

Creature Comforts ~ Pet Loss

By Victoria K. Guerrero

Because pet loss has hit our community pretty hard this past year, we have decided to honor those who grieve, as well as those that are now gone in this month's Creature Comforts column. Our hearts go out to you!!

The bond between human and animal has been a strong one since the beginning of time. Some people seem to bond easier with an animal than with another human. Trusting an animal can be as simple as breathing; without judgment, animals offer a hearing ear, and a furry shoulder to cry on. They are the best secret keepers, and will listen for hours. They don't ask for much, and don't really seem to care what we look like, or even how we smell, and in most cases they will even worship the very ground we walk on. What a wonderful ego boost, thus the reason why it is so easy for humans to bond with an animal.

Letting go after such a bond is formed can be devastating. Greif can be confusing, painful, embarrassing, and stressful. Understanding that grief is natural when losing a pet is as important as accepting that there is no "correct" way of grieving--people all have their own way of letting go. Often well-meaning family and friends try to reason that it was 'just a dog' or 'just a cat' but to the owner of a very best friend, it was just that, a treasured friend. The grief over the loss of a pet can be as devastating as the death of a human family member, because in so many cases, our pets are our family.

Children also can have different

and sometimes emotional battles with the loss of a pet. Age can play a huge factor in how a child responds. Younger children may not yet grasp the finality of death, seeming to not care, while older children may seem to overreact due to finally comprehending what has happened. Honesty is always best with children. Trying to protect a child by telling him that the family dog ran away may backfire when the child finds out that in truth the dog has died. Allowing the child to have a part of letting go--perhaps a small burial site with flowers, accompanied by tears of hurt and pain--then lets the child keep fond memories of times past, and understand the meaning of closure.

The effect of loss may also be tragic for other family pets, and should be taken into consideration. After losing our beloved Danny Boy three years ago, it was touching how Danny's little sister Yoshie grieved his loss. Little Yoshie needed time, and consideration. I tried to distract her at times, taking her places with me, or getting her a new toy, these little things seemed to help us both heal our broken hearts.

Replacing a pet can be very hard for humans and the other pets in the home. It is best to take all family members into account, and make sure it

won't turn into a disaster. Some families choose to wait a while, or even a long while. Others choose to replace the pet as soon as possible; still others wish to never own a pet again. Whatever you and your family choose will be up to you, with every situation being unique.

True, the hardest part of giving your heart to a beloved pet, is deciding it is best to let go. Quality of life is an important factor in determining when an elderly or ill pet should be put down. If the quality of life is decent, then a wonderful time to spend saying goodbye can occur. The last precious days with a beloved pet will always be cherished.

people needing support. Enid Traisman is the wonderful director of the Pet Loss Support Group. She holds classes on grief, and has created many avenues of support, and healing. 503-234-2061 is a message line, or email Enid at petloss@dovelewis.org. This is a unique and free service that many in Oregon take advantage of in times of grief.

Also worth mentioning is the sadness that occurs from having to rehome, or relinquish a beloved pet. Life changes can often force the need of relinquishment, which at times can be as devastating as losing a pet in death.

Understanding the process of loss is such an important part of the journey to healing a broken heart from any kind of pet loss.

Creatures honors those in our community that have endured the loss of a beloved pet. As a special tribute to our friends and neighbors who have had to say good bye to a beloved pet, we

are currently installing a "Pet Memory" board. Please feel free to stop by with small pictures, drawings, and short stories of your pet. We will have the new board in place by the 10th of April, we look forward to seeing you and hearing your treasured stories at Creatures!



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These items were left outside the Vernonia Senior Center over the weekend of March 31st. Senior Center volunteers would like to remind the community that items left outside and uncovered are often ruined by inclement weather. The Senior Center must pay to get rid of items they can not use. Donations should be dropped off between the hours of 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM, Monday through Friday. For after hours drop-offs please contact Pauline at 503-429-5810 and she will be happy to arrange to meet you to accept your donation.

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