

GRIEVING THE LOSS OF A PET

by Marilyn Remus

There is often no happier day than the one when a human welcomes a pet into their lives. If all goes well, the pet and the pet parent will spend many years together delighting in their special world that no other person or animal will be invited to share. Many memories will be made and it would seem that nothing will ever happen to interrupt this scene of happiness. However, there is always an end to this perfect picture and it is when bereavement and grief step forward and enter their world. One does not happen without the other.

The definition of bereavement is... "the total response pattern displayed by an individual following the loss of a significant object, usually a loved one".

The definition of grief is... "the emotional suffering caused by death."

The guardian of a pet that has died will instantly realize their life will never be the same. It has been written that the human grief process for companion animals is immediate, painful and sometimes will exceed the boundaries of grieving for human loss. A human will be deeply saddened by the loss of a relative or friend; however, the loss of a treasured pet may push the emotional balance to an entirely different level. It can leave one literally without words when an attempt is made to explain our feelings to others. This happens because humans who care for, protect, and love an animal experience not only the pleasure of their company and their animal dedication, but also proudly acknowledge the responsibility of being "the guardian", the one who will keep pets safe and loved and above all "protected". Being human we know that death will come. We know their life span is shorter than ours. We know we cannot stop it from happening. And yet, we push this understanding aside and somehow convince ourselves that the death of our cherished pet is a long way off. We know better, but we do it anyway. And so...we grieve the loss of our pets.

Unexpected grief: If the death is unexpected and

sudden, the grief process will likely be accompanied by a silent rage because the human will feel they were not given warnings of an impending loss such as illness or old age. This grief may be so intense that it leaves the pet's caregiver with no way to express their outrage. The first few days after the death will often find the caregiver unable to come to terms with the loss. The best way to explain this situation is to realize that the caregivers are likely in shock.

Anticipatory grief: This term is explained by knowing that the love object (the pet) is going to die before the actual death occurs. In this type of grief, a person experiences a more normal pattern of grief but before the actual death and these griever's sometimes have a shortened grief reaction after the actual death occurs.

Anticipated grief is a much more complicated set of circumstances as the human owners are acutely aware of a time frame they cannot push away. There can be a variety of scenarios but generally it is known that a pet may be facing euthanasia because of a terminal illness, or old age, or, in some cases, behavioral problems.

Euthanasia...Gentle Death - Painful Decision:

Pet loss and its associated grief often mean that the guardian has had to make the painful decision to use euthanasia in the best interest of their beloved pet. The word euthanasia literally means 'gentle death'. Your vet will evaluate your pet's physical condition, but only you can judge the way they act. If there is constant pain, stressful treatments are not helping, and the pet is uninterested in life and/or not responding to affection, it may be kinder to end their lives and not have them endure further suffering. If there is irreversible decline, you have the ability, and even the responsibility, to be merciful.

Euthanasia is accomplished by injecting an anesthetic overdose. Your vet may relax the pet by injecting a tranquilizer first. Once the anesthetic shot is given, the pet



Pumpkin

will become unconscious almost immediately and death comes quickly and painlessly.

As individuals react in many different ways, it is impossible to say that grief is lessened by having made the decision to use euthanasia as the last treatment for your pet; however, pet parents do have the knowledge that they cared enough to help their pets through to a "gentle death" when it was time for the pet to leave.

As pet parents, we cannot escape grief. It will be our constant companion in the early days and it will seem as if sadness will never leave our thoughts. So we need to dig deep and find the way that suits us to help get over the loss of our cat or dog...our good and gentle friends.

A few suggestions to handle grief...

Sharing with and talking to friends that have also lost a loved pet will help. People who have not allowed the love of a pet into their lives may express their disdain for your emotions and so it is best not to be around them.

Allow tears. They will not wash away your treasured memories, but are a physical way to release pain and mental anguish.

Go for a long walk and will yourself to remember all the good times.

Take care of yourself. Maintain good health. Your pet would not approve of the fact that you allowed yourself to become ill over their absence.

Sleep. If you cannot sleep, then read. If you don't feel like reading, then listen to music. Or watch television. Let your mind become involved in sound and in other thoughts to allow you to forget for a short time. Write. Put down all your thoughts and memories of your lost pet and keep this journal in a special place. Years later you may uncover this writing and it will bring great joy into your life to remember your dear pet.

Force your mind to think other thoughts. Remember poetry you once knew. Recite the mathematical time tables you learned as a child.

You will think that the end of the grieving period has come when suddenly a commercial on a TV show will put you, once again, in tears and memories will come flooding back. Your mind is healing itself and it will go quicker if you don't fight emotions, but allow yourself to remember your beloved companion.

The day will come when you look into the eyes of another animal in need and wonder if you should take that step to share your life with them. The time frame to make this decision is different for everyone and only you can know when the time is right. **Grief** will turn into more **love** to give to another pet.

Animals are such agreeable friends. They ask no questions, they pass no criticisms and they love truly.
George Elliot (1819 - 1880)...an English, Victorian novelist.



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PETS GRIEVING THE LOSS OF THEIR HUMAN:

Can cats and dogs show emotions to prove they love their humans?

by Marilyn Remus

Do pets grieve the loss of their human?? **If only we could speak dog or cat language** and ask them so we would know the answer to that question. Is it the human ego that makes people feel that their cat or dog has feelings for them? We talk to our pets constantly. We tell them our deepest thoughts. We ask them questions and give them answers. "Are you ready for dinner?" "Of course you are." "Would you like to go out for a walk?" "Great. Then let's go."

Go into a library and you'll find an entire section on observations and stories of people who will swear that their pet loves them deeply. Animals can be trained to perform all manner of tricks. Dogs seem to delight in that task. Cats - not so much. However, some cats can be trained to do very impressive tricks. Perhaps they can easily do them but they choose not to be bothered. **Again, if we could speak dog or cat language, we would know.**

Can cats and dogs show emotions to prove they love

in a corner. All of these animals are acting out their emotions, telegraphing to humans they have lost loved ones. They miss the human who cared for them. They miss their warmth; their smell; the sound of their voice, and their love. They are not okay. They are grieving.

Dogs can be trained to go into battle alongside their humans, often forming lifetime bonds. Television viewers will never forget the sight of a dog at the funeral of his human, who had given his life for his country. The dog lay, wilted and perfectly still, on the floor of the church beside the casket of his human, showing his undying love and devotion to the loved one the dog knew he'd lost. No clearer vision of animal love could be projected to prove pets clearly possess emotional feelings of love.

Does an animal who has lost his human ever recover? Pets thrive on attention and caring given by their person. For pets and humans alike, the passage of time allows

the loss to be "managed". Dogs seem to adjust faster than cats in their acceptance of their situation. Cats dislike change and will seem more aloof, but time is also in their corner to help the grieving process.

What is the best way to approach an animal who has suffered loss to gain their willingness to trust again?

PATIENCE, PATIENCE, and more PATIENCE. The immediate desire to scoop an animal up in your arms and shower them with love may cause them to immediately back up and return to isolation mode. Radiate calmness and talk to them in a soothing voice while looking at them, but not coming so close as to break the barrier of private space.

If the animal backs up or turns away,

continue to talk softly but then move away and grant them their privacy. After five or ten minutes, return to the animal, continuing to reach out to them with your voice. Animals sense kindness and, if they are ready to take a step forward to a new person, they will move toward you. The trick with every new animal is to let them come close enough to you to signal that you may touch them.

Of course we may never know if animals remember their previous humans. Most experts agree animals live in the present moment. So, as new pet parents, it is our joy to know we are giving a pet who suffered the loss of his or her beloved human an opportunity for happiness in a new home under the blanket of your love.

Know that **ALL CREATURES** crave and will continue to thrive in loving homes in an atmosphere of kindness and safety. You will find the experience of a wonderful new beginning goes for **pets** and **pet parents** alike. Good Luck!



their humans? Let's begin with something most pet parents are familiar with - the trip to the vet. Perhaps the first visit will go smoothly; however, after that, pets show their feelings and begin howling; or whining; or trying to hide or shaking the list is endless. They display a definite "I-don't-want-to-be-here-emotion." They know and they remember. **And if we could speak dog or cat language.....**

So it would seem physical activity is a key to sensing animal emotions. Usually happiness seems to be on display with wagging tails; joyful barking; loud, rolling purring and wiggling; yelping, meowing and howling - all exhibiting gleeful joy.

But... go into a shelter where animals who once displayed those happiness moves are now in cages and have lost their homes and their humans. Dogs seem to be angry as they continually bark and pace. Cats are silent with large, unsmiling eyes as they hide under blankets or behind a box

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION PICNIC



One of the highlights of the summer for The Royal City Humane Society was the Volunteer Appreciation Picnic held at Queens Park in late July. It was one of the hottest days of the summer but in spite of the weather, the event was very well attended.

Thanks to our sponsor, Bryon Fleming at Grizzly Construction, we were well fed and there were lots of cold beverages on hand to keep us hydrated. We enjoyed a great assortment of Pizza as well as cold drinks, fruit plates, cookies and many snack treats. When we were done with playing a good old fashioned game of Croquet, it was time for a gift exchange game called Right, Left. This was a hilarious game with wrapped gifts being passed back and forth during a tale featuring The RCHS and our volunteers. It was narrated with aplomb by Julia Schoennagel amid raucous laughter and goodwill. The story did not end until everyone received a mystery gift. We thank Grizzly Construction, Shoppers Drug Mart Sapperton, Starbucks Sapperton, Save-on-Foods Sapperton, VanPet, Greens n Beans, A&W and Landmark Cinema, and the many anonymous donors for their generous gift donations.



Our Summer Santa group of elves did a stellar job gift wrapping over 40 gifts.

We are looking forward to a Celebration of our Volunteers again in 2019, as we and our shelter and foster cats depend on them every day, and they never let us down. No matter what the weather, they show up at their assigned time and do the best for our feline residents. We also have many volunteers working outside of the shelter, in transportation, trapping and any other duties that make our "jobs" easier. So our thanks to you all!!



Finally, I would like to thank all our Board of Directors for working together to make this event such a success. ~Gail Beau, President



Royal City Humane Society

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The Royal City Humane Society is a registered, no kill animal charity based in New Westminster, BC. As the only charity animal shelter in New Westminster, RCHS campaigns against pet overpopulation and cares for stray, injured and abandoned animals by testing them for disease, sterilizing and tattooing and finding them new homes. RCHS is 100% volunteer run. Funding is obtained through various fund raising activities, memberships and donations, and all funds are spent on the welfare of the animals.