

## Reaching Out when a Pet Dies

On October 30 of last year, my husband and I made the wrenching decision to have our dear little Scottish Fold cat, 'Sconset, euthanized. She had pancreatic cancer, and treatment just wasn't helping. For the previous six weeks, we had been her at-home veterinary caregiver team. I administered subcutaneous fluid IVs and gave her pain and steroid shots; and my husband had to hold her still.

I said a prayer out loud every time needles were involved! A prayer that I would be guided with the syringe, that He knew we only wanted what was best for her, that we prayed for a successful outcome. But for His reasons, He decided that our seven years with her was the tenure of her blessing our home.

We decide midday that the time had come to call the vet and tell her “we knew.” They actually had time for our special procedure in a few hours, so now it was time for our final talk, our goodbyes. This is the only time I can recall ever questioning God's plan in anything. Why was God allowing this to happen to her and to us? Here's where the visceral sadness kicked in.

The actual passing was so smooth—just two shots and a warm fuzzy blanket. Rather like anesthesia from which you don't wake up. You go in with your pet, but you come out with an empty carrier—and a heart heavy with emotion.

So with this background of caregiving, emotion and, now, emptiness, I proceeded to reach out to those who knew of the illness—who had been praying or not, who were Christian or not, who liked cats or not.

I still have the sympathy cards. One from a Greek Orthodox acquaintance, who said our pets depend on us to do the right thing. One from a dear Lutheran friend who talked of loss and sadness and memories. One from our often matter-of-fact Jewish veterinarian, who when she heard during a positive point in the treatment that our cat had people praying for her cheerfully agreed that it seemed to be helping.

A concerned colleague from a professional organization (professed lapsed Catholic) said she hoped our cat was in a better place. A good golf friend (not a church goer) was kind in her remarks and said she could still get sad when she thought of the dogs she's lost over the years. My best friend from college (LCMS from the cradle) told me she totally believes we see our pets in heaven!

And a very special but often emotionally distant friend (German, Jewish, in Germany) sent a hug via email—and expressed such compassion and understanding even though she has never cared for pets.

So, what's the point to my sharing this? Don't hold back. Share your faith and share your sorrow. Freely. Don't just seek out people who you think are like you! Cast your net! Include many—Christian or not, closest friends or not.

God will put people in your path to touch your heart. Some will be more capable and willing than others. And you may be very surprised at who comforts you the best! Allow the greatest number of people to be kind to you when you most need it. Don't be afraid to reach out and let them know. And don't you dare hold back when YOU sense someone needs YOUR kinds words!

“O Lord, you preserve both man and beast. How priceless is your unfailing love!” Psalm 36:6-7

There is no special encouragement in Scripture about seeing our pets in heaven—maybe this quote. But no matter what, we'll never forget our pet companions as long as we live our earthly lives. And that's what really matters. There is no special encouragement in Scripture about seeing our pets in heaven—maybe this quote. But no matter what, we'll never forget our pet companions as long as we live our earthly lives. And that's what really matters.