



Dealing with the loss of a pet



Nothing ever prepares you for the loss of your beloved pet. Growing up on acreage as a kid, I was surrounded by pets that loved to run. They had trees, dams, and dirt beneath their feet. The earth was their home. As a 12 year old, I loved to roam with my blue cattle dog called 'Mate'. He was more than a mate, he was my brother. We would go on incredible journeys together, eat sandwiches, and talk to each other in only a way that a pet owner is able to. We were inseparable.

Dad brought him home as a 6 week old fluff ball that would fall over his own feet when he played, have weet-bix left on his chin after breakfast, and howl like a baby during the night for his mother. He would cheekily get out sometimes as a puppy between the fences, pull all the towels off the washing line and bake himself in the sun on them. He had a personality that belonged in Hollywood.

Mate was born to chase things. If something was moving, he was nipping at its heels or hurtling his little body in an attempt to catch it. He would often get a kick from horses but get back up and go again because he was a warrior. I used to walk Mate on his lead when there was traffic around. I could not stop him from running. On a Sunday afternoon, I took him for a long walk. It was a quiet day, one that the clock seemed to putter. Sensing he wanted to get off the lead, I set him free.

We had walked around a bend in the road together and he was cruising along beside me. He looked satisfied with his tongue out and cheeky grin he seemed to soften me up with. I could hear a car coming behind me so I moved further away from the roadside. Mate was still there. As the car passed, like a bullet my four-legged friend was off trying to catch it. A second car whizzed passed me not long after. There was the sound of car tyres skidding, a hollow crunching sound amidst the grey smoke that filled the air, and my best mate doing somersaults beneath the wheels.

You do not think in this instance, you just 'do'. I did what my mate did and hurtled my body towards that car, fell to my knees, and buried my head on his little belly that had no life left in it. I screamed in pain and howled and howled and howled. Plaintively I wanted to go with him....

Anyone that has ever loved a pet regardless of the species understands the magic they propel into our lives. Our basic roles as a steward for or pets are to care and nurture and receive love in return. We also discover a side to ourselves that we cannot inject into human interaction through our pets. We feel innocent and have a grace that we cannot often find in people. I love the fact that I can talk like a child to animals and get away with it. So when a pet is lost, we lose that ability to feel whole. We come home to an empty house or lose that

flutter of knowing our pet is waiting behind the front door as we put the key in the lock. We see or hear things that remind us of our pet, whether it is a bark in the street from another dog, a tussle of cat hair on the carpet, or in my case; chewed up inner soles from most of my shoes. We do not want to let go but we know we have to. Getting over this initial stage is difficult.

Feelings we may encounter

- Acute grief; desolation, overwhelming misery, irrationality
- Anger; blaming or acting on the loss on other's (e.g., veterinarian, family members, friends)
- Denial; refusing to acknowledge the death of our pet
- Disbelief; acknowledging the death but being too distraught to accept the fact initially
- Guilt; feeling responsible for the death of your pet
- Depression; the feeling of misery upon ourselves over the death of a pet. Losing the ability to care, feeling numb and indifference. Can be prolonged or intense.

If you have just lost your pet and are identifying with some of these symptoms it is important to understand that they are natural thoughts and emotions. There is help out there if you need to gain a better understanding or even just to talk through the problems you are facing. Not everybody understands what you are going through so if you don't feel comfortable talking to a relative or friend, consider contacting a telephone counselling service or a grief support group.

◦ Lifeline - 13 11 14

◦ Mensline - 1300 78 99 78

◦ GriefLine (12pm-3am) - 03 9935 7400

◦ Kids Helpline -1800 55 1800

◦ Suicide Helpline - 1300 651 251

The following website provides information about palliative care, pre-euthanasia guidance and preparation, peaceful home euthanasia and bereavement support as well as arrangements for burial or cremation, <http://mybestfriendonline.com.au/>. Another useful website about pet loss is; <http://www.ourwonderfulpets.com/>

Be kind to yourself. What you shared with your pet is forever lasting...

By Mark Ryan

