smith of Share the Joy Photography offers some tips and tricks for making these pictures truly share-worthy:

1. Prep your pet — a good brushing and wiping around eyes is a great way to start.
2. Watch your lighting. If outside on a bright day, head into the shade. The best light is in the morning or early evening, not in the middle of the day.
3. Calling your pet's name is not the best way to get its attention; it will likely cause it to run toward you. Instead, shake a treat bag, squeak a toy or say a favorite word ("treat," "ride" "walk") to get it to look at you.
4. Most people tend to take pictures looking down on their pet. Rethink your angles. Try getting on the ground and photographing up at your pet.
5. Owners often forget that pets can be emotional sponges. If you stress about picture taking, your pet will, too. Instead, laugh a lot, reward with treats and show your pet lots of love between pictures. This will make it fun for both of you!

