

FAREWELL WITH LOVE

WHEN YOU LOSE A BELOVED ANIMAL

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For My Beloved Children

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“If there are no dogs in Heaven, then when I die I want to go where they went.” — Will Rogers.

DEDICATION

This book was inspired by a deep and abiding respect for all of life. To pay final respect to a beloved animal is a holy act. It shows gratitude for their boundless loyalty and for the great joy they bring into our lives. To show reverence for their existence in death is to truly honor them.

This book is dedicated to all the animals I have been fortunate to have known and loved in my life, and also in the lives of my children and grandchildren.

It was an honor to know and love each and every one of them. We were filled with wonder, excitement, and gratitude for their companionship, the lessons they taught us, and how they enriched our lives.

They comforted us, made us laugh, played with us, danced with us, and shared our beds. Sometimes they tripped us and made us look silly; sometimes they stole the food off our plates and ran off with our belongings. They spilled things, dragged mud

There is no question we were better persons for sharing our lives with them. We will be forever grateful. What a treasure to share our lives with so many incredible animals.

and dirt into the house, jumped on the furniture or the counters, and we always had the feeling they were laughing when they outsmarted us.

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Not all the animal stories in this book are about their passing, and our grieving their loss. Some stories show that animals grieve too, and they miss us when we are gone and they show it in different and varying degrees. They have opinions, make choices, have needs, and feel deep emotions; they are grateful when we help them, have strong commitments to their animal families, and some even show they have a sense of humor. It is no wonder that they grieve also, if they lose us, their animal friends, or anyone in their animal families.

Mostly, I hope those who read this book will be inspired to get involved, be aware, reach out in their communities, and find out if there are any animals suffering that could be rescued—perhaps you could find them a home. Call your local animal shelter or rescue organizations and offer to help them.

I am hoping also that readers will speak out against any and all forms of animal cruelty and exploitation, and that they will speak out to their friends, teaching all children with whom they come in contact to do the same.

Lastly, I hope that many readers will accept this challenge and the responsibility to be good stewards of all of God's creatures. There is no question that we are all richer for the joy they bring us; and for making us better persons. Imagine what kind of a world we would be living in, if we extended the kind of unconditional love to each other that animals so effortlessly and naturally extend to us.

In Gratitude to:

Prince I, a black Labrador from a litter of eleven puppies

Prince II, a golden retriever who loved the snow

Freckles, a cocker Spaniel who loved to cuddle

Caruso, a canary who sang when he heard the sewing machine

Alice, a goose who loved to ride in our convertible with her head out the window and a red scarf around her neck flying in the wind

Mungo, the squirrel monkey who would open the refrigerator and help herself to food, ride on the back of the dog, pull the cat's tails, and would also answer the telephone and scream into it

Prince III, a golden retriever who played in the woods every day with a red fox puppy when he was a puppy

Snoopy, a forest cat who got in lots of fights with forest critters and had the scars to prove it

Johnny, a baby rescue raccoon who lived in our house until he was old enough to return to the wild, and always jumped up to the sink and turned on the faucet to wash his food before he ate it

Matilda, a mommy cat who lived to be twenty two years old

Bumseh, a Siamese cat who was so gorgeous he should have been a movie star

Carmen, a chicken who learned to type her name with her beak on an old typewriter

Peanut, the pinto pony who loved apples

Rusty, Our horse who came into the house once, walked over to the coffee table, and ate the flowers off the chrysanthemum plant before we could get him out (he also would stick his big head into the bathroom window when we were brushing our teeth, just to check things out)

Alexander, the baby goat who slept with my daughter in her bed while they shared milk from the same baby bottle

Sydney, the peacock who would wander into the house and sit on the sofa with his long tail, so there was no room for anyone else to sit there

Charlie, a giant cockroach who lived under our house, but came out every morning to share crumbs from our muffins

Thumper, the lop-eared rabbit, who was litter box trained, and also loved to chase the cats

Yowgin, a grey cat who loved chasing squirrels

Rex, the German Shepherd rescue dog who had been horribly abused and who adored playing with kids

Muffin, the Chihuahua, another rescue dog who had been abandoned and found by the side of the road in a snowstorm, starving and shivering

His wife, Lilly, another Chihuahua who was badly abused, was rescued from the dog pound two days before her execution day

Daisy, the glamorous Norwegian Forest cat who was rescued in a tree at two weeks old after her family was killed by a Rottweiler

Henry, the pigeon we found in a snowstorm with a broken wing, who flew back to his family in two months, after living in the house while his wing was healing

Nahla, the princess rat who lived in a Victorian doll house with her rat husband and two rat children. She would run up the stairs, go out on the balcony and stand up on her back legs to beg for treats while she held on to the railing with her front paws

Her husband, Alexander, who always came running when he was called, who liked to take bubble baths in our bathtub

Sam, the black garter snake who escaped and was never found

Then there were the numerous goldfish, turtles, lizards, salamanders, mice, moles, frogs, toads, guinea pigs, other rats, and twin baby squirrels whose mother had died and who were bottle fed and released.

We delighted in our chickens of all different breeds with crested heads who laid blue-, pink-, and yellow-colored eggs for us. We also had a beautiful white German Shepherd who loved to listen to music—she learned to sing duets with my daughter when she played her flute.

And, finally our most cherished and beloved dog of all, an incredible Black Labrador named **Petunia**. She was a rescue dog with a heart of gold. She loved other dogs, cats, and even let Nahla, the princess rat, sleep on her back to take a nap. Petunia took delight in pulling my five-year-old granddaughter to school in a wooden wagon while she sat on a pillow with Muffin, the Chihuahua, and Nahla on her lap, and she was always careful not to walk too fast so they wouldn't all tip out on the sidewalk.

Petunia loved to play, and of course *never slept in a dog bed*, but only in “people” beds. She loved to play dress-up and to pose for the camera and begged for treats with her eyes. Everybody who ever met her loved her. She was one in a million.



CONTENTS

Dedication	v
In Gratitude to:	vi
Foreward	xiii
The Devastating Loss.....	1
Three Animal Therapy Stars	4
Euthanasia: the Subject That Nobody Wants to Talk About.....	7
Dealing With the Finality of Death	13
Do Animals Have Souls?	17
Honoring Your Animal's Life.....	21
Family Remembrance Ceremonies	23
A Few Suggestions	24
The Rainbow Bridge.....	27
Ethics and Reverence for Life	31
More Treasured Animal Tales.....	35
The Dog Who Was a Matchmaker	35
Amanda and the Best Dog in the Whole Wide World.....	41
Maria and the Parrot Who Became a Catholic	45
Kazzy, the Therapist in a Camel's body.....	47
Karen, My Friend	49
The Whale Who Changed the World.....	54
Conclusion.....	57
Books and Writings to Inspire Animal Stewardship	59
Suggested Reading List	59
A Message From the Author	74



FOREWARD

I felt compelled to write this book, especially for children, but also for those fortunate and special adults who still have the soul and spirit of a child. They are the ones who really understand how devastating it can be to a child to lose a beloved animal.

All my life I have been in awe of the animals I have known and loved. Some small, some large, some with fur, some with feathers; some with slimy skin, hard shells, or bumpy skin; some with hooves; some that barked, sang, oinked, or meowed; but all warmed my heart. I cannot conceive of my life without all of them.

As a child I learned that animals are special in so many ways. They all had a purpose. They all had a message. There is no such thing as an animal that is without meaning or without a reason for being.

Every one of them has a divine spark, unlike a plastic toy made in a factory with no life. They often seem to know what we need from them. In such a fast-paced, hectic world that is so superficial, so lacking in compassion and so insensitive to our emotional and psychological needs, animals can often grant us the love, affection, and companionship we need just to get through the day.

How delightful it is to come home and find a dog joyfully running to the door, with tail wagging furiously, giving doggie kisses and boundless enthusiasm? They greet us and let us know how much we were missed. It is priceless

beyond words. Our more reserved kitty family members wait for precisely the right time to greet us by waiting until we sit down in our favorite chair. Then they jump into our laps, purring their “welcome home” to us. If you happen to be reading a paper or using your laptop they will think nothing of walking on the paper and sitting down on exactly the paragraph you are reading, or walking across your keyboard to let you know that being ignored is not an option. As people who have cats as companion animals know, they have one philosophy: cats rule!

Our animals always notice when we are gone and they always delight in our return. Their intuition is legendary. They know when we’re sad or depressed or scared, and they seem to know just when we need attention or affection. They give unconditional love when we need it the most, because that is all they know. They are masters at comforting us. I believe in my heart, they make us better people because they teach us how to love. They don’t ask much

*Joy is a powerful
and indispensable
part of healing.
Gratitude and joy go
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in return for their boundless loyalty. And the nice thing is they don’t criticize us or hurt our feelings like many of our human friends. They just want to be part of our lives, and they live for our attention and recognition.

When that special bond is broken at the time of death, it leaves a huge hole in our hearts. The tears flow when we remember all the good times and we yearn to have them back in our lives, if only for a moment. The greater truth is that when we realize how deep that bond was and how they filled an empty spot in our hearts, the longing for them can come crashing down like a fierce thunderstorm. That life we have shared with our beloved animal is over. Our lives will change, and we are left with an aching heart, wondering if life will ever be the same.



When we have a beautiful relationship with an animal that has enriched our lives, we are at a loss initially to comprehend their death. Adults who are intuitive and caring can use this as a significant teaching moment to teach children about the finality of death. Teaching children to reach inside to re-

flect and express sorrow can help immeasurably. Let them know that they are not swimming in that sea alone.

That is why I think addressing this issue is so important. Teaching children it is normal and acceptable to cry and be sad is giving them permission to grieve on a deeper level. That's when healing miraculously begins. Adults must also be open about their grieving and set an example to children: grieving is normal and it is good to grieve. Grieving proves beyond a doubt how important the bond was with an animal and how connected we had become to that animal. The most profound response to intense grief is to teach children gratitude for having an animal in their lives. Being filled with gratitude is the key. It puts everything in perspective.

Our hearts can be bursting with sadness and, at the same time, overflowing with gratitude. It is not contradictory to allow ourselves to grieve by being grateful. The natural consequence of gratitude is the manifestation of joy. Gratitude triggers immense joy. It is genuine and a very real and spontaneous reaction when we start sharing stories, allowing our minds to wander back in time, and recollecting all the joys that our dear animal brought to our children and family.

So, when your heart is aching, think of your beloved animal up there in heaven with all the angels and allow your heart to sing again.

Joy is a powerful and indispensable part of healing. Gratitude and joy go together when you are struggling to heal. It helps the pain to subside, and it honors our animals' lives by giving them great meaning. It also opens our hearts and allows us to fully embrace what we lost in a new light. The past we had together with our animals will always be part of our life stories. It will be a permanent part of who we are. No one can ever take that away from us.

We will carry our precious animal tucked away in our hearts forever, and we will always have instant recall of our times together.

When we realize that they were in our lives but for a brief time, and we recognize that they indeed had a purpose and that they came with a message, we can allow the gratitude and the joy to wash over us like a gentle rain. Ask any child what the animal's message was, what his or her animal's purpose was—to be on this earth, and in his or her life—and he or she will tell you. Children always know and they know it with all their hearts. Adults who have kept that special wisdom in their hearts and minds will know, too. It is a gift, and it is a given that they know.

These precious beings we loved so well, that were entrusted into our care, deserve to be honored in their passing. That is why it is so essential to honor them in creative, unique, and imaginative ways. Rituals are crucial, especially for grieving children. Rituals heal many a broken heart, and personal involvement by the children in the planning and implementation of what your family decides to do, has a profoundly positive effect on them. They feel empowered because they are actively involved and doing something for their animal. They feel relieved and less helpless (some children have told me these rituals actually made them happy). They know it is their last chance to do something nice for the animal they loved. In most cases, these remembrance ceremonies or celebrations of the animal's life can be blessed and beautiful events, ones to which we look back on in the years to come as acts of reverence and respect.

I am convinced that God has a special place in heaven for all His animals. After all, they are His creations and He bestowed upon us the privilege of having these magnificent and unique creatures in our lives as His gift to us. So, when your heart is aching, think of your beloved animal up there in heaven with all the angels and allow your heart to sing again.

