on:

Pets, Mourning, the Body, & Death Positivity

A Collective Resource Guide on Pet Passing
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"in periculis audax"
"bold in danger"

Dedication

This zine is tenderly dedicated to my handsome, take-no-shit cat Sosuke (2014-9/2/2019) and my equally as handsome Grandpa Butch (2/27/44-9/9/19).

Thank you, Sosuke, for opening my eyes to death and preparing me to serve as an empathetic source of love, positivity, and knowledge for my family and anyone else experiencing loss.

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This zine discusses the pet death process, including processing of the corporeal body post-death, loss, and grief.

Please read with your own wellbeing and safety in mind.
Introduction

This project emerged from my creative energies needing a release, a purging, and a direction after my family cat Sosuke was hit by a vehicle. His death was unexpected and jarring. I had been pouring my energies into nesting and creating a warm, conducive home for us both. I had taken him to the vet two days earlier. I expected him to be in my life for the long haul. I had bigger adventures planned for us.

Instead, on 9/2/19 my neighbors tenderly informed me that Sosuke’s body was around the corner from my apartment. Someone had gently moved him off the sidewalk, tucked under the leafy overhangs of a shrub. To see his body, hours after his death, was jarring. It viscerally pulled emotions out of my gut that came out through a very embodied grieving process. I was not prepared to see my loved one’s corpse, especially in such a violent and unfamiliar manner; I’m not sure anyone ever is.

Instead of removing myself from the death process, I chose to immerse myself in it. I wanted to feel everything I needed to feel as close up as I could. I chose to handle his body and escort it through as much of the death process as I could with reverence, respect, and introspection. I wanted my first truly emotional look at death to be healing but also strengthening, educational, and enlightening.

The following content is a cacophony of forms of grieving, remembrance, and celebration. I hope to offer a vulnerable, transparent processing of grief that helps educate folks on the actual corporeality of death — both the bodies of the deceased and our own bodies in how we choose to process, express, and release grief.

I hope this guide will give light, love, and structure to anyone feeling chaotic, lost, or unprepared in the pet death process.

With deep wells of love and comfort,

Bailey Hamblin

From: Kitten Underground <kittenundergroundba@gmail.com>
Date: May 31, 2014 at 4:04:28 PM PDT

As you enter the Great Mausoleum, the first piece on your left is our replica of Michelangelo's Moses. The original was completed in 1515 by commission from Pope Julius II for his tomb. It is located in the San Pietro in Vincoli Church in Rome.
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Please read with your own wellbeing and safety in mind.
While you may think a particular friend or loved one will be emotionally equipped to uplift you during tragedy, it may not always be the case. Even pet deaths can be triggering and stir up past traumas.

Encourage your supporters to take care of their bodies and, when you have the energy, express ample gratitude for the compassion and comfort they are able to provide.

The horns on the statue's head are the result of a mistranslation from Hebrew. In the book of Exodus, when Moses returned to his people carrying the tablets, the Hebrew text says that his face “was shining” or even that “rays were coming from his face” after his conversation with God. In Hebrew, the words for “shining” and “horned” are very similar. Unfortunately, the Latin Vulgate Bible, which was widely used at the time, had mistranslated the Hebrew text and incorrectly referred to Moses as having horns on his head.

Reflecting on death and planning for death will not bring premature, unlimely, or tragic deaths. It may, however, offer you a sense of peace to know your loved ones’ afterlife is planned for and that their body will be treated gently and respectfully as it transforms into a new form.

I encourage folks to think and talk about death often; have at least a loose plan in place for your pet’s death. Knowing your options for post-death care relieves certain burdens that are difficult to manage and comprehend during times of trauma.
Consider starting with the following reflections to begin thinking about pet death:

What state will/may the body be in?

Will I have access to the body/be able to claim the body?

How do I want my pet’s body to be treated/handled/preserved/remembered?

Consider: Much of the death and mourning process is for the living; consider how you want your pet to be memorialized in terms of the healing process for the living and which option best embodies your pet.

Consider: Cremation, burial, alternative burial/disposal, taxidermy, skeletal re-articulation, etc.

Will I need to contain, house, or transport the body?

How will I do this?

Who will help me? What materials will I need?

Consider: Container type, comfortable linings and coverings, blankets, trinkets, etc.

How much time do I think I’ll need with the body?

While this may be hard to fully realize or plan ahead of time, knowing what aspects of post-death body treatment are meaningful to you may provide you comfort and certain confidences in the grieving process.

Consider: saying prayers/blessings/last words, lighting incense/candles placing protection around the body, cleaning the body, dressing the body, charms and talismans, etc.

What resources will you personally need to care for your own body while you process grief?

Consider: Friends/family to help with logistics, to chat with, to emotionally support you. Staying well fed, hydrated, and rested. Taking the time and space to release emotions.

Do you need time off work?

Do you need rides places?

Do you need assistance with food, chores, errands, etc.?
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Cremation Considerations

Information Provided By: Eden Memorial Pet Care: Providing pet cremation services with a caring touch | Located in Paso Robles, CA

How to Prepare for Pet Cremation:

1. If you feel that your pet is going to pass, call our facility to keep us on alert to what is happening.

2. We can put a driver “on alert” for you.

3. If you are arranging a home euthanasia with your personal veterinarian, check with them to see if they use our services.

4. If your pet passes at home unexpectedly, please call us for an appointment. We will then make the necessary arrangements and do our best to accommodate your situation.
Things to Consider about Pet Cremation:

Eden Memorial Pet Care works with Mobile BIS and uses PCS (Pet Cremation System), a revolutionary pet tracking and identification system, that provides each pet with a "barcode" that follows each pet throughout the entire cremation process and gives both clients and veterinary hospitals "live time" status of what is happening to their pet.

Cremation process is a 4-6 hour process. A pick up time will be arranged according to time of drop-off, respect to other client's pets that are still in process, and appropriate procedures that must take place.

Due to our guests/clients safety we are not allowed to have guest/client assist in any cremation procedure. This includes – placing/removing pet in/out of crematory chamber, using any equipment (crematory units, processors, freezer, forklifts), or preparing pet for urn.
Services Provided:

**EXCLUSIVE PRIVATE CREMATION** – is the process of cremating one pet exclusively. The pet is placed in the crematory chamber and cremated by itself. The cremains are then collected individually, placed in an urn of your choice, and returned to the owner.

**STANDARD PRIVATE CREMATION** – is the process of cremating more than one pet at the same time, but separated by some form. At Eden Memorial Pet Care, a pet is placed in the crematory chamber and separated by a brick or an individual pan depending on size of pet. Each pet’s location in the crematory chamber is documented and pets are collected individually one at a time and constantly kept separate. There is no co-mingling of cremains during this process. Each pet’s individual cremains are placed in urn choice, and returned to owner.

**COMMUNAL CREMATION** – is the process when several pets are cremated at one time with no separation. This process does allow for co-mingling of cremains. No cremains are returned to owner. At Eden Memorial Pet Care, all communal cremains are collected and spread throughout a private property located in Paso Robles. This location is not accessible to the public.
The concept of cremation had always slightly irked me; the idea of toasting your loved one’s corporeal shell to a crisp seemed removed, haunting, and violent.

However, when my cat was hit by a car, his body wasn’t in the greatest shape. I felt like I lost by ability to properly bury him or have him memorialized through taxidermy or skeletal re-articulation. His damaged body seemed so unlike him and deeply upset me. Cremation allowed me to release Sosuke from his bodily harm and provided me with an element of closure.

I placed his body in a decorated and comfortable box along with some good luck/protective trinkets to hand over to the morgue. I was anxious about leaving his body alone so creating this soothing elements and rituals helped console me.

When the cremation started, I was allowed to spend some time in the morgue chapel. The crematorium technician offered to play some “morgue-music” as she lightheartedly called it; the song became one I associated with Sosuke’s corporeal transformation and release. It still provides me with comfort and an opportunity for reflection.

I’m thankful pet cremation was a tool at my disposal to provide tangible, anchoring steps to take during my grieving process and a chance for closure. Cremation allowed me to preserve my memory of Sosuke’s body as handsome, lively, and whole.
He's Still Breathing
On Losing a Pet in a Break Up

By Lexi McCoy

Winter 2017: My ex and I were living in an uninsulated trailer with no heat. I was depressed, kept burning my leg from getting too close to the space heater, and didn’t eat much of anything. We were buying a bottle of vodka from Costco once a week and fighting a lot. One rainy day we decided to go to the beach after work. My ex took a wrong turn in his old truck with the doors that didn’t close all the way. We were driving past the pound and he suggested we stop in to play with the dogs. I didn’t want to.

Walking through the desolate and freezing pound that reeked of dog piss, I saw DD shaking in his kennel wearing the tiniest light green hoodie. He was and forever will be the sweetest most perfect little creature. Big, bulgy, shiny Chihuahua eyes, red brown fur, soft little paws.

Deceased Pets/Animals in Public

Coming across deceased pets/animals in public can be traumatizing and emotionally taxing.

Prioritize your own wellbeing and safety.

If you feel emotionally prepared to take steps to address a deceased pet in public, consider the following:
While it's often not encouraged to touch unknown deceased animals, with protection and caution you can gently move the body to a safer, more respectful nearby location.

Remember to cover your hands or wear gloves and consider covering your mouth with a rag or mask depending on the state of the body.

Attempt to find a tag with an owner's contact information.

If contact information is available and you feel capable, contact the owner to inform them of the location. If not, find a friend to make that call.

There's no need to be graphic in your description of the deceased pet; however, it does help some folks have a realistic sense of what to expect when they are reunited with their pet's body.

You may also want to consider canvassing the nearby neighborhoods to inquire about an owner.

If no contact information is available, call your local Animal Services to inform them of the location and description of the animal.

Animal Services will check for a microchip on found deceased pets and attempt to find and notify the owners.

You may wish to spend some time near the body to offer words of comfort and general protection until someone is able to retrieve it or it is reunited with its owner.
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4. You may wish to spend some time near the body to offer words of comfort and general protection until someone is able to retrieve it or it is reunited with its owner.
3. How have your personal experiences of pet loss shaped your expression of grief and involvement with the Cal Poly Cat Program?

Sam shared a story of her family outdoor cat passing from FIV (feline immunodeficiency virus); a neighborhood boy found the body resting hidden under a bush. The experience was jarring and emotional but she and her family found ways to connect, create meaning, and memorialize their cat.

She encourages folks to find whatever outlet works for them to remember and be appreciative of their passed pets. We bonded over remembering fond moments through photos and creative projects. Anyone can visit the shelter to spend time with the cats; students who have left pets back home or lost family pets while living away from home have found peace and consolation through the program.

Sam reminded me that it's okay to be sad in the shelter and still be comforted by the presence of their cats who help connect us to memories, moments, and emotions of our own deceased pets.

PET PROGRAMS/ SHELTERS AS PLACES OF POST-DEATH HEALING

By Bailey Hamblin in collaboration with the Cal Poly Cat Program

Special thanks to student managers Sam and Mel

In between the university campus's blooming orchards and warehouses of cobweb-collecting old desks sits hidden a two-room cat shelter. Over 3,000 cats of varying ages and health conditions have been homed by the Cal Poly Cat Program since its origin. The shelter is entirely run by private donations and volunteerism.

I came to the space to learn more about how the program navigates deaths of cats in their program given the recent loss of my own; but more than that, I left with a better understanding of my personal navigation around grief and healing.

GREAT MAUSOLEUM

The Great Mausoleum is an amazing building full of sculpture, stained glass, and history. There are 11 terraces and enough steel and concrete for a 70-story skyscraper. Construction on the Great Mausoleum began in 1917 and is based on the Campo Santo in Genoa, Italy. Campo Santo is Italian for "holy field," and is a term used for graveyards.

A peaceful and healing way of expressing your final goodbye for now.
Along the wall of the narrow entrance to the shelter are collaged photos and bios of each cat storying their origins, pasts, and personalities. The program has cared for elderly cats, cats who have faced abuse, cats of students in housing transitions, and cats abandoned on campus. The program also provides shelter and feed stations around the campus for feral and undomesticated cats.

A few student volunteers and visitors spoke openly and eloquently to me about their own pets' deaths. They expressed the difficulties of explaining their grief to peers and reaching out to professors for academic support during times of grieving. Feeling distracted or "out of it" in class during the fast-paced quarter system can exhaust and overwhelm students.

I sat amongst the roaming cats with student managers Mel and Sam to talk more about the program's navigation, and their personal experiences, of death and grief:
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Sam explained that the shelter staff pride themselves on getting to know each cat’s personality in order to facilitate the best adoption match; losing a shelter cat becomes emotionally more difficult because of this bond. It’s also difficult to not hear about a cats passing after they’ve been adopted.

The shelter works closely with local vets to keep the cats healthy and provide end of life care and euthanasia when necessary based on quality of life. Sam explained the importance of staying up to date with healthcare so volunteers aren’t met with sudden deaths on entering the shelter for shifts. Given the close proximity of cats, medical concerns can spread quickly around the shelter. The program keeps all its cats updated with vaccines, medications, and other healthcare needs.

The program’s processes for death grief and memorialization have fluctuated over time based on the emotional needs of the volunteers and the logistical feasibilities of the program. Providing cremation services posed logistical and financial strains. The program staff have also built memorial walls for deceased shelter cats; this often becomes emotionally difficult for long-term staff to see on a daily basis.

provide a way for those mourning the loss of a loved one to express their sorrow, and symbolically “release” that loved one on to the heavens, in a serenely beautiful and meaningful way.
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Grief, Loss, and the Body

CITRINE is a yellow quartz also called false topaz because of its color. Good crystals of gem quality come from Brazil. Not to be confused with pale smoky quartz.

How do we navigate taking care of our bodies and another living creature’s body? How do we strike a balance of care for ourselves and others? How can the love and healing provided by pets impact our lives even for the briefest of moments?

The body responds to trauma and grief physically as well as emotionally and spiritually. Listening to our bodies during times of loss is critical to maintaining our health. Have you eaten? Have you drank enough water? How many hours of sleep are you getting? These things can be difficult to manage and remember on your own when grieving. Where you can, lean on those who support you. Ask for help. The world will respond with resources when you vocalize your needs.

Teach others how to treat you. And do not accept anything less.
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no heat. I was depressed, kept burning my leg from getting too
close to the space heater, and didn’t eat much of anything. We
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work. My ex took a wrong turn in his old truck with the doors that
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can be traumatizing and emotionally taxing.

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If you feel
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consider the following:
I still don't know what to do. I know DD is better off with one owner in one home and not with two that are constantly fighting. With his vision loss and confusion, making him navigate two homes seems cruel. And I know I'm better off never seeing my ex's face again after all that he put me through. My friend offered to break into his home and steal DD back for me. I thought about it for a few days but politely declined. I also drafted a strongly worded email with lots of fuck you's and go fuck yourself's but never sent it.

It's been a few months and at least once a week I'll think of DD and completely lose it. People will ask me how my dog is doing and I'll completely lose it. I'll see a photo of him and completely lose it. When I lost DD I lost it and I don't know what "it" is but I'll never get it back.

A dog won't fix your relationship or your mental health or the collapsing ceiling of your stupid fucking trailer. But DD taught me one million things including a pet won't fix your toxic relationship. And that sometimes you just have to let go. If you've lost a pet in a break up, I'm here to tell you that it's okay to let them go. You should not feel guilty. You should do what's best for yourself, your mental health, and your pet. Please be gentle with yourself.

I'm not religious, but every time I think about DD I pray. I pray that he's healthy and happy and gets to sunbathe in big windows all day. I pray that feels secure and loved. I pray because I don't know what else to do.

I held him in the rain, and he nuzzled into my jacket. The volunteers told us he was a senior and only had a few days before he'd be put down. Senior Chihuahuas (specifically brown or tan) are of the most common dogs being euthanized in pounds, along with pitbulls. The pound was closing, and without thinking much at all, we decided we'd get him. Together. So what if we had only been dating like 8 months and fought all the time and didn't know where we were gonna live and had no money and were high functioning alcoholics?? Getting DD would fix all that; he would dissolve the lies, make our icy trailer with the cardboard taped over the hole in the wall warm, and we would be happy. And I couldn't let him die.

The first night we took DD home, I was an anxious mess. I gave him a bath in the kitchen sink and he curled up next to me in bed and fell asleep as if it had been his bed forever. I cried myself to sleep because I was so happy.

My ex and I fought less; getting a dog seemed to put a Band-Aid on our problems. He still lied to me and we still drank too much. My parents said I was stupid for getting a dog with him (I was). I made DD food from scratch, but wouldn't feed myself. I would take him on short walks but didn't have enough energy to go further than a few blocks. My parents said I was too skinny (I was).

Spring came and I felt like a bad parent. I realized I couldn't take care of DD unless I took care of myself first. I checked myself into a treatment center, became vegan, and started working three jobs to save money to move out of the town that I was miserable in.

DD saved me.
In the summer I moved south and took my ex and my dog. Our house had a yard, a garden, and big windows where DD could lay in the sun all day while we were at work.

We were happy. I’d come home from my shitty day jobs to DD barking at me until I picked him up so he could frantically lick my face. I’d hold him and walk around the house singing “angel baby” and “earth angel” to him. I’d wake up with him curled up next to my stomach like he was the first night I brought him home. I got him a tiny Black Flag t-shirt and made him a peanut butter cake for his adoption anniversary.

Things were good until one day they weren’t. I don’t know how to describe it but I felt like one day I just woke up. I realized I had been treated like shit. I broke up with my ex, slept on a couch for a month and a half, drank whiskey in my coffee in the mornings, and went on Tinder too much. I held DD and cried a lot.

My ex and I were trying out some joint custody bullshit. It didn’t work (duh). We were fighting all the time as if we had never broken up. He used the situation to his advantage and guilted and manipulated me whenever he could. Whenever I’d give DD to him, I felt like I’d been punched in the stomach. But I was determined to make it work; DD was OUR dog and saved his life as much as mine.

DD started acting weird. He got aggressive and bit people and dogs. He was perfectly house trained and then suddenly wasn’t. He wouldn’t sleep in my bed like he always did, every night. The vet said he was losing his vision and he was confused. To give DD more stability, we decided my ex would keep him for longer stretches of time because he had more free time than I did and I was traveling a lot.

Then one day, he just blocked my number and wouldn’t text or call me back so I could pick up DD. He took my dog and disappeared. He took my fucking dog and fucking disappeared. I wanted to disappear.

He’s still breathing, but I feel like he’s dead.
In the summer I moved south and took my ex and my dog. Our house had a yard, a garden, and big windows where DD could lay in the sun all day while we were at work.

We were happy. I'd come home from my shitty day jobs to DD barking at me until I picked him up so he could frantically lick my face. I'd hold him and walk around the house singing "angel baby" and "earth angel" to him. I'd wake up with him curled up next to my stomach like he was the first night I brought him home. I got him a tiny Black Flag t-shirt and made him a peanut butter cake for his adoption anniversary.

Things were good until one day they weren't. I don't know how to describe it but I felt like one day I just woke up. I realized I had been treated like shit. I broke up with my ex, slept on a couch for a month and a half, drank whiskey in my coffee in the mornings, and went on Tinder too much. I held DD and cried a lot.

My ex and I were trying out some joint custody bullshit. It didn't work (duh). We were fighting all the time as if we had never broken up. He used the situation to his advantage and guilted and manipulated me whenever he could. Whenever I'd give DD to him, I felt like I'd been punched in the stomach. But I was determined to make it work; DD was OUR dog and saved his life as much as mine.

DD started acting weird. He got aggressive and bit people and dogs. He was perfectly house trained and then suddenly wasn't. He wouldn't sleep in my bed like he always did, every night. The vet said he was losing his vision and he was confused. To give DD more stability, we decided my ex would keep him for longer stretches of time because he had more free time than I did and I was traveling a lot.

Then one day, he just blocked my number and wouldn't text or call me back so I could pick up DD. He took my dog and disappeared. He took my fucking dog and fucking disappeared. I wanted to disappear.
I held him in the rain, and he nuzzled into my jacket. The volunteers told us he was a senior and only had a few days before he'd be put down. Senior Chihuahuas (specifically brown or tan) are of the most common dogs being euthanized in pounds, along with pitbulls. The pound was closing, and without thinking much at all, we decided we'd get him. Together. So what if we had only been dating like 8 months and fought all the time and didn't know where we were gonna live and had no money and were high functioning alcoholics?? Getting DD would fix all that; he would dissolve the lies, make our icy trailer with the cardboard taped over the hole in the wall warm, and we would be happy. And I couldn't let him die.

The first night we took DD home, I was an anxious mess. I gave him a bath in the kitchen sink and he curled up next to me in bed and fell asleep as if it had been his bed forever. I cried myself to sleep because I was so happy.

My ex and I fought less; getting a dog seemed to put a Band-Aid on our problems. He still lied to me and we still drank too much. My parents said I was stupid for getting a dog with him (I was). I made DD food from scratch, but wouldn't feed myself. I would take him on short walks but didn't have enough energy to go further than a few blocks. My parents said I was too skinny (I was).

Spring came and I felt like a bad parent. I realized I couldn't take care of DD unless I took care of myself first. I checked myself into a treatment center, became vegan, and started working three jobs to save money to move out of the town that I was miserable in.

DD saved me.

I'm not religious, but every time I think about DD I pray. I pray that he's healthy and happy and gets to sunbathe in big windows all day. I pray that feels secure and loved. I pray because I don't know what else to do.

A dog won't fix your relationship or your mental health or the collapsing ceiling of your stupid fucking trailer. But DD taught me one million things including a pet won't fix your toxic relationship. And that sometimes you just have to let go. If you've lost a pet in a break up, I'm here to tell you that it's okay to let them go. You should not feel guilty. You should do what's best for yourself, your mental health, and your pet. Please be gentle with yourself.

I still don't know what to do. I know DD is better off with one owner in one home and not with two that are constantly fighting. With his vision loss and confusion, making him navigate two homes seems cruel. And I know I'm better off never seeing my ex's face again after all that he put me through. My friend offered to break into his home and steal DD back for me. I thought about it for a few days but politely declined. I also drafted a strongly worded email with lots of *fuck you's* and *go fuck yourself's* but never sent it.

It's been a few months and at least once a week I'll think of DD and completely lose it. People will ask me how my dog is doing and I'll completely lose it. I'll see a photo of him and completely lose it. When I lost DD I lost it and I don't know what "it" is but I'll never get it back.

DD, I love you and I'll pray for you every day until we see each other again. - Lexi
Pet Memorialization

Pet memorialization is anything you want it to be. Many of the rituals our cultures have set up around death and dying are for the living. We find and make meaning through rituals and rites that give us tangible steps to take during the death process.

Pet memorialization can include:
- A pretty thrifty urn for their cremains
- A paw print imprint piece of art
- A altar of meaningful trinkets, memorabilia, and photos
- A project created in their honor
- A goal and vow to yourself to live life differently in their honor

We can also use our own bodies as homes for memories and memorialization. Giving part of our body in honor of another can be a personal, intimate way to navigate grief and memorialize a loved one. We are transcribing memories and emotions into the very cells of our being.

Our lives and bodies are forever transformed by death. Why not get the art to express it?
“Most of us rarely are eye witnesses to this transcendental unraveling and truth be told most of us don’t want to be.”

AN [INK]LINATION OF UNITY: EXPLORING PET DEATH THROUGH TATTOO

By Sarah Carlisle Stewart

While it could be logically misconstrued as a stereotypical display of defiance towards death, my memorial tattoo embodies the reconciliation of life and death. Pet death reminds us that death is inevitable for all living things; death is the unifier for all of life.
The death process exposes an uncomfortable abstract concept: goodbye. We evaluate life based on the intimacy and connections we have distorting death to mean separation. Because our relationships with others often rely on verbal communication, the silence ensuing the death of a loved one stirs deeply rooted fears. We begin to project our own feelings of betrayal, rejection, and loneliness on to the process. The bond between pet and person, on the other hand, transcends the pitfalls of human language making the death of a pet a different experience. This relationship is built on a more nuanced communication thriving on small, yet significant gestures allowing it to penetrate to a deeper, soul connection. When we experience the loss of our pet, we’re given an opportunity to examine death without the complicated baggage that comes with a human relationship convoluted with personal narratives and perceptions.
When a pet dies, we get a unique glimpse behind the curtain revealing that all life is cut from the same quilt; death is the thread that unites us all. We are life and death, we are individual and same, we are together and apart. This incomprehensible dissonance incites an ironic fear of death causing us to retreat. Instead, we should aye in the fear: the ultimate is, I am, we are. Fear has taught us that death is a binary, the opposite of life. Life and death are really two phases of oneness; they are simultaneously balanced and unpolarized. When we experience the death of a pet, we can venture straight to the love, unhindered and unrestrained, fully empathetic and in tune. When a pet dies, this oneness in us all becomes illuminated.

My catto serves as a reminder of this collective. My cat is a part of me, yet separate. I can recognize her essence in the midst of the oneness and vice versa. Death merely marks the pivot of transition to our most authentic selves. Our souls connect despite the walled boundaries of the physical form. Her essence, both in death and life, connects with mine. The marriage is seamless in the same way the ink joins and permanently marks my body. My catto is not a cliched physical illustration that from pain comes healing and beauty. Instead, it is the "pain" that is beautiful; it is the ever fluid marriage of pain and healing, separation and unity, you and me.
Showing Up for Death

Every death is different. Logistically, they all occur at different times, in different manners, under different circumstances. Deaths also impact different folks in different ways. But for the most part, death is unscheduled. It is slippery and elusive. We cannot plan our lives and schedules around being present for and during death.

But showing up for death, however that looks in your life, can be therapeutic and offer closure. While I missed the physical passing of my grandpa, I showed up for various aspects of the funeral and memorial process. From the last hospital visit to the final viewing at the crematorium, each small moment of involvement with death allowed me to come to terms with death’s finality. It demystified death for me.

Show up for death where and when you can/are able. It will teach you about yourself. It will teach you about the various life forms around you. And it will connect you to something beyond and outside of yourself in a humbling, enlivening way.
I never had a lick of problems with Ruby, until March of 2012. I noticed she had lost a little weight and wasn’t quite herself for a few days, maybe a week? One afternoon after coming home from work, I went to feed her and she was lying in the bushes. I reached into to get her and she nipped at me, weird, very weird for her. I turned around and went to get some food and refresh her water bowl and upon returning she was back lying in the bushes. I knew something was very wrong so I loaded her up in the old F150 and took her to the Vet. He ran some tests, drew some blood and gave her some antibiotics and electrolytes. All he could determine was that she didn’t have a fever and vitals were normal, but she “didn’t look good”. He sent us home and said he would call in the morning with blood test results. Ruby could barely hold her head up as we backed up out of the Vet clinic parking lot but the moment we crossed the old wooden bridge at the Nuthouse, she immediately perked up, even stood up, semi-excited to be home. I parked the truck and she got out on her own accord and went directly to the back of the bushes in the yard. I knew right then and there she was preparing to die. I called you guys to come out and say good bye, IDK why I knew, but just the way she acted I knew she was making ready for her “crossover”. It was an emotional mess with all you guys out there saying your farewells and I felt so guilty that I had dropped the ball with raising Ruby and maybe not catching earlier signs of a pending illness that would have prolonged her life. Peyton sensed the pain I was in or Ruby was in or both and volunteered to stay the night to comfort Ruby.

Death is such a distant, kept at-arms-length experience for most people these days. I am talking about the sacred moment in time when the soul leaves it’s physical shell of rubble and dissipates into that unseen dimension that we all know exists. Most of us rarely are eye witnesses to this transcendental unraveling and truth be told most of us don’t want to be. I mean many of us have no problem walking through the grocery store and loading up on fresh caught wild salmon, or a big ass tri-tip, or a pound of thick cut bacon and not giving a second thought to where this “flesh” came from and how this specific animal journeyed from a “full of piss and vinegar” living creature to this intangible “medium rare piece of meat.” I am not belaboring the consumption of animal flesh, hell I love a good steak! I am purely making the observation that most of society is numb to or purely could give a rat’s ass about any and all life forms “crossover”. I believe this even goes for the passing of your Uncle Charlie or your great grandma Alma, most of us just aren’t there or don’t care to be there when a soul transitions to the “other side”. We are stable enough to see them all gussied up by the mortician at their funeral but most of us aren’t spiritually sound enough to participate or even be an innocent bystander to death. For those of us that have been there at that moment, whether it be human or animal, it is an extreme emotion-exposing episode.
I personally have been an eyewitness to only one human crossing over but many animal crossings. I was there when the Vet peacefully had to put down big Bo, our family horse in the backyard of the Danville house in 2005 and Peyton and I tearfully held Ruby, our feisty Red Heeler, when she struggled for her last breaths of life out at the Nuthouse in 2012. Both pet experiences were profound and just flat out gut wrenching. Bo was 28, old but not super old for a horse, he was such a big beautiful creature even on the day of his death. He had flipped a gut, Colic and little hope aside from an emergency surgery up at UC Davis. A joint decision between the Vet, Gma-Gpa, and myself was made to “put him down”. I tear up even now, thinking of that special moment 14 years ago. It was a warm spring day as we calmly led Bo to the shade of a pear tree in Gpa’s, he had no clue what was coming. He stood big and tall and I remember thinking how healthy his coat looked when the Vet quietly administered the necessary drugs. For such a large animal I expected more thrashing and just an overall mess, but as his knees buckled, he quietly laid his head on the ground and peacefully took his last few breaths. In stark contrast to that majestic bay gelding that stood tall just moments earlier, now lie a motionless pile of horse flesh. That is the moment I am talking about, the crossover was quick and almost serene. But seeing Bo or Bo’s physical shell, now lying under a blue tarp, awaiting for the Renderer, just absolutely floored me to the ground.

Ruby the little red Queensland heeler we bought from Decco Ranch in Elk Grove, CA back in 2004 was pound for pound the smartest and feistiest dog we ever had. She didn’t weigh more than 35lbs but was tough as nails and loyal as all hell. I am sure she would have loved to take a snap at all those douchey teenagers that use to tease her from beyond the back fence on their way to and from Bristow Middle School. I know Darren Spencer got to feel the sting of her bite when Ruby thought he was coming into our backyard uninvited. Left to her own devices and my inconsistent training she probably would have turned into a pain in the ass. But props to Michelle for getting Ruby professionally trained, it really made a huge difference. Ruby was really your mom’s dog but during the split up, she gracefully allowed me to have Ruby out at the nuthouse, and that truly was a lifesaver. Turns out Ruby was a very good listener or at least I thought so during some of those dark and lonely nights I initially spent out at the nuthouse. Ruby was very efficient & well behaved, she only barked when something was wrong, she never got up on furniture, came when called, and never once tangled with a skunk or other animals out there, unlike Zulu or Gumbo.
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Rage Against the Dying of the Light
An Ode to Ruby and Bo

By Jon Hamblin
September 4, 2019

Death is such a distant, kept at-arms-length experience for most people these days. I am talking about the sacred moment in time when the soul leaves its physical shell of rubble and dissipates into that unseen dimension that we all know exists. Most of us rarely are eye witnesses to this transcendental unraveling and truth be told most of us don’t want to be. I mean many of us have no problem walking through the grocery store and loading up on fresh caught wild salmon, or a big ass tri-tip, or a pound of thick cut bacon and not giving a second thought to where this “flesh” came from and how this specific animal journeyed from a “full of piss and vinegar” living creature to this intangible “medium rare piece of meat.” I am not belaboring the consumption of animal flesh, hell I love a good steak! I am purely making the observation that most of society is numb to or purely could give a rat’s ass about any and all life forms “crossover”. I believe this even goes for the passing of your Uncle Charlie or your great grandma Alma, most of us just aren’t there or don’t care to be there when a soul transitions to the “other side”. We are stable enough to see them all gussied up by the mortician at their funeral but most of us aren’t spiritually sound enough to participate or even be an innocent bystander to death. For those of us that have been there at that moment, whether it be human or animal, it is an extreme emotion-exposing episode.
What a rough night it was and I am sure Peyton could give you her side of the story but it wasn’t as calm and peaceful as Bo’s death. Unbeknownst to us at the time, Ruby was in complete organ failure, complications from diabetes. Ruby couldn’t get comfortable much to the chagrin of Peyton. I believe that as the evening progressed and Ruby’s physical state was deteriorating at an accelerated rate, she started to hallucinate and lose all her senses. It wasn’t pretty as she struggled to breath and honestly I am mad at myself now for not doing something to aid her. Peyton and I gently rolled her onto a sheet in the bedroom and laid by her side. I simultaneously whispered in Ruby’s ear to move along, trying to encourage her to let go of the pain and move over to paradise, while praying to God to take her. Her last few gasps were gut wrenching but she finally gave up the ghost as P & I balled our eyes out. I really don’t know why I felt it necessary to bury her right away. But in the pale light of dawn, I dug her grave near the back fence of the Nuthouse and we emotionally laid her little, lifeless shell to rest in the cool of black Delta soil. What a rough night! BTW the Vet called later that morning to inform us that Ruby had severe diabetes and was experiencing organ failure, suggesting we put her down. I hated to see Ruby suffer and to this day blame myself for that painful end of life for her.

Yes, start to finish, all life is sacred! And just as we joyously celebrate the start of a new life, why shouldn’t we do the same for the end of a life? Death is nothing to be afraid of, for it comes for us all, eventually. And as we struggle to understand some of the why’s and how’s or fixate on that moment when life slips beyond the veil, maybe it’s best if we appreciate the side we currently reside in and the life and memories we share with the one’s we love, including our loyal, loving pets.
And just as we joyously celebrate the start of a new life, why shouldn't we do the same for the end of a life?
Hamblin, Jon. *Rage Against the Dying of the Light: An Ode to Ruby and Bo.*

*MATERIALS USED:*
- 35 mm film photography taken at Old Mission Cemetery in San Luis Obispo, CA
- Clippings from Forest Lawn Glendale Mausoleum and Museum brochures
- Clippings from *LIFE Special 2018, Frankenstein, The Man, The Monster, The Legacy*
- Clippings from *Gone But Not Forgotten* (1981) by Patricia Fox-Sheinwald
- Clippings from *Gray’s Pocket Anatomy: The Dissecting Room Companion* by Charles Leonard
- Dove release brochure from Benedict-Rettey Mortuary in Morro Bay, CA
- Funeral pre-planning brochure from Benedict-Rettey Mortuary in Morro Bay, CA
- Misc. stickers from friends
- Misc. family photos
- Sosuke’s pawprints provided by Black Mountain Pet Crematorium in Morro Bay, CA

At the end of Cathedral Corridor and to your far right is the Columbarium of Memory. In the back of the Columbarium is *The Memory Window* by Charles J. Connick.
Grief is not something we move past or get over; it morphs and transforms inside of us as we continue on with our lives. Grief will resurface in deep swells of emotion. Grief will also be harmlessly in the background of our thoughts. It is okay to be swept away with grief. And it is okay to be numb to grief for periods of time.

Grief and loss looks different on everyone. Connect with your grief. Identify it, name it, and talk with it. It can fuel beautiful life transformations, community connections, and solidarity with others.

PRE-HALLOWEEN PARTY
death cafe
FUNERAL FOR
Σ SOSUKE (so-skay)
Help us celebrate the life of Sosuke and kick off the Halloween season!

SATURDAY, SEPT.
21ST @ 6 PM.

DRINKS + FOOD PROVIDED.
(+ gifts for your feline-friends)

I have cat food and toys to donate if you have a feline friend.
THANK YOU to everyone who contributed to this guide. Thank you to everyone who took care of me physically, mentally/emotionally, and spiritually while I was in the height of my grief. Thank you to everyone who picked up this guide and gave it a read; you’re better preparing yourself for deaths in your own life and to be a more empathetic, aware resource for others experiencing loss.

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BS APT - text / dm for deeds.

+ ASPEN'S
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Let's mix drinks, talk mortality, and share pics of pets.

RIP
I have cat food and toys to donate
if you have a furry friend.
Carlisle Stewart, Sarah. An (INK)LINATION of Unity:
Exploring Pet Death through Tattoo.
Hamblin, Bailey & Cal Poly Cat Program. Pet
Programs/Shelters as Places of Post-death Healing.
Hamblin, Jon. Rage Against the Dying of the Light: An Ode
to Ruby and Bo.
McCoy, Lexi. He's Still Breathing: On Losing a Pet in a
Break Up.

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Pre-Planning...

Pre-planning funerals is a growing trend in America because of the peace of mind that comes from having one’s affairs in order.

For more information please visit with your trusted funeral director.

HANDBOOK FOR THE
Recently Deceased

Pets, Mourning, the Body, Death, Positivity

A Collective Resource Guide on Pet Passing