



Heaven's Pets' Grief Group

More than ten years ago, Jennifer Melius established Heaven's Pets. Heaven's Pets provides cremation services for one's beloved pet and does so in the dignified and loving manner that your companion deserves. When Jennifer was developing her business, she asked her neighbor, me, Sharon Henry, if I would be willing to facilitate grief groups for the bereaved. I am a Clinical Social Worker and throughout my career I saw clients struggle with the decision to put a pet down, to handle the pet's illness, or to have the courage to adopt another animal after the pet's death, so I was eager to offer my skills.

Throughout the years hundreds have come to our meetings, held the first Tuesday evening of every month at the Heaven's Pets building on the Lake Lawn Metairie property. Some people come only once, just to talk about their loss with others who understand. Frequently participants have been told by relatives or co-workers things like, "It's just a dog, get another one!" When you've had that cat or dog for the past 10 to 20 years as your constant companion, that's not very comforting. Other people come for months or even years. After Katrina, the Grief Group included many who not only lost their companions, but their homes, cars, even their jobs. The Grief Group helped them link arms and stay afloat in that sea of tragedy while dealing with the stress of rebuilding lives.

Often people will say "I don't think I'll ever get another pet, I can't take any more pain like this." Then they'll come the next month and say, "Let me show you pictures of Katie, my new cat!" Typically participants in the groups feel guilty. They worry that they put their pet down too soon, or held on too long; perhaps costing their pet unnecessary suffering. They worry they should have done more. When they get a new pet, they feel guilty when they love their new companion. Some people think they would be abandoning the deceased companion by getting another friend. I suggest that love is unlimited, and the new pet will not be a replacement.

One's lost loving companion is in Heaven, shining down love and gratitude upon you. Guilt is not an option here! He would not have you grieve. She wants only happiness for you and appreciates the years of faithful companionship you provided.

Last year, a man came to the group with a tremendous burden. In the past year, he had lost his mother, his father, and Buddy, his beautiful dog. He was so distressed that he couldn't even pick up the cremains. He came monthly to talk about his grief. A miracle happened. Duke, another Golden, was to be put down, and needed someone to foster him for a while. Duke's life was saved...and he saved Gary's life. At the same time, Eddie came to the group, mourning the passing of his beloved Bullet. Each month he arrived at the group sporting pictures of Bullet. One month he came empty handed. "What's up???" I wondered. His veterinarian had called him saying, "We've kept this dog alive at the clinic until we felt you were ready to adopt a new dog." Now Eddie has Gumbo to give love to and to care for. Gary continues to attend the Grief Group, not because he is still grieving, but because he wants to share his story of survival and triumph over the tragedy of losing one's beloved companion.

Gary brings Duke to each meeting. He trained Duke to be a therapy dog. When someone in the group starts crying, Duke gets up, goes to the bereaved person's side, puts his paw on his or her knee and looks up. Each person feels so loved and understood. Now that's really a pet bereavement group at its best!

SURELY

*Surely a star danced in Heaven
On the day Buddy was born.*

*Surely daffodils perked,
And Gabriel blew his horn.*

*Surely they knew without a doubt,
That Buddy was truly worth shouting about!*

*Surely a star dimmed in Heaven,
On the day Buddy died.*

*Surely daffodils bowed
And loved ones cried.*

*Surely they knew without a doubt,
That he'd be missed round and about!*

*Surely with each song's refrain
And each breath of Spring,*

*Surely we'll see Buddy dancing
At Home, with the stars once again!*

By Sharon Henry

When & where: 2nd Tuesday of every month

7 – 8:15 p.m.

Heaven's Pets at Lake Lawn Metairie

Free of charge *Anyone suffering from the loss of a pet or anticipated loss of a pet is welcome.