



# **Pet loss and bereavement**

## Foreword

All of us who have a close bond with our pets will someday face the profound sadness of their death.

The distress of grief engulfs us as we miss their presence in our lives and make practical arrangements for their burial or cremation.

Many of us will find the intensity of our feelings takes us by surprise.

This leaflet may be helpful and informative because CPC acknowledges the unique and significant contribution that animals make. CPC provides owners with a kind and respectful service at the time of bereavement and that makes it just a little bit easier to bear.

### **Mary Dawkes BA (Hons) Dip Counselling**

Senior Accredited Counsellor and Psychotherapist

## Introduction

In the 1970s my uncle lost his little Jack Russell. In those days the vet told you to leave it with them and they'd dispose of it. He wasn't at all happy; he had no time to say goodbye, and was left with a great empty space inside.

We talked about it, talked some more, and after a year we decided to open a pet crematorium where ordinary everyday people, like us, could bring their pet for an individual cremation. That was over 35 years ago.

Over the years I've heard people say "It's only a pet"; I tell them they need to care for an animal to understand what loss means. I remember we had two families in, all upset except for two men, who were smirking, looking as if they didn't know why they were there. A woman came in with the ashes of her border collie and chose a casket which, she was advised, was three times larger than she needed. She explained that a few months before, she'd lost her husband. Before he'd died, she'd promised him she'd scatter his ashes along with those of their dog. The casket was for the ashes of her husband as well as her dog. I saw the expression change on the faces of those two men: suddenly, they understood.

**I've had pets all my life and doing this work doesn't make me immune from grief. A big part of my life was my dog, Zak. We all have a special pet. And he was it. A dog in a million.**

I'd lost Ben, my old dog, and I went to Battersea Dogs' Home to see if I could get another. I looked and looked but no dog seemed to have quite the right temperament, which was important because at the time we had three young children. But then I turned round and saw this German Shepherd. They said he wasn't at all suitable: that he was highly nervous having been beaten up by a previous owner. I asked to go into his cage and he let me stroke his head. As I walked out of the cage, he followed me. That was it! From then on, Zak seldom left my side. He came with me to work, and sat at my feet. He often nuzzle up to a grieving owner as if to say he was there to help.

My wife rang me at work one day to say that Zak was ill. I rushed home and took him to the vet. His stomach had ruptured. I waited and went to see him when he was settled in his cage. He tried to get up but couldn't. He didn't make it through the night and when I got the call, I was devastated.

I went through the system at CPC, and like everyone else, felt this yawning gap inside me. I felt absolutely terrible and cried my eyes out. It's part of the process we all have to go through. And now, when I think of him, when I look at pictures of him, I smile. I have such good memories of him. I was so lucky: he was such a character, such a fantastic dog.

Amazing, isn't it – such an impact a pet has on you? But I'm no different from anyone else.

### **Ray Hale, Chairman, CPC**

Excepts from "Farwell, My Lovely" by Susie Cornfield

## The human-animal bond

**Our pets are part of the family, each one of them unique, they bring different qualities to our homes and lives.**

In our pets lifetime we form a strong bond with them. When that bond is severed through death, many of us are not prepared for the emotions that flood over us. Contrary to what is believed by those who have never known the joy and reward of pet ownership, losing a much loved pet can for some people be the same as losing any other member of the family.

When a human member of the family dies, we arrange a formal goodbye ceremony usually in the form of a funeral, followed by a burial or cremation. This gives an opportunity to say goodbye and grieve formally. There is no reason why we should not do this for a pet. There are many services available to us as pet owners that offer the same compassionate care as human funeral directors offer. The chance to say goodbye or to be able to erect a memorial are very beneficial to the bereavement process. Having a plan for when the time comes may help you to cope and prevent you from making a decision you may later regret.

The emotional side of a death is something that we cannot plan for in advance. Working as a Pet Bereavement Advisor, one of the most common things that I hear is "I did not realise I would feel this way when they died" or "I can't believe how upset I am." The death of a pet can have a profound effect on us. We can feel inhibited by friends, family, colleagues and employers

who may not appreciate the depth of our loss. Grieving the loss of a pet is nothing to be ashamed of and should not be stifled through fear of judgement by others.

I have had pets all my life and have never lived in a home without one. My first pet I grew up with was a Sheltie called Lassie. When she died I was 16 and it was the first experience that I had ever had of death in the family. Many years later I still think of her from time-to-time as I do with all the pets that I have lost. While the loss never gets any easier it has never meant that I would want to be without one.

Our pets bring us so much happiness and fulfilment and it is heartbreaking when they die. However, we should not deny ourselves the chance to love or be loved by another pet in the future. Each pet is individual and their character can never be replaced. This does not mean there is not another pet out there that could fill the gap left. The way that we feel when a pet dies is nothing in comparison to all the years of happiness that they give us and we give them.

**Maryann Griffin**  
**CPC Pet Bereavement Advisor**

*"Although it may not seem like it straight after you lose your pet, and the grief is at its most raw, most pet carers agree that it is better to have loved and lost a companion than never to have known how wonderful the human-animal bond can be."*

**- Shailen Jasani MA VetMB MRCVS**

*“The presentation of my pet Shadow was lovely. He looked wonderful and the time taken to present him was well worthwhile. It was a necessity that I said farewell to Shadow and I thank CPC for having the facilities and services available to do so.”*

**- Mr. Russell Knight**

## Bereavement support

**Sometimes it helps to share your feelings with someone who knows from personal experience how distressing the loss of a pet can be and who will listen with compassion and without judgement.**

The death of a pet can also trigger off other painful memories and lead us into a spiral of despair which may need more specialist help.

CPC recommends the services offered by the following organisations.

### Pet Bereavement Support Service

The Blue Cross Pet Bereavement Support Service (PBSS) mission is to provide free and confidential emotional support and information to anyone who is affected by the loss, or anticipated loss, of a pet or assistance animal through illness, euthanasia, natural death or other circumstances like theft or attack.

The support line 0800 096 6606 is open from 8.30am - 8.30pm everyday. All calls are free and confidential from a landline. If calling from a mobile phone, some phone networks may charge. Support is provided by trained volunteers. The service does not offer a counselling service but is able to offer emotional support and information for pet owners who may be experiencing the loss of a pet. Alternatively you can also email the Pet Bereavement Support Service on [pbssmail@bluecross.org.uk](mailto:pbssmail@bluecross.org.uk).

The PBSS helpline is accredited by the Helplines Partnership which is an independent regulatory body [www.helplines.org](http://www.helplines.org)

### Samaritans

Alternatively, Samaritans provide confidential non-judgemental emotional support 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair. They can be contacted on 08457 90 90 90 or by emailing [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

Further information can be found on the Samaritans website [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

### Seeking Professional Medical Help

If your grief feels overwhelming, or you have prolonged symptoms or distress, your own family doctor can help. Do not be afraid to say you have suffered an animal bereavement.

### The Ralph Site

The Ralph site ([www.theralphsite.com](http://www.theralphsite.com)) is a not-for-profit website that provides support to pet owners around the loss of a beloved companion. Resources include:

- Information on euthanasia and aftercare
- Reading around grief emotions and management
- Ways to remember your companion
- Private forums and a Facebook community
- Different types of pet loss support and links to pet bereavement counselling

# Saying goodbye at the crematorium

Some people may like to say a final farewell to their pet prior to their pet's individual cremation.

For further information on attending your pet's cremation please contact CPC.

## Garden of Remembrance

Commemorating the lives of much-loved pets, CPC's garden of remembrance contains columbaria, as well as individual and communal plots. Located at Cambridge Pet Crematorium, the garden welcomes visitors throughout the year. Many people choose to have their pet's ashes interred or scattered in this peaceful place.

## CPC's Book of Remembrance

When visiting any one of our crematoria, you can share your memories and draw comfort from our books of remembrance. Alternatively, you can leave an online tribute at [www.cpccares.com](http://www.cpccares.com)

CPC has a number of crematoria across the U.K. welcoming pet owners and their families.

If you choose to attend the cremation of your pet, on arrival at the crematorium you will be guided to our farewell suite. In comfortable surroundings, your bereavement advisors will explain the service and be on hand provide support throughout.

Once you have said your final farewell you may wish to witness your pet's cremation. For those who would find this option reassuring a monitor will enable further viewing of the cremation.

After the cremation you may wish to take your pet's ashes home with you on the day and this can be arranged.



Cambridge Pet Crematorium



Cheltenham Pet Crematorium

CPC offers a range of services and resources for bereaved pet owners, and their families.

## Pet Memorials

Remember and celebrate your companion's life with one of CPC's personalised memorials for the garden or home. Our range can be viewed at [www.cpccares.com](http://www.cpccares.com) or contact our bereavement advisors for a brochure.



Above: The Tumbled Cobble Memorial

Below: Excerpts from [www.cpccares.com](http://www.cpccares.com)

## Online Tributes

Commemorate your companion's life and share your thoughts with other pet owners by leaving an online tribute on our website [www.cpccares.com](http://www.cpccares.com)



## E-Sympathy Cards

You can send an e-sympathy card free to friends and family from our website. Selecting from a range of designs you can personalise and send wishes of condolence.



## Reading

There is a selection of beautiful poems that can be read on our website. There is also a list of recommended pet loss books.



*"When my partner and I came to Cambridge Pet Crematorium to collect our pet's ashes I was amazed how beautiful the setting was. We made sure we took the time to walk around the Garden of Remembrance and were once again taken aback by how tranquil and beautiful the gardens are. My mind could not have been more at rest knowing George was treated with respect and dignity and for that we can't thank CPC enough."*

- Ms. Jan Harrison



## Our crematoria

### **Cambridge Pet Crematorium**

A505 Main Road, Thriplow Heath  
Nr Royston, Hertfordshire SG8 7RR  
T: 01763 207700 E: [cambridge@cpccares.com](mailto:cambridge@cpccares.com)

### **Caledonian Pet Crematorium**

Nettlehill Road, Houstoun Industrial Estate  
Livingston, West Lothian EH54 5DL  
T: 01506 833686 E: [caledonian@cpccares.com](mailto:caledonian@cpccares.com)

### **Cheltenham Pet Crematorium**

Unit 5601, Shannon Place, Shannon Way  
Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire GL20 8SL  
T: 01684 857494 E: [cheltenham@cpccares.com](mailto:cheltenham@cpccares.com)

[www.cpccares.com](http://www.cpccares.com)

