



PET TALK

By Dr. Wayne Rush

IN MEMORY

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Pets play an integral part in our lives. They show us unconditional love and affection every day. They share our homes, our lives, and sometimes our beds. Our pets may be the first living things we interact with each morning and the last thing we attend to each night. Sometimes we don't realize how much we love them until they are suddenly not with us. This month, I am dedicating this article to our family pet, Ava, who died unexpectedly at the end of June. As a veterinarian, I often have to counsel owners and help them through the loss of a pet. Experiencing this loss first hand reminded me just how difficult it can be. It is especially difficult if the death is unexpected, if it is the first time losing a pet, or if there are children involved. It is hard to lose a member of one's family no matter what the situation.

Pets have a lifespan much shorter than we do. So it is inevitable that all pet owners will sooner or later have to decide when an aging or terminally ill pet has to be put to sleep. A common question I get from pet owners centers around euthanasia and how will they know when it is time to let go. I tell them that the time is different for each pet and each owner. There are no black and white rules to govern when the time is right. You will know when the time is right. You will look into your pet's eyes and know. Then you will be at peace with the decision. At the time of our first conversation on the subject, many of my clients do not seem to understand. But when that fateful day comes, I have yet to have a client make a wrong decision.

This month I want to introduce you to a friend, Christine Hunsaker. She owns a company called Paws Whiskers and Wags located nearby in Decatur. PWW handles all of our animal hospital's deceased pet needs. I have known Christine for years and have been amazed at the compassion and sensitivity of not only her, but also of her entire staff. I think you will enjoy hearing about the experience she had when she lost a pet, which led her to starting her company a number of years ago.

Oh, and by the way in case you're wondering—I do

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*Krystal, a few years ago, with our beloved "DARROWBY'S AVALANCHE",
Sept. 2006 - June 2009.*



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believe there is a place in heaven for our pets and if we are lucky enough we will join them one day.

Here is Christine, in her own words:

"The loss of a pet is probably the toughest journey I have experienced as an adult so far, (noting of course that I have not lost a parent). Our company was started in February 2004 when our little dog Casey died in my arms. It was midnight on a Sunday and I was due to catch a plane the next day. Casey was 14 years old and a big part of our family.

While I had been in the cremation and funeral business the past 20-years, (I even grew up living in a funeral home), I was unprepared for the loss of Casey. More so, I was unprepared, disappointed and even shocked at our experience over the next 24 hours as we unsuccessfully attempted throughout the night to gain assistance in helping us with our grief and to have Casey cremated.

This experience led me to create Paws, Whiskers & Wags, Your Pet Crematory. I wanted to create an organization that allows peace-of-mind for all pet owners in their time of grief. I wanted to create a comforting environment where pet owners, when possible and if it was their desire, could be present and say goodbye.

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Christine Hunsaker

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For many of us, pets are important members of our families, and the loss of a pet can be as traumatic as it was for me. Therefore, end-of-life decisions represent the final acts of love and kindness we can show our pets.

In the process of developing our facility I thought of my own experience and translated lessons learned into the superior way we perform our service. I determined the highest standards and then developed policies to meet them. For example: Everything happens under one roof with a 100% full disclosure and a comfortable environment—this way pets do not have to be transported elsewhere.

I made sure pet owners would have the peace-of-mind that I would want for myself: the knowledge that the last decision they made for their pet was the right one.

Because of news stories that people have read about disreputable organizations, I made sure that we would take the extra step of taking care of one pet at a time and use a sophisticated tracking system to assure each owner who requests an urn that they need not have any doubt that they are really receiving their own pet.

We personally answer the phone 24 hours a day and have helped many pet owners by providing transportation to our facility. Our pricing structure is fair and reasonable.

In summation, in one's time of grief, you should be able to trust arrangements to reliable professionals and not have to be unnecessarily burdened with other worries and concerns. It was in that spirit that I created Paws, Whiskers and Wags."

Dr. Wayne Rush owns and operates the DeKalb Animal Hospital.

Christine Hunsaker, owner and founder of Paws, Whiskers & Wags was born and raised in the funeral business, holds and International MBA.. She can be reached at:
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