



# *My Grief Journal*



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*“Grief is not a disorder, a disease, or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, spiritual and physical necessity, the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is to grieve.”*

*Earl Grollman*

When we grieve the loss of a friend or family member there are five stages of grief; denial, anger, bargaining, depression (or sadness), and acceptance. But with the loss of a pet there can also be a stage of guilt. Most people go through all five stages but not always in order. It's normal to go from one step back to the other as each builds your strength and helps you move on to the final step of acceptance.

*“Grief is like the ocean; it comes in waves ebbing and flowing. Sometimes the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim.”*

*Vicki Harrison*

Even though the goal of grief is the final step of acceptance, it doesn't mean you will ever be “all right” or “Okay” with what happened.

**Grief**

*"I had my own notion of grief.  
I thought it was the sad time  
That followed the death of someone you love.  
And you had to push through it  
To get to the other side.  
But I'm learning there is no other side.  
There is no pushing through.  
But rather,  
There is absorption.  
Adjustment.  
Acceptance.  
And grief is not something you complete,  
But rather, you endure.  
Grief is not a task to finish  
And move on,  
But an element of yourself  
An alteration of your being.  
A new way of seeing.  
A new definition of self."  
Gwen Flowers*

When I lost my son to cancer, I thought there couldn't be anything positive to come from that experience. But I found solace in this quote by John Adams to Thomas Jefferson.

*"Grief drives men into habits of serious reflection, sharpens the understanding and softens the heart." John Adams*

As you work your way through this journal I hope you will find a softened heart and a sharper understanding; healing denial, anger, guilt and depression to a place of peace and compassion.



## *Stages of Grief*

All the stages listed below are ways we deal with grief. Grief is the most intense pain any of us will ever deal with. Few things in life cut so deep or leave so painful a wound as grief. So where does this pain come from? I think this quote sums it up.

*“Grief, I’ve learned, is really just love. It’s all the love you want to give, but cannot. All that unspent love gathers up in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in that hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go.”*

*Jamie Anderson*

*Denial*– Denial and shock are the first stages of grief. It’s not so much you are denying your pet is gone, although some people may, but the feelings of loss. Denial is really a way of protecting yourself from the hurt you can’t handle. You just feel numb and wonder how you’re going to get through the day. You find yourself saying things like, “I just can’t believe they’re gone.”

Denial in the beginning can actually be a blessing by just dealing with what you can handle. As you begin to accept what’s happened you can begin healing. Just remember through in the process of healing all the emotions you were suppressing in the beginning will start to surface. Take them on by identifying them and letting yourself feel them.

*Anger*— Anger is a necessary part of the healing process. It's necessary that you feel your anger and realize anger has no bounds. It can be directed at your veterinarian, people in your family, the person that may have caused your pet's death, yourself, God and even your pet itself. You need to be willing to feel your anger and let it out. For some of us we have been conditioned to think anger is something we should never feel, but if we don't feel it, we can't deal with it. There's a saying if you can't feel it you can't heal it. Pain is at the heart of anger. Anger is just a way of attaching that pain to something. Anger is a bridge to that which you lost. It is something to hold on to, rather than having nothing. Instead of letting go you have something to hang on to, your anger. Remaining angry at someone or something keeps you from moving forward in the grieving process and accepting your loss.

*Bargaining*— Bargaining and guilt go hand in hand. I remember before my great grandmother died trying to bargain with God. If he would let her live I would become a better person. It is the internal dialog of trying to negotiate your way out of grief. If I had only ... things would have been different. As you can see a lot of guilt can arise from that type of thinking. "I should have" becomes a constant refrain in your internal thoughts. You begin to question all your decisions.

Guilt is not only an emotion it is a belief, a belief that can cause you to question your decisions and actions. You may even decide that you deserve the pain of grief and not try to work your way through it. It can cause you to totally shutdown. Anger can distract you from your pain, but guilt intensifies it.

Guilt can become a real problem too if you were the one that had to make the decision to euthanize your pet. Making that kind of decision will always lead to "what if ..." questions. There is an English Proverb that says, "Death always comes too early or too late." In other words, there is never a good time for death. You need to realize you did the best you could and made the best decisions you could with your pet's best interest at heart. You also need to realize that feelings of relief you no longer have the responsibility of taking care of a sick pet are normal, and they don't make you a bad person. Guilt will try to use these feeling if you don't.

*Depression* – Depression is an appropriate response to a great loss. You shouldn't feel bad about feeling sad. You need to be careful though that it doesn't take over your life. Depression can rob you of your energy, happiness and the desires of life. Depression is one stage that you may need outside help to overcome. You may need to get outside yourself, think about your other pets, your family and friends, and begin participating in life again. Helping others can be a great way to move past your depression and see the joys of life whether it be helping animals or humans.

*Acceptance* – Acceptance is often confused with “being alright” or “OK”. It isn't. You will never be okay with the loss of your furry companion, but you can learn to live with it. Acceptance just means you have come to accept the reality of your loss and are not using denial and anger to escape reality and that you are not using bargaining and guilt to make things worse than they are. Grief, as John Adams realized, can be a time to grow as a person with deeper understanding and a softer heart.

## *Stages of Grief Questions*

*Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak whispers the o'erfraught heart and bids it break. Shakespeare MacBeth*

It's time now to acknowledge the feelings and beliefs of grief. As Shakespeare said, if we don't give sorrow words it will lead to an overburdened heart that is forever broken.

*Denial* (What reality are you denying? I can't believe they're gone. I don't want to believe they're gone.)

*Anger* (With who or what are you angry? Who or what do I blame for my pet's death? Is anger a way of holding on to your pet? If you let go of your anger and blame, what would happen? Do other people's ability to move on make you angry? Why?)

*Bargaining and Guilt* (What bargains have I made and with who? What beliefs do I have about myself that make me feel guilty and are they justified? Are there things I need to change in my life?)

*Depression* (How do I feel right now? Am I getting out and living my life? Am I happy and what do I need to do to be happy? Am I exercising and eating right? Does being happy negate the loss of my pet? Is it okay to be sad sometimes? Do I need permission to be sad?)

*Acceptance* (Does accepting the loss of my pet mean that they weren't important in my life? Does acceptance mean I'm okay with what happened? Can I begin to live my life again and make new relationships with new pets? When will I know it's okay to feel okay?)



## *Coping with Grief*

There can be things as you go through your daily life that trigger your grief. It can be a good thing in your healing to identify those triggers and see if there are ways to mitigate them or have strategies to deal with them. For instance, your pet's bed, their leash, a collar may trigger a whole host of sad memories in the beginning. You may want to remove them until you are able to deal with the loss. Just remember you are not trying to remove all memories of your pet, only trying to find a way to deal with your loss until healing can occur.

What are my grief triggers?

How will I handle them? / How am I handling them?


Here are some strategies for dealing with your grief from Moira Anderson Allen's book Coping with the loss of your pet.

**1. Let yourself grieve.** Remember you can't heal what you can't feel. (What emotions do you not allow yourself to feel? Why do you think it is easier not to feel? How did you learn not to feel? What do you think would happen if you let yourself feel sadness? What would happen if you let yourself feel anger? What would happen if you felt joy? How does being emotionally numb affect your relationships?)

**2. Remember the good times.** (Are you concentrating on the good times you had or the pet's death? Are you maintaining a positive attitude about yourself and the role you had in your pet's life?)

**3. Seek outside help?** (Do you feel there is something wrong with needing help? Does it mean you are weak? Do you feel you are overreacting? Are you seeking out other pet owners for support? Do you think a Facebook group or therapist could help you? If no, why not?)

**4. Turn to your faith.** (Do you believe in God, an afterlife, or in a divine purpose? Do you believe God is loving and understanding of our feelings? What are pets really? Why were they created? Does all of creation long for God?)



## *My Mourning Rights*

*"Grief can't be shared. Everyone carries it alone, his own burden, his own way."*

*Anne Morrow Lindbergh*

Grieving the loss of a pet, more so than grieving the loss of a person, can lead to some conflicts or hard feelings between people who don't understand. Those that don't know the bond that can be formed with a pet may wonder why you are taking it so hard; it was just an animal; you can get another. Although people are well meaning, you may get lots of advice on how you should be handling your grief.

Everyone grieves differently. We need to know it's okay to grieve the way we need to grieve, and we also need to allow others in our family to grieve the way they need to grieve. All grief should be a judgment free zone.

Here are some mourning rights you can claim.

- ✓ *I have the right to grieve the death of my pet.*
- ✓ *I have the right to take as much time as I need to grieve my pet.*
- ✓ *I have the right to feel what I feel and when I feel it.*
- ✓ *I have the right to grieve even when others think I should get over it.*
- ✓ *I have the right to demonstrate my feelings of grief in my own way.*

## *My Mourning Rights*

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- ✓ *I have the right to move through the stages of grief in my own time.*
- ✓ *I have the right to move forward and backwards in the stages of grief.*
- ✓ *I have the right to cry and show my emotions.*

What other mourning rights do you have?

Is there anyone you need to talk to about your right to mourn in your own way? Someone that just doesn't get it and doesn't realize they are hurting you with their attitude.

Is there anyone I'm not giving them the right to mourn in their own way?

Who are the people I need to surround myself with that do get it?



*Remembering You*

My favorite memory of you is when ...

My funniest memories about you were ...

*Remembering You*

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My sweetest memory of you was ...

I remember bringing you home and you ...

I remember when you became a part of our family and you ...

*Remembering You*

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You were there for me when ...

I can't help but smile when I remember you ...

When I think of you I feel ...

*Remembering You*

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These are some of the things I want you to know ...



## *Things to do that can help healing*

Below are some ways to memorialize your pet and help with the healing process.

- ✓ *Create a written tribute. This could be a letter to your pet (or even a letter from your pet to you and your family), a poem, an accounting of your pet's life, etc. This can also be done as a family with each member contributing their own written material.*
- ✓ *Post a tribute online.*
- ✓ *Light a candle on special days.*
- ✓ *Create a memorial display of things that remind you of them.*
- ✓ *Have a portrait painted.*
- ✓ *Make a donation in their honor. Create a fundraiser in their honor.*
- ✓ *Plant a tree in their memory.*
- ✓ *Create a scrapbook with special photos and memories.*
- ✓ *Create a memorial garden.*
- ✓ *Celebrate their birthday with a party for your other animals.*

What are some other things you can do to remember your pet?

*My Notes*



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