

THE PET CONNECTION

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When It's Time To Say Good-Bye

I often like to choose topics that have a personal meaning to me when writing these articles for The Pet Connection and this month's topic happens to be especially personal. My husband and I had to say good-bye to our 15 year old Jack Russell terrier Phoebe this week. She'd been suffering for the last three years with the dog versions of Parkinson and dementia. It got me to thinking that sharing about our experience could help others who some day are faced with the challenge of lovingly letting go of their pets.

In many of our homes pets enjoy a status of family membership that would make children in some countries envious. Our pets eat with us, sleep with us, exercise with us, run errands with us, watch TV with us, go on vacation with us, and in general spend an incredible amount of time with us. So it is no wonder that there is a big hole in our lives when they leave. You can never completely prepare yourself for that loss, but there are things that you can do to help soften the blow.

First of all, enjoy your pets while you can, don't take them for granted. You never know how long you are going to have them, and memories are so much sweeter without regrets. Take pictures, lots of pictures! And not just when your pets are young, but when they are in their senior years as well. There's nothing more comforting than having a bunch of pictures to reminisce over; to laugh and cry and say "remember when" over.

Sometimes we lose a pet suddenly, sometimes we lose them to the long process of aging or a debilitating illness. In either case, thinking ahead about how you would like to handle certain details of saying good-bye can be a helpful thing. For instance, would you feel better to have your pet cremated or would you like to bring her or him home to bury? In the case of our Phoebe we chose to bring her home and bury her in our garden. It gave us closure to keep her with us that way, but for some people the constant reminder might be too painful. Perhaps a pet cemetery would be a better choice for some. Making some of these decisions ahead of time will free your heart to focus on the more important emotional needs of saying good-bye.

If it becomes necessary for you to make a decision about euthanasia you have options. There are mobile veterinarians who can come to your home if that would be easier for you or your pet. And don't hesitate to ask your own veterinarian if they will make a house call to help you say good-bye to a pet, most likely they would be willing to do so. One last thing I need to tell you about euthanasia, and this is from several personal experiences, it is an amazingly dignified and peaceful process. I encourage you to stay with your pet, and be holding or talking to them when they pass, you will be very glad you did. Also, I have found that snipping a locket of my pet's hair to keep has been very comforting.

Sometimes there are other people and animals to consider when it's time to say good-bye to a pet. Consider how you can help your children or other pets to have closure with the loss. In our case we chose to have our other dog Joey present during both the euthanasia and burial of our Phoebe. We decided that since we were always together as a family we should share this experience as a family.

Joey actually licked Phoebe on the face before we buried her, and he has not had any problems adjusting to her absence, which is pretty amazing considering they were raised together for 15 years.

The last thing that I would like to talk about is perhaps the hardest. Please be willing to say good-bye to a suffering pet even when you don't want to. This is not about you, this is about them. They are trusting you to be strong enough to make a sacrificial decision on their behalf. Real love does not hold on because it can't bear to let go, instead it seeks what is best for the one loved.

I hope that my sharing on this topic has been helpful and not too depressing. Saying good-bye to a beloved pet will never be an easy thing, and no one likes to think about it ahead of time. If nothing else I hope this article encourages you to go find that wonderful critter friend of yours and give him or her a special hug today! Part of the healing process is sharing your grief with friends, so I'd like to share a baby picture and a senior picture of our precious Phoebe with all of you. We will see you soon sweetheart! Love, Mommie