

When We Have To Say Goodbye

By Mary Lou Randour, Ph. D

What has felt like a void may become more like an absence. And, in time, the absence can evolve into a presence.

When my dog, Toshi, died three years ago, I found some solace in this poem. I did not always heed the call “do not weep,” but the idea of finding his presence in the every day beauty and vibrancy of life offered me some comfort.

Anyone who has loved animals also has suffered their losses. And facing the loss of a beloved animal companion shares all the challenges of facing any other loss. For me, and for many others, having some sort of memorial ceremony was part of the grieving process. Gary Kowalski’s remarkably helpful book, *Good-bye, Friend*, especially the poems in it, guided me through that difficult time. Other reading, such as the books noted in this issue’s Book Bag (see page 20), offer a context for facing loss.

There is no “right” way to grieve — whether the loss is that of an animal or human companion. Everybody will do it in her or his own way. Some individuals may want to grieve privately; others may find solace in sharing their sorrow with friends, as I did. Making a memorial contribution in your animal companion’s name to a worthy cause can supply some meaning to a loss. So can taking an action in honor of one’s departed pet on behalf of other animals — such as writing a letter to an elected official, participating in a Spay Day program, or volunteering for an animal protection group.

Social acknowledgement of one’s loss

can be an important factor in the grieving process. It helps when others recognize the magnitude of our loss, and respect it. Society has gained a deeper understanding of the bond between humans and their animal companions, and as a consequence we are more likely today to encounter others who are sympathetic to our loss. Such respect and acknowledgement helps.

No matter how much support we receive at the death of our animal companion, I don’t believe there is any way to completely recover from a loss — the pet will always be loved and missed. But what has felt like a void may become more like an absence. And, in time, the absence can evolve into a presence. We can enjoy a vital and active memory of our shared life with our animal friend, one that enshrines the love that will never die. 🐾

*Do not stand at my grave and weep.
I am not there, I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow.
I am the diamond glint on snow.
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you wake
in the morning hush,
I am the swift, uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circling flight.
I am the soft starlight at night.
Do not stand at my grave and weep.
I am not there. I do not sleep.*

— Anonymous



Toshi



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