

In the Tokyo area, at least, salvation is at hand. The advent of professional "pet sitters," people who will come to your home to feed, exercise, clean up after, and spend time with your animals, has done away with most of the problems for owners and pets alike.

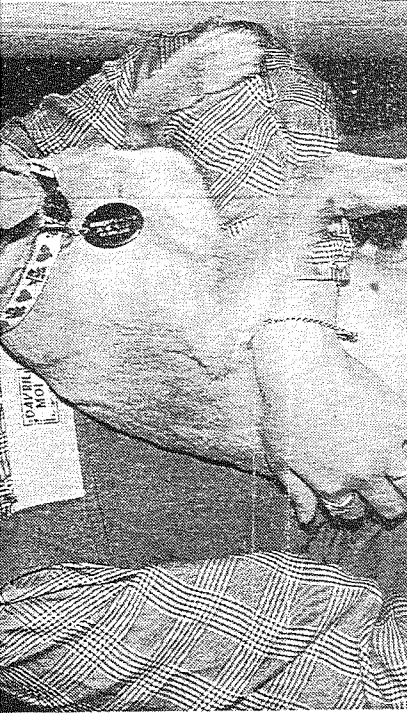
Pioneer of the pet sitters was Cat Sitter Nanri, a felines-only service begun over two years ago by Hideko Nanri, 35, in Tama City.

In December '92, Sachiko Takahashi, 27, in Tokyo's Katsushika Ward, began its canine counterpart, Bof Bof, and in April the following year, Teruyo Yamaguchi, 35, and her partner Kayoko Saito quit their jobs as translators to launch the all-purpose pet-sitting, plant-tending service Rusuban Wan-nyan out of Setagaya Ward.

Generally speaking, pet sitters work in the same way as babysitters. After the initial contact, they visit the owner's home, collect the key and get acquainted with the animal, learn what's where and receive any special instructions. Owners fill out an information card on the pet and sign a release form in the case of an accident or illness while the animal is being cared for by the sitter. Nanri also requires a certificate of vaccination for cats in her care.

The owner provides the food and pays transportation costs in addition to a daily charge. Sitters will usually travel within an hour of their base or charge an additional fee if they go further. Nanri also has helpers working out of different areas, which greatly increases her range of coverage.

Daily fees for cats are about ¥3,000 for the first cat and ¥500 per additional cat with slight variations between the services. For dogs,



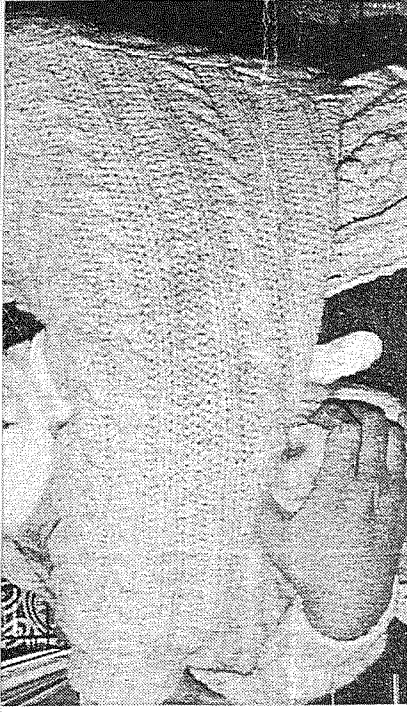
SACHIKO TAKAHASHI (left), holding a contented-looking Momi, is the founder of the canine sitting service **Bof Bof**. Momi is one of three dogs Takahashi took in as abandoned puppies. Hideko Nanri (right) pioneered the Tokyo pet-sitting business two years ago, with the start of Cat Sitter Nanri. Here she poses with one of her two cats, Dodo. PHOTOS BY BARBARA BAYER

¥4,000 depending on size, and ¥2,000-¥3,000 per additional dog. The fee includes daily feeding and a walk.

Takahashi of Bof Bof charges a set ¥2,000 hourly fee, regardless of the number of dogs. "I let the owner tell me how they want me to use the hour," Takahashi says, "whether they want me to play with the dog, take it for a walk, clean up after it, groom it, whatever." Takahashi will also keep dogs at her home — ¥3,500 for 12 hours, ¥5,500 for 24 hours.

Animal owners themselves, the founders of the three services were well aware of the need for pet-tending services. Rusuban's Yamaguchi says, "I have four cats of my own and whenever I'd take them to the vet to be cared for, their condition would start deteriorating after two days."

Nanri of Cat Sitter Nanri, agrees. "Cats really hate a change of environment. They'll refuse to go to the toilet, or stop eating and lose weight. Also when you keep animals at the vet's, they're put together with sick animals as well as healthy ones. That's stressful and in the worst cases they can catch something from another ani-



Takahashi bottle-fed the newborn for a month until she could successfully turn it over to its new mother.

Those who keep animals despite landlords' prohibitions needn't fear that calling in a pet sitter will blow their cover. Skilled accomplices in clandestine ownership, pet sitters know how to deal with house security or nosy neighbors and have raised garbage disposal to an art. Pet food boxes, cans and kitty litter are disguised or carried away from the scene. "Some of my customers," confides Nanri, "live in buildings that are strictly 'no pet apartments' so when I go to the door I can't introduce myself as Pet Sitter Nanri. I have to say I'm a relative or a friend checking on things."

In addition to business matters, both Nanri and Takahashi are concerned with raising the level of pet care in Ja-

pan and educating people on the importance of neutering and humane treatment of animals. Both are qualified Pet Care Advisers, designated by the Japan Pet Care Association, which offers a course in animal care and Japanese pet ownership laws.

"I want to reach not only those people who take good care of their pets but also those who don't," Takahashi says.

Nanri, too, is a staunch believer in education, especially of the young. She plans eventually to go into schools and teach children about animals and their care in the hope that this will serve to nurture a humane attitude, one that will carry over into the home, to their parents and the world at large.

For inquiries and reservations call: Cat Sitter Nanri, tel. (0423) 39-7002, fax. (0423) 38-6796; Bof Bof, tel. (03) 3838-3197; Rusuban Wan-nyan tel./fax. (03) 3487-2276.