

Dear Haley Family,

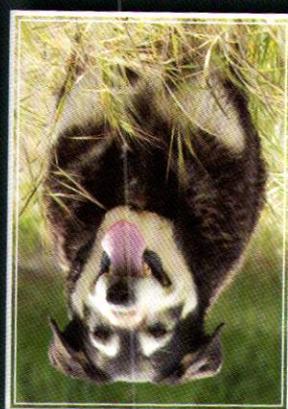
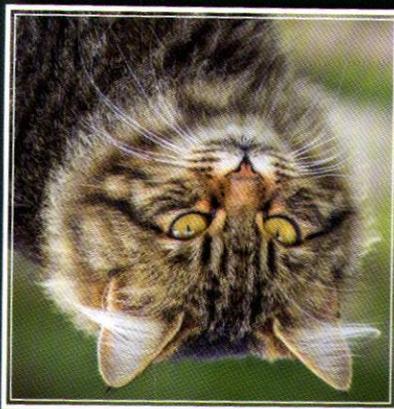
Our pets come into our lives
and leave their paw prints on our hearts.

May the memories you made together
bring you comfort.

With deepest sympathy.

Our prayers are with you as you care for Simba
in his final days. We hope this prayer blanket will
remind you of God's presence and comfort.

Blessings + peace, Stallsville OMC Animal Ministry Team



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Animal Ministry Team
Stallsville United Methodist Church

Hand or Paw, God loves us All

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We faced this prospect with acceptance, however. We had a peace in our hearts about what must come, because we had a chance to make sure that Nani's last days were as happy and comfortable as we could make them. Despite the grief of the "pet loss limbo" period, we had the comfort of knowing that death didn't take us by surprise; we weren't left regretting the things we hadn't done, or wishing that we'd had a chance to do things differently. We kept the first half of our bargain (making life better for Nani), and now we faced the second half: Letting Nani go.

While some psychologists consider bargaining to be nothing more than a mental game we play to avoid or ignore grief, I believe it can be genuinely helpful—provided one is realistic about the process. If you find yourself in "pet loss limbo," you may find that "bargaining" is an effective way to ease your passage from grief to acceptance. Here are some tips on "healthy" bargaining:

1. Be realistic about your pet's condition. Don't expect a complete, miraculous cure; you'll only be disappointed. Instead, look for ways to work within and around that condition to extend and improve your pet's life.

2. Focus your efforts on your pet's well-being, not your own. Don't try to make a "bargain" with God or the universe just to keep yourself from feeling pain, or to postpone that pain. Instead, use this time to seek ways to improve your pet's life and comfort level. By doing so, you'll enhance your own ability to accept the inevitable.

3. Use whatever time your pet has left to take care of "unfinished business." If you haven't spent as much time with your pet as you'd like, spend it now. If there are special treats or experiences that your pet particularly enjoys, use this time to provide them. The best way to spend this time is to ensure that, when your pet dies, you aren't left with regrets and self-recriminations.

4. Seek a balance between your pet's health and its general comfort and happiness. Often, for example, a pet may loathe the "special diet" that is prolonging its life. If your pet starts losing weight because it refuses to eat a prescription diet, you may not be doing it any favors by withholding its preferred foods. Similarly, if life-prolonging treatments are more stressful or painful than the disease they're designed to cure, you may need to make a decision about "quality" of life vs. "length" of life.

5. Keep your side of the "bargain." If you've asked for "time" to give your pet extra love and attention, and you miraculously *receive* that time, use it! It may, indeed, be a miracle.

6. Be prepared to take "no" for an answer. I firmly believe in the power of prayer, but not all prayers are answered as we would wish. If you seek to "bargain" in the last days of your pet's life, you must accept the possibility that you won't get what you're asking for. If and when that occurs, don't waste time and emotional energy blaming yourself or the universe for failing to respond to your wishes.

7. Understand that a "bargain" isn't going to change the final outcome. If your pet has a terminal illness, you may gain the gift of time—but it is a temporary gift. Use that time, not only to improve your pet's quality of life, but to come to terms with the inevitability of loss. You may find that this precious gift of time is just what you need to work through many of the other emotions of grief, so that you can face the final loss of your pet with a measure of acceptance and peace.



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If you're grieving the loss of a pet, you'll find more helpful tips in Moira Allen's book, *Coping with Sorrow on the Loss of Your Pet*, available from Amazon.com at <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1598584537/>

"Pre-Loss Bereavement" and the Power of Bargaining

by Moira Anderson Allen, M.Ed



 *The Pet Loss Support Page*
www.pet-loss.net

“Pre-Loss Bereavement” and the Power of Bargaining

There is a stage of grief that one hears very little, if anything, about. It's the hidden stage, a stage that friends and family may have difficulty understanding. It's a stage when people are most likely to ask why you are grieving—because your pet hasn't even died yet!

It's the stage I call “pre-loss bereavement.” It begins when you realize, with absolutely no wiggle-room for argument, that your pet is going to die. You don't know when, but you know loss is coming. It may not even be coming soon; your pet may have weeks, months, even a year or more of life ahead. But you know that you have reached “the beginning of the end.”

It may begin with a diagnosis of a final, incurable disease or condition. When an older cat is diagnosed with borderline kidney failure, for example, you know that you may be able to take steps to manage the problem and keep “full failure” at bay for a time—but you're never going to be able to accomplish a “cure.” Or, it may begin when you look at your pet with “newly opened eyes,” and notice changes in its health or condition that have been taking place slowly over time. When a pet gradually loses weight, for example, it's easy to overlook subtle, ongoing changes to its appearance, because you never see a sudden, dramatic alteration. Then, one day, you look at your pet and realize that you can see every rib, every bump of its spine.

Whatever the trigger, pre-loss bereavement begins when you realize not just intellectually, but emotionally, that you are going to lose your pet. It is something you have always “known,” from the day you brought your pet home—but now it is not simply known, but *felt*, deeply, keenly, painfully. Now, you may find yourself in something of a “pet loss limbo”—you begin to grieve the loss that is coming, but there is no “closure” to your grief. You can't “get over it” because the loss hasn't actually happened yet. And

you know that things are only going to get worse before they get better.

This is the period in which you are likely to experience all the classic Kubler-Ross “stages” of grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance. Denial may have preceded this stage, vanishing like a toxic bubble the day



you accept and acknowledge the diagnosis or changes in your pet—or, it may resurface from time to time, as you try to convince yourself that your pet's condition isn't really *that* bad. Anger can come at odd times—when, for example, you think you are taking your pet to the vet for the last time, and manage to psyche yourself up to make the most painful decision, only to have an unexpected “reprieve.” Yes, of course you are glad to bring your pet home again—but you may feel a twinge of irrational anger at having had to go through all that for “nothing”, only to have to go through it again. Depression comes and goes as you contemplate a future without your pet. But the most common reaction to this stage is likely to be bargaining—bargaining with your pet, your vet, yourself, or your higher power for *anything* that will extend (or improve) the life of your pet.

I know this stage well. Several years ago, my 15-year-old cat, Nani, was diagnosed with borderline kidney disease. At the time, she seemed to be deteriorating rapidly; I doubted she had more than a few months to live. And so I entered the “bargaining” stage (or, for some of us, the “begging” stage).

But what could I bargain *for*? I knew I could not hope for a cure. We weren't sure how old Nani was, as she was a young adult when we adopted her, but we knew she was at least 15 and possibly 16. While cats occasionally live to 20 or longer, such lifespans are rare, and not likely in a

cat already suffering from kidney disease. So what could I ask (and pray) for that might have some chance of success?

I chose to ask for “time.” I realized, looking at my wasting-thin kitty, that Nani had been suffering from a certain amount of “attention neglect” over the previous year. We had undergone a stressful move and job change, cramming ourselves, our goods and three cats into a very small duplex. Nani had not been getting the same amount of lap time, cuddle time, and sleep-on-your-face time that she had enjoyed previously. I felt a surge of guilt; if only I could have some *time* to make that up to her. Give me time, I asked, to make sure that in her final days, she feels loved; give me time to give her the attention and cuddling that means so much to her. My part of the “bargain,” of course, was to provide those things!

Miraculously, time was given. In 1999, I doubted Nani would survive six months; she survived for more than four years. Each time she seemed to slip toward the edge, a change of diet would bring about an amazing rally. Even though she lost nearly 1/6 of her original weight, and underwent surgery for a lymphoma, she has hung in there.

More importantly, she had “time” to enjoy renewed attention. She had more years to curl up on whomever was resting (or sleeping) in the recliner (and if you were “resting,” a curled-up, purring Nani was almost certain to put you to sleep). She had time to play with the other cats, and even to chase 18-pound Brisco down the hall if he forgot his manners. She had time to watch the birds at the bird-feeder, and the squirrels at the squirrel-feeder. Her one disappointment was that we no longer allowed her on the top shelf of the closet, for fear she might jump down and injure herself.

Eventually we looked at Nani and come to the conclusion that “time” was running out. Her weight loss had accelerated, and a reaction to a prescribed medication made her seriously ill. Though she managed yet another rally, we could see that she was slower, stiffer, weaker, thinner. The time was coming to make that final decision.

stuffed animal. Spouses are nice, but you need fur. Curl up in bed with a stuffed animal and a heating pad; it's lots better than lying in the dark wishing you had something furry to touch.

7. Avoid irrevocable decisions. Don't do anything you can't undo. For example, if you can't stand the sight of your pet's toys, don't throw them away—put them out of sight. A week or a month from now, you may wish you had them again, perhaps to incorporate into a memorial, and you'll bitterly regret any hasty actions that can't be undone. Similarly, don't rush out and get a new pet until you've had time to think.

8. Replace negative imagery. The last moments of your pet's life can become a powerful image—whether you witnessed them or not. Unless you want that image to overwhelm your positive memories, start working on replacing it with something more pleasant. If you believe that pets go on to an afterlife, for example, try replacing the image of the "last" moment of your pet's life with the "next" moment: The moment it arrives, healthy and whole, on the other side. What happens then? Who greets it? What does it do? Fill your mind with "the moment after." If you don't believe in an afterlife, concentrate on the special things you did for your pet to make *this* life a blessing for it.

9. Be honest with yourself. You've been wounded, and you hurt. You're not weak, crazy, or overly sentimental to feel this way. Even if you have to put on a "brave face" for the rest of the world, don't try to fool yourself into thinking that you're not really in all that much pain. If you cut your hand off, it wouldn't help to get angry with yourself for bleeding—and losing your pet is a lot like losing a part of yourself. You *will* hurt, and it will take time to heal.

10. Make a decision to work through grief. You've heard the saying, "Time heals all wounds." That isn't true. Time doesn't heal all physical wounds (try cutting off your hand and just ignoring it!) -- and it doesn't heal all emotional wounds either.

. . .

I've met people whose grief has persisted for years: They're just as upset, just as angry, just as miserable over their loss as they were the day it happened. Such people tend to be consumed with bitterness, obsessing over their loss—and not only do they suffer, but they also bring suffering to everyone around them.

Grief is normal, but it is also seductive. It's very tempting to let it "take over." Before you do, think about how you feel today, and ask yourself if you want to feel exactly the same way in six months, or a year. Notice that I'm not asking you to decide how you want to feel today. Today, you may not have much choice—any more than you could choose not to feel pain if you were physically injured. Your decision about how to *manage* that injury, however, would be crucial in determining whether, a year from now, you are healed—or crippled.

The same is true of grief. You can't control whether or not you grieve. But you can decide whether or not to let that grief control *you*. And these ten "survival steps" are a good way to ensure that it doesn't!



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If you're grieving the loss of a pet, you'll find more helpful tips in Moira Allen's book, *Coping with Sorrow on the Loss of Your Pet*, available from Amazon.com at

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The Moment After: Surviving Pet Loss

by Moira Anderson Allen, M.Ed



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The Moment After: Surviving Pet Loss

The world has just ended. Your pet—your friend, your confidante, the companion who was always there for you—has died. Dog, cat, horse, bird, hamster, ferret—species doesn't matter. Age doesn't matter. All that matters is the huge hole that has just entered your life. That, and the grief.

Conventional wisdom suggests that I devote this column—call it “the moment after” column—to tips on how to start feeling better. But if your pet has died within the past few hours or days, you may not be able to even imagine feeling better. You may be wondering how you can even survive. You may also not *want* to feel better. Painful as it is, that ragged, miserable hole may seem all you have left of your pet, and you may not want to get rid of it just yet. The thought of “feeling better” too quickly may actually seem disrespectful. You may feel that you owe your pet a period of grief, of pain. “Feeling better” may seem a lot like “letting go,” and you may not be ready to do that yet.

That's OK. Grief and mourning aren't some sort of awkward, embarrassing mental lapses that should be “gotten over” or “healed” as soon as possible. In reality, grief is our final expression of love, the last gift we have to offer. It isn't to be rushed. Instead of trying to “get over it,” we must find ways to “get through it”—and that can take awhile.

So, for this first column, I'm not going to talk about how to “heal.” I'm going to talk about how to *survive*.

Ten Ways to Hang On

When you face that huge emptiness inside, it's tempting to just give yourself over to grief. At the same time, a certain amount of survival instinct reminds you that you still need to do something to keep going. But what? Grief makes it hard to think, to plan. What can you do to keep that hole from swallowing you?

1. Eat something. You may not feel hungry, but food is important. Grief burns a lot of energy; you need fuel. Eat something that makes you feel good—and if that happens to be a huge slice of chocolate cake, well, this is no time to worry about your diet. Me, I like tomato soup; it reminds me of sitting warm and snug by a fire while the rain beats on the windows. If you can't face a full meal, nibble. Eat *now*, whether you want to or not.

2. Cry. Cry as much as you want to, whenever you feel like it. Take the day off from work. If you can spend even one day crying whenever you need to, it will make it much, much easier to face the next day.

3. Find something to do. This may seem trite, but focusing on a task really does help. Finding a project to complete, a task to accomplish, helps you focus on the world (and the “you”) that exists outside that hole. It's not a distraction, and it won't make your grief go away. It simply helps you adjust your perception, to recognize that while grief is *part* of your life, it isn't the sum total of your life.

4. Count your blessings. When you lose a loved one, it's hard to focus on anything positive. Unless your circumstances are truly dreadful, however, chances are that your pet was not the only good thing in your life. Remind yourself of some of the good things that you still have by deliberately reviewing a list of your “blessings” — such as your

family, your remaining pets, your friends, your interests. Review them in your head, or write them down. Again, these don't fill the hole—but they do remind you that there is a world outside that hole, and that you are still part of it.



5. Reflect on things that don't involve your pet. The loss of your pet may seem to touch every aspect of your life, but in reality, it hasn't changed *everything*. Reflect on the things it hasn't changed—the things that you did and enjoyed without your pet. When my cat died of cancer, I forced myself to remember that “The loss of my pet doesn't take away my ability to enjoy long talks with my husband. It doesn't take away my ability to write. It doesn't take away my ability to read a good book. It doesn't take away my ability to create beautiful things. It doesn't take away my ability to enjoy a long walk on the beach...” Focus on those things that your pet didn't “touch” while it was alive—and you'll be reminded of the things that haven't really been “touched” by its death.

6. Cuddle something furry. If you have another pet, give it some extra cuddle time—even though part of your mind is thinking that this isn't the pet you *want* to cuddle. It's still warm, and furry, and may be very confused and concerned right now. If you don't have another pet, consider cuddling a