

Honoring your pet

Whether you are preparing for the loss of your beloved pet or have already said goodbye, honoring their memory is something that is so important to all pet parents. Many decide long before that moment occurs what they want to do to memorialize and remember their pets while keeping them close to their hearts forever. This is such a meaningful part of processing the immense loss of their physical being.

The first thing to know and understand is that as a pet parent, we are all different and as such, our needs vary significantly. Some may need very simple ways to treasure our companion's memory and others may wish to have very elaborate memorializations. Both are beautiful ways to pay tribute to a very special life.



One benefit of hospice planning is the ability to consider options for this homage. Many pet parents choose to start this tribute while saying goodbye to their pets and I have been witness so many beautiful choices. There have been pet parents who have set up photographs highlighting the lives they have shared together from puppy and kitten hood to the present day. Candles and incense burning as well as music either pre-recorded or even played by the pet parent themselves have filled rooms and caused tears to swell with grief and joy. I have seen pet parents cuddle their beloved in their laps, lay with them on the floor enveloping them fully into their own bodies, and in some cases comfort from afar when some pets have chosen out of the way spaces to make their transitions.

Others choose to continue to honor their pets after they have died with gravesite and memorial services. Again, I have been blessed to have been present at so many different types of services. Some were religious, others not, but always they reflected the deep love and incredible bond the pet parent had with their pet. Those in attendance felt that bond with the words that were spoken, the music that was played, the aroma of flowers in the air and the taste of the delicious dog shaped cakes that were eaten! And let's not forget the sound of all the invited pets in attendance as well-do they ever enjoy these events!

During hospice planning, I try to make suggestions for ways a pet parent might pay tribute to their pet as for so many, it is very hard to truly "think" during that time. I am not always aware if these recommendations come to fruition but regardless of whether they run with the idea, modify it or completely scrap it, I know that I have at least given them somewhere to start.

But always, no matter whether there is a formal tribute or not and whether it occurs before, during or after the death of the pet, that bond is always at the heart of it all. And truly, at the end of the day, once the music is turned off, the cake is gone, and the guests (two and four legged) have departed, the bond is still there as nothing can break that bond. Nothing. That bond truly transcends time and they will always be with you. Always.