

The Pet Lover's Code

Dr. Alan Wolfelt

Though you should reach out to others as you journey through grief, you should not feel obligated to accept the unhelpful responses you may receive from some people. You are the one who is grieving, and as such, you have certain “rights” no one should try to take away from you.

The following list is intended both to empower you to heal and to decide how others can and cannot help. This is not to discourage you from reaching out to others for help, but rather to assist you in distinguishing useful responses from hurtful ones.

- 1. You have the right to grieve the death of a pet.** You loved your pet. Your pet loved you. You had a strong and profound relationship. You have every right to grieve this death. You *need* to grieve this death. You also need to mourn this death (express your grief outside yourself).
- 2. You have the right to talk about your grief.** Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk about your grief. Other pet lovers who have experienced the death of a pet often make good listeners at this time. If at times you don't feel like talking, you also have the right to be silent.
- 3. You have the right to feel a variety of emotions.** Confusion, anger, guilt, and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey after the death of a pet. Feelings aren't right or wrong; they just are.
- 4. You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits.** After the death of a pet, your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel like doing.
- 5. You have the right to experience “griefbursts.”** Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but it is normal and natural.
- 6. You have the right to make use of ritual.** After a pet dies, you can harness the power of ritual to help you heal. Plan a ceremony that includes everyone who loved your pet.
- 7. You have the right to embrace your spirituality.** At times of loss, it is natural to turn to your faith or spirituality. Engaging your spirituality by attending church or other place of worship, praying, or spending time alone in nature may help you better understand and reconcile your loss.
- 8. You have the right to search for meaning.** You may find yourself asking, “Why did my pet die? Why this way? Why now?” Some of your questions may have answers, but some may not. Ask them anyway.
- 9. You have the right to treasure your memories.** Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of a special companion animal. Instead of ignoring your memories, find ways to capture them and treasure them always.
- 10. You have the right to move toward your grief and heal.** Reconciling your grief after the death of a pet may not happen quickly. Remember, grief is best experienced in “doses.” Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you must forget that the death of a beloved pet changes your life forever.

Little Souls

By: Daryl Price

With clumsy legs and a silly heart,
They are asked to play the part
Of children when there can be none
Of our own, sweet daughter, or playful son.
When our hand is too firm our voice too cold,
They forgive us our sins and put love in our souls.

With sturdy legs and a willing heart,
They are asked to play the part
Of trusted friend with love to give
When too lonely seems our life to live.
With pleading eyes beneath a noble head,
Asking only for praise, or tattered bed.

With trembling legs and a trying heart,
They are asked to play the part
Of one who takes their last breath,
To willingly go before us in death.
They teach us how to live and die,
Never complaining, never asking why.
Tail slow to wag, purr too soft to be heard,
Their dying wish but one kind word.

With silent legs and a worn out heart,
They are asked to play the part
Of greeter to a better place,
Should our lives be so noble, so full of grace.

A long lost toy found beneath a chair,
Reminds us of how we used to care
For those of willing heart and sturdy legs,
At our tables who no longer beg.
For they have found a softer lap,
On which they wait while they nap,
With One who grants their souls to rest,
Souls indeed, because our Lord needs pets.

“A Living Love”

By: Martin Scot Kosins

If you ever loved an animal, there are three days in your life you will always remember...

The first is a day, blessed with happiness, when you bring home your young new friend. You may have spent weeks deciding on a breed. You may have asked numerous opinions of many vets, or done long research in finding a breeder. Or, perhaps in a fleeting moment, you may have just chosen that silly looking mutt in a shelter— simply because something in its eyes reached your heart. But when you bring that chosen pet home, and watch it explore, and claim its special place in your hall or front room— and when you feel it brush against you for the first time— it instills a feeling of pure love you will carry with you through the many years to come.

The second day will occur eight or nine or ten years later. It will be a day like any other. Routine and unexceptional. But, for a surprising instant, you will look at your longtime friend and see age where you once saw youth. You will see slow deliberate steps where you once saw energy. And you will see sleep when you once saw activity. So you will begin to adjust your friend’s diet— and you may add a pill or two to her food. And you may feel a growing fear deep within yourself, which bodes of a coming emptiness. And you will feel this uneasy feeling, on and off, until the third day finally arrives.

And on this day, if your friend and God have not decided for you, then you will be faced with making a decision of your own on behalf of your lifelong friend, and with the guidance of your own deepest Spirit. But, whichever way your friend eventually leaves you, you will feel as alone as a single star in the dark night.

If you are wise, you will let the tears flow as freely and as often as they must. And if you are typical, you will find that not many in your circle of family or friends will be able to understand your grief, or comfort you. But, if you are true to the love of the pet you cherished through the many joy-filled years, you may find that a soul— a bit smaller in size than your own— seems to walk with you at times during the lonely days to come. And at moments when you least expect anything out of the ordinary to happen, you may feel something brush against your leg— very, very lightly.

And looking down at the place where your dear, perhaps dearest, friend used to lay— you will remember those three significant days. The memory will most likely be painful and leave an ache in your heart. As time passes, the ache will come and go as if it has a life of its own. You will both reject it and embrace it, and it may confuse you. If you reject it, it will depress you. If you embrace it, it will deepen you. Either way, it will still be an ache.

But there will be, I assure you, a fourth day when, along with the memory of your pet and piercing through the heaviness in your heart, there will come a realization that belongs only to you. It will be as unique and strong as our relationship with each animal we have loved and lost. This realization takes the form of a Living Love. Like the heavenly scent of a rose that remains after the petals have wilted, this Love will remain and grow and be there for us to remember. It is a love we have earned. It is the legacy our pets leave us when they go. And it is a gift we may keep with us as long as we live. It is a Love which is ours alone. And until we ourselves leave, perhaps to join our Beloved Pets— it is a Love we will always possess.