

Paws to Angels

Nebraska's Only and First Pet Loss Center

By Cathy Wyatt



Cherie Fry & Chadz Ann

"With age, she started to lose her sight and hearing, and then as time went on, her bladder was failing more and more. She then, within time, started to eat less and was losing weight."

That's how Felicia Weaver described the end of life for the family's dog of nearly 17 years.

"She was like a child to us," said Weaver. "She would sit with us on the couch, lay with us in bed, beg for food, and go with us to family functions during the holidays. Our kids who are 15 and 11 interacted with her on a daily basis to play with her just like a sister."

Sixty-two (62%) percent of people in the U.S. reportedly have pets. Of them, eighty-three (83%) percent refer to themselves as "mommy and daddy" to their dogs, cats, and foxes?

"The most common names we see here are probably Jake and Bailey for dogs and Tigger or Tiger for cats," said Dr. Rod Van Horn, a Veterinarian at the Omaha Animal Medical Group. "The most unique pet I have treated is a Fennec Fox named Loki."

"Her name was Chamois and she was a yellow lab," said Joyce Wilkins. "I purchased her at seven weeks and had her for a little more than 12 ½ years. I remember going to the home of the people who had the puppies, and I couldn't decide which one I wanted; although, I knew I wanted a female. The mom went into her kennel and all 12 puppies followed her except one. That one wound up picking us... Chamois taught me patience. She taught me kindness. She taught me how to love and love deeply. And, she taught me how to truly be happy from within."

"Life expectancy, especially for dogs, changes with breeds and size of dog," said Dr. Van Horn. "In general, larger breed dogs tend to live fewer years than smaller breed dogs... Cats, in general, are

longer lived than most dogs. Late teens are not uncommon in cats. The oldest cat I have seen was 29 years old (rare)."

According to Dr. Van Horn, one of the more likely causes of death in cats is kidney disease and in dogs kidney disease, cancer, and owner elected Euthanasia from various other diseases.

"In general, our role is to prepare the owner for this event if possible," he said. "We can consult with the owner to help understand that it is O.K. to grieve, along with the process and steps of grieving. We can provide support during this process and guide owners in the direction to receive additional support."

Introducing Paws to Angels, Nebraska's first and only full service pet loss center.

"Paws to Angels provides a service to pet owners in a comprehensive manner that hasn't been available in the past in our area," said Dr. Van Horn. "They provide the opportunity for owners to better prepare themselves for the unwanted death of their pet or to help them with the grieving and emotional events that are normal after the loss of a pet. Every owner will go through one or all stages of grief at some level."

At the heart of it all: Love, Respect, Dignity and a woman named Cherie Fry, Founder and Owner.

"I knew it was a matter of time before Chadz Ann would die," said Fry. "I spent days with guilt and fear with no light at the end of the tunnel and unable to reach closure... I spent hours on the internet trying to find the best cremation services possible for her and wanting to memorialize her. I knew for her body care in death that I did not want her precious body in a bag. I didn't want her body frozen and stacked with other pets waiting for a truck to come



around and pick her up. I thought for the 11 years of unconditional love that she gave me that she deserved much more."

Very overwhelmed with grief and still nowhere to turn and no one to understand her, Fry made a vow to help other pet parents like herself in her dog's memory.

So, earlier this year, she opened her doors and, it would appear, her heart to those in need.

"To be honest, I didn't know what to expect out of grief counseling," said Wilkins. "Cherie has helped me with my feelings, and I am very thankful that not only has she been there for me, she has also become a friend."

So, how does this work? According to Fry, it begins with the following:

- For families, letting them have a chance to talk about what their pet meant to them.
- Helping them understand that how they handle their death preparation is a way of thanking them for what they have done and been to the family over the years.
- Helping the pet parent / owner use this time to express their love for their pet and show that they will always love them.
- Respecting the family and pet relationship by treating their pet not like an animal but like the special little family member they are.

"All my services are built around providing families with the full aftercare." *Continued*

Continued: Paws to Angels

A person, a process, and, as families will find, an environment to match... You'd never know it from the street, though. Located at 117th & Dodge in Omaha, Paws to Angels is sandwiched between an insurance company and an investment firm. It is a warm, welcoming, and peaceful area consisting of three rooms complete with a gathering space, a sanctuary, and a visitation area.

"Everything in here was done with the pet parents in mind," said Fry. "...down to the color on the walls."

While you'll find hours of operation on the door, Fry will tell you that she's available to families 24/7.

"Death knows no time..."

Upon receiving a call, she is ready to accommodate you on the phone, in person, transporting your pet, selecting a casket or decorative urn, a complimentary visitation, funerals, counseling, etc...

"When your pet dies," said Fry, "it is important to stop what we are doing, turn aside, and note the fact that our hearts are heavy, our support for each other is unwavering, and our loved one's life is worth remembering."

"If you ever have a pet that is just like family," said Weaver, "Paws to Angels is the place to go... Cherie cares about her customers just as much as we cared about our Nookie dog."

For more information on Paws to Angels, log on to www.pawstoangels.net or call Cherie at (402) 507-0585.