

Missing Your Animal Companion? Loving Memories Help Us Heal

There is no single way to memorialize your lost animal companion. But those memories are important and can bring a deep comfort during difficult times.

By: **Ann Beyke, MA, LPC**

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Every person's loss is different, but we all need to take the steps to move through it; beautiful memories can sometimes soothe the agonizing feelings we have on that journey
- Memorializing your precious companion can provide a great sense of relief, as concentrating on the most important moments you shared can help soften the pain
- Creating a memory box is one way to honor and memorialize a pet; you can also design a shrine, make a donation to an animal shelter or create a ritual to remember your animal
- Storytelling, journaling, music and other creative outlets can also soothe your soul upon the loss of a best animal pal

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Why are our touching memories important to us as we move through the mourning process after the loss of an animal companion?

Remembering a beloved animal pal keeps them close, bringing us comfort during a difficult time and can help us heal. Loving memories keep the connection to our cherished animals close in our hearts and minds.

As we move through the mourning process, we experience a range of emotions, oftentimes emotions that we can't explain or may be surprising to us, perhaps even a bit frightening. Our tender memories are essential to help us through this difficult time.

After the first canine companion I had as an adult left this world, I was certain I would fall apart. I was confused and unsure why I was feeling the way I did. The loss was so profound and deeply painful. But there is no rulebook or road map for the healing journey.

Every person's loss is different, but we all need to take the steps to move through the loss. Beautiful memories can sometimes soothe the agonizing feelings we have on that journey.

Memorializing Your Precious Companion

I sought out help, looking for articles and books that might provide guidance. Now there is, thankfully, much more in the way of resources for us. I found a little book, which is still available – "Coping with Sorrow on the Loss of Your Pet," by Moira Anderson.

I could hardly believe there were other people who might be experiencing the same feelings and that there was actually hope I could be happy and feel "normal," once again. The book helped me recognize that memories were significant in the mourning process.

Memorializing our precious companions can provide a great sense of relief, albeit with many tears. Concentrating on the most important moments you shared can help soften the pain.

Years after Nimbus, a sweet lab mix I adopted from a local shelter, departed my household, I still laugh and sometimes cry tears of joy — and sadness — when I see every piece of Tupperware I own with her signature teeth marks.



"Nice beach, where's the ocean?" - Goldie & Nimbus, White Sands National Park, New Mexico

She was a pro at getting them out of the sink, along with stealing a loaf of freshly baked bread off the counter while she was at it. It's a beautiful memory I will always cherish. And I will never want or need any more Tupperware!

The ways to memorialize a loved pet are as personal and creative as we want them to be. My dear friend Mary and I have wept over the loss of many of our animal companions.

To help her recovery from those losses, she creates memory boxes of her beloved pets, including pictures of the dog, various quotes about how animals enrich our lives and their tags and collar. It brings a smile to her face when she looks at the box and allows her to cherish the time they had together.



A memory box with special relics honoring Jester, a very special pooch

Creating a memory box is just one way to honor and memorialize a pet. You can design a shrine, make a donation to an animal shelter, or create a ritual to remember your animal, whether you perform it on their birthday or the day they passed away.

You might compile a photo album of pictures with the pets or place a bench in your yard with the pet's name on it. Use your artistic skills and paint a rock to place in your garden with your pet's name. All of these are ways to help us heal.



Mistress Bella enjoying her wheat grass

Mistress Bella loved wheat grass, as long as I fed it to her blade by blade. She would sometimes hack it up with a furball, or not.

She was sent to me by Maxwell Cat, 10 days after he passed, via a co-worker, who was compelled to find her, online, in foster care. She was with me longer than any other, and passed in June 2021, age 13.3. Bella and Maxwell were the most special cats ever.

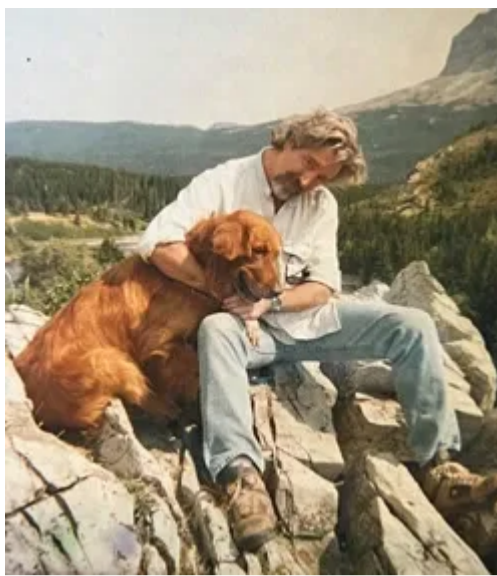
Another way to memorialize your pet is to write a story about what you loved most about them. Deborah shared with me how she kept a pad of paper next to her bed, as after her dog's death she often woke up in the middle of the night. She used that time to jot down the moments with her pal that brought a smile to her face.

Her dog, Annie, would greet her when she came home from work, dash into the guest room, catapult her large vizsla body onto the bed and sprawl out for what Deborah called "belly wubbies."

She loved speaking baby talk to her pupper as they made this nightly connection and described it as a magical time of the day. It's one of the many loving and fond memories she has of Annie.

Storytelling Soothes the Soul

I have a real soft spot for golden retrievers, so I was thrilled when D. Stewart offered to write his memories of Oscar. This is a wonderful example of how storytelling soothes the soul and the loss of a best animal pal.



Memories of a great friend — Oscar & D. Stewart, New Mexico

"Oscar Murphy Mondoghie was a wedding gift from one of my groomsmen at my second wedding in 1991. He was 12 weeks old at the time and was the proud offspring of registered AKC parents.

Raising a dog from its early years has lots of advantages and, over time, builds a long-lasting bond between man and canine. Oscar was a true 'love dog.' He made friends quickly and was the most loyal companion in my life.

My most fond memories of Oscar were of our many weekend trips to San Gregorio Lake near Cuba, New Mexico. We camped out almost every weekend I had free and walked the 3/4-mile trail to the placid lake.

Oscar loved the nature around him and he would blaze the trail and then always stop to wait for me to catch up. At the lake, I fished and he chased chipmunks and occasional ducks in the water. He was always at the ready to receive pats and hugs from passersby around the lake.

Oscar's life ended on October 26, 2001. He passed away in my arms at only 10 years of age after enduring a majestic battle with cancer in Minneapolis. After cremation, I brought Oscar back to the lake we had always enjoyed together. His ashes were sprinkled in glorious fashion during a special memorial ceremony that my closest and best friend and I conducted to honor Oscar.

He was given a great send-off consisting of wonderful remembrances, buckets of tears, and heart-felt songs. There is not a day in my life that I do not think of this magnificent and loyal companion. His memory constantly reminds me of the true meaning of unconditional love, devotion, and companionship. I intend to rejoin him someday at San Gregorio Lake in the same way: ashes to ashes."

If writing isn't your thing, try another creative outlet. In a session many years ago, a client shared a stunning video tribute to his cat that included music. I was so touched by the incredible love he had and the creative process that went into the video. He shared with me how he spent hours choosing photos and matching music, shedding lots of tears, but also being grateful for her every moment with him.

Just as there is no road map or rulebook for your healing journey, there is no single way to memorialize your lost animal companion. But those memories are important and can bring a deep comfort during difficult times. Don't be afraid to try something that will keep you connected to your animal companion. You'll feel so much better.

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