

BUSINESS STYLE

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The death of a loved one is never easy for close friends and family members. Whether their passing was expected or sudden, they were elderly or very young, life is never the same for those left behind.

Fortunately, many people find support through their friends, extended family, neighbors, coworkers, and clergy. It is not uncommon for grieving family members to receive everything from flowers and sympathy cards to frozen meals and time off from work.

However, when that family member is furry (or feathered or scaled), support of any kind can be difficult, if not impossible, to find. After she found herself in this predicament, Cherie Fry founded Paws To Angels in an effort to provide information, options, and care for grieving pet parents and their families.

On New Year's Eve of 2009, Cherie lost her dog, Chadz (pronounced "shades"). After a lifetime of educating herself on Chadz's care and happiness, Cherie says she realized that she had no idea what to do at the time of her death. What she found out, unfortunately, was that "Pets are put into bags and placed in freezers stacked on top of one another, waiting for a truck to come around. The pet parent walks out with no options, no support," Cherie tells me.

"Nobody could or would care for her body in the way I wanted her cared for. I didn't want her put into a bag, put into a freezer, and to wait on a truck route. For the 11 ½ years that she gave me of unconditional love, I thought she deserved better than that."

Out of her grief came a passion and desire to become a Pet Loss Professional, Certified Pet Loss Grief Companion, Certified Cremations Specialist, and a Pet and Animal Chaplain.

Paws To Angels, located at 11718 West Dodge Road, officially opened its doors in January 2012, and remains the only full-service pet loss center in the state of Nebraska and the greater Omaha area, says Cherie. Prior to the opening of Paws To Angels, there were few options for owners and families when it came to dealing with their pet's death.

Pet parents could request cremation, but the cremation process for animals is unregulated. And there was no one to guide owners through the process, she explains. In many places, it is illegal to bury your pet in your yard, and there are very few regulations and requirements that pet cemeteries must abide by. While many general therapists offer grief support, Cherie says she is unaware of anyone in the Omaha area who specializes in therapy specifically for pet loss or who offers the service because they themselves went through a similar loss and pain.

Some of the services offered by Paws To Angels include pre-planning; pet death care options (such as cremation and/or burial and preservation); pet loss grief companionship; information for parents and children; visitations and funerals; guidance for euthanasia; anticipatory grief support; and memorials and gifts. Cherie tells me that she is available to her clients 24 hours a day, seven days a week. While Paws To Angels has several packaged options to choose from, Cherie's support and services are often tailored to fit each family's unique needs, she adds.

She goes on to say that her facility offers a calm, safe, and comfortable place for pet parents to "grieve, mourn, and say their

goodbyes." She also has private rooms for funerals and visitations. Cherie points out that she never freezes pets, but instead uses special caskets and swaddling blankets for pets to rest until their parents are ready to move on to burial or cremation, giving the pets and families love, respect, and dignity.

Prior to opening Paws To Angels, Cherie worked as a certified pharmaceutical technician and as a certified sterile IV compound pharmaceutical technician. That experience gave her a good understanding of the physical processes that occur with an ill or dying pet and once an animal has passed away, she says.

Cherie's personal experience as a pet parent who lost a beloved companion, combined with her compassion, knowledge, and personalized service, is appreciated and comforting to her clients, she points out.

In December of 2011, the health of Felon, Paula Coffee's beloved Boxer, was beginning to rapidly deteriorate. While she was not ready to face what might be the end of Felon's life, Paula's family encouraged her to plan for it. She reached out to Cherie at Paws To Angels, and spoke with her for 45 minutes on their first phone call.

"I have a very supportive family and friends, but no one to truly know how this would ultimately change my world," explains Paula, adding that Cherie stepped in to fill this role and walk her through every step. "She was there for me when I had to put my baby down. She gently took him in her arms and took him to Paws To Angels. She set him up beautifully in the chapel and allowed me time with him every day for a week-and-a-half. She stayed by his side throughout his cremation and rushed me his ashes back that same day so I could bring him back home again. And finally, she has been there for me every day ever since."

Although Paula continues to grieve, she credits Cherie "for truly saving me, and for giving my baby all the love and respect that he so rightfully deserved."

Patrick, another client of Paws To Angels, found Cherie only after the sudden death of his much-loved cat, Birdie. Several years ago, Patrick adopted him from a shelter in Fremont. After considering the name "Buddy" for his new friend, he chose "Birdie" when the cat caught a bird right out of the air during some rare outdoor play time.

One night this past August when Patrick returned home after a late night at work, he found Birdie struggling to breathe. After rushing him to an emergency clinic, Birdie sadly passed away. Patrick says he felt pressured by the clinic's staff to make final arrangements there on the spot. He explains, "After Birdie died I was hurting, and the people involved in this process only made it worse. Thankfully, I found you (Cherie), and once I got my little guy to (her) the healing process could start."

It was nearly too late by the time Patrick found Cherie online, and it took a lot of work and determination. But once Birdie arrived at Paws To Angels, Patrick says he was able to rest a little easier. "The best way I can honor my friend is by making sure that everyone else knows their options and knows about Paws To Angels," he says.

Visit Paws To Angels online at www.pawstoangels.net for more information, or contact Cherie by phone at 402-507-0585 or email at pawstoangelsinfo@cox.net. **WE**

PAWS TO ANGELS "Honoring Our Beloved Pets"

By Julie Kuntze



Owner Cherie Fry with one of her cats, Garfield

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