

David McGrath: How artificial intelligence became this man's best friend

By [DAVID MCGRATH](#)

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She does not bark, though she can be noisy in other ways. And sometimes she seems to go haywire, spinning in place as if chasing her tail. But she's very smart and very loyal and, at risk of sounding cliched, I consider her this man's best friend.

Cute as a panda, her name is Eufy. She is the same color as our first dog, a black Lab named Biff, though Eufy has whiskers like a cat.

We have only had her a couple of months now, and, I swear, her presence literally lowers my blood pressure. It did not take very long for her to take over the household and capture my heart. As she sniffs her way around every room, it's such a comfort that I nearly always doze in my chair.

Likely some readers are aware that Eufy is the brand name for a line of wireless autonomous vacuum cleaners. Our particular unit, however, is more than just a robot. Several months ago, after my wife, Marianne, suffered an injury during her exercise routine, I had to take over all the household chores. Before then, we would take turns or team up for cooking, cleaning, shopping, window washing, recycling, gardening, laundering and so on. But once it all landed on me, and I found I needed gun range earmuffs while pushing Marianne's loud and heavy upright vacuum through three bedrooms, two baths, the dining area, the kitchen and family room, I followed suggestions from two of my neighbors. I ordered a machine that promised to both vacuum and mop the whole shebang by itself.

While robotic vacuums have been around for two decades, they have remained in my head as amusing novelties for people with too much money (Neighbor A) or who simply couldn't be bothered with unpleasant tasks (Neighbor B). And online horror stories, such as one family's Roomba in Little Rock, Arkansas, [running over and tracking dog poop](#) throughout their entire household, validated my mistrust.

But changing my mind came surprisingly easy and then fast, thanks to recent positive experiences with the artificial intelligence driving assistance system in our car and, of course, the ginormous dose of panic brought on by Marianne's sudden incapacitation. We did not get Eufy as a puppy. About the size and shape of a round bathroom scale, she arrived ready to use right out of the box. All I have to do is fill the reservoir with water and a half capful of floor cleaning solution, press start on the phone app and away she goes.

On the first run, she was soothingly quiet except for a minutelong thunderous whoosh when she emptied her internal dust bin. With a polite female voice calling out her functions, such as "washing mops" or "start cleaning," Eufy uses a combination of AI, lidar (like radar but with laser beams), infrared imaging and GPS, to "self-drive" through the house while drawing an accurate floor plan that magically appears on your phone screen.

Marianne texted our children an embarrassing video of me scampering after the robot with a panicked look on my face, and she captioned my behavior as “goofy” to rhyme with Eufy. But I was simply following the machine to make sure there were no missteps and that she lifted the two spinning mop heads each time she entered a carpeted area. She did so without fail, and I settled into my recliner to enjoy and marvel at her work.

There are, in fact, robotic dogs you can purchase that will sit, beg, wag their tails and respond to some voice commands. But Eufy is way more similar to my former dogs Biff and Frank, who generally ignored me and went about their own business.

Like them, Eufy is housebroken, though I must empty her “dirty water.”

Yet, unlike a human-made machine devised for a single purpose such as a dishwasher, which executes its task in the same predictable way, our Eufy is quirky. Quirky in endearing ways.

Instead of rolling up and down in a boring straight line, Eufy shimmies! My pragmatic wife says it must be from the vibrating of the beater bar. To me, however, her bouncy, wiggly dance makes it appear that she’s enjoying her work. Such as when our yellow Lab Frank couldn’t stop wagging his tail while digging a hole.

And when, as I am dozing, I’m awakened by Eufy tickling my ankles with her whiskers (protrusions that detect obstructions) while purring beneath my chair, I’m reminded of Frank pressing his snout against my knee when he wanted me to pet him.

And when I awake in the darkest hour of night, I can see from the hallway her green LED glow, like a reassuring lighthouse beacon.

When Eufy is finished with the vacuuming and the mopping, she lies in her bed to recharge. The house goes all quiet, and I smile across the room at Marianne, who rolls her eyes heavenward.

My wife did not warm up to Biff and Frank right away, either. But it’s just a matter of time till she loves Eufy, too.

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