

**L**ove, respect, compassion, and dignity are the core values that Cherie Fry, founder and owner of Paws to Angels Pet Loss Center, demonstrates as she works with grieving pet parents and families.

Cherie is, among many things, a Pet Loss Professional. She explains that many people do not understand what someone in her role does; nor do they really understand the importance her role may play in the loss and healing process for many grieving pet owners. This was the situation surrounding the Goebel family when they lost their cat, Sophie.

Tabitha Goebel shares, "When our beloved Sophie passed away, it was quite a shock. I knew it was important to me that Sophie be taken care of in a dignified way, and not treated like just some animal. She was a dear member of our family and she deserved respect in life, as well as in death." Tabitha explains that she sought out a facility that would do an individual cremation. "It became clear that there wasn't the level of compassion I was looking for. I didn't want her riding in a vehicle somewhere and I wanted her treated like the special girl that she was."

Tabitha states the consensus of many families who have gone to Paws to Angels when she says, "Cherie was kind, compassionate, and truly genuine in sharing her sorrow for our lost loved one. Throughout the whole process, Paws to Angels was there to comfort our whole family. The staff did an exceptional job at helping our very young children and included them in the process every step of the way."

That is just a sample of Cherie's world. As a Certified Pet Loss Professional, she guides pet parents in education. She explains that she guides families in what they don't know about their pet loss and grieving process, as well as helps them with the many options they never realized they would have. She is also a resource in helping children face emotions they don't understand.

Cherie is also a Certified Pet Loss Grief Companion; she points out that she is not a counselor. As a Pet Loss Companion, Cherie says she supports the family in its grief and guides them in the tender process of saying goodbye to their beloved pets. She explains that she listens; she doesn't fix.

Cherie says that pet parents want to talk, so she listens. She also asks questions, because Cherie knows the importance of allowing the families to share their stories and having their feelings validated.

It was through her personal experience with the loss of her own pet family member, Chadz, that led Cherie to start her business, Paws to Angels, in 2010. When she was making the critical decisions on what to do and going through all the motions and emotions, she recalls that there was no one to help her walk through her pain and struggle; and no one to care for Chadz's body with the respect and dignity she deserved.

She points out that she was amazed at the lack of support and options for grieving families. She also states how little education was available for families surrounding the death of a loved

pet. She stresses a very real fact: "We are a death avoidance society. We don't want to talk about it."

Cherie says that pet parents don't realize what they don't know because they have never had options when it came to memorializing their pets. Some families are seeking permission to honor the lives they shared together, and pet parents do want their pets' bodies treated with respect and dignity. A Pet Loss Professional's role is to educate grieving pet parents on what they don't know; guide them, and offer support. Cherie and other Pet Loss Professionals help families make choices that make the most sense to them, allowing families to create their experience in the way they want to, in their timeframe, and in a way that is right for them.

For many children, their first experience with death involves a pet. "I am here to help them mourn and help them with the feelings they don't understand; to help them say goodbye. I am also

a resource for parents who don't know how to help their child through the loss," she shares.

Another fact Cherie stresses is how important credentials are today. As with any profession, a reputable pet death care service will seek out certifications and continuing education for its staff members. By undergoing training, pet professionals display their commitment to achieving the best practices in their profession.

She says she is continually setting standards in operational excellence, professionalism, and ethics in pet death care. Cherie believes her business is highly recognized for its compassion, transparency, and added value.

"No one wants to look ahead to the day they must say 'good bye' to their beloved animal companion. Even though each of us knows that day will come, it can be very hard to sit down and plan for it," admits Cherie. "Much like making final care plans for the human members of our families, by planning ahead for your pet family member's aftercare needs you are determining your family's needs and bud-

get ahead of time, eliminating hastily-made decisions, and regrets that may follow later."

She shares that a common concern among families that have their pets cremated is wondering "Is that really my pet?" Unfortunately, Cherie shares that pet cremation is not regulated.

"We are the first in the state of Nebraska abiding by ethical processes and standards that have been put into place based on what is done on the human side," says Cherie, "We have a six-step authentication process; we can guarantee you receive only your pet's cremains when we they are returned to you."

"For continuing help, we provide a biweekly support group for pet parents and a bimonthly support group for children," she says. "Unlike the loss of a human family member, those who have lost a pet will often have to move through that time alone. By coming together at Paws to Angels, people find comfort in sharing and remembering the good times."

Paws to Angels is located at 11718 W. Dodge Road. For more information, including hours of operation, or to speak with Cherie Fry, please call 402-507-0585, or visit the website at [www.pawstoangels.net](http://www.pawstoangels.net). You can email Cherie at [pawstoangelsinfo@cox.net](mailto:pawstoangelsinfo@cox.net). 

## PAWS TO ANGELS

By Paulette R. Hammerstrom



*Cherie Fry, founder and owner with Mollie*