

Northwoods Humane Society – Deanna Persson, President

The Northwoods Humane Society was given a book on a CD by Walter and The Crew, Inc. The Crew lives in Forest Hills, New York. It is a survival guide for owning pets. It is available on-line. It was sent to us to use for as a tool for pet education and problem solving. I have chosen to share the information on bereavement – the task of saying good-bye to a beloved pet.

The death of a pet can be as devastating as the loss of a human loved one. The type of bond between us can determine the degree, but the process we go through in experiencing that loss will certainly be the same. Pets are often “lost” to their owners by straying away or when the circumstances require, they be given up to a shelter or to someone else. Sometimes pet owners have to make the choice of saying good-bye because of the pet’s terminal illness or severe behavioral issues. There are the times when they die unexpectedly. We can’t prepare for that.

When pets “disappear”, that may leave a gnawing sense of uncertainty as to what actually happened. Sorting out the possibilities of kidnapping, accidental death or being lost are drawn-out, difficult emotional experiences. Here are some thoughts that may prove useful in dealing with the loss of a loved pet.

The process or stages of grief are usually explained in relation to human death. These reactions, however, are typical responses to all forms of loss.

Denial is an immediate, psychological defense, when the news of death, terminal illness, or disappearance of a pet is heard. This is very much an unconscious work of magical thinking. The response is simply that it has not happened. “I’ll run to the store for cat food before Kitty wakes up,” is an example when the pet is found dead.

Denial seems to give a person a little time to digest the gravity of the situation and prepare to face reality. When the event involves an accident or critical illness, this may interfere with taking necessary immediate action.

Bargaining often occurs when terminal illness, accident or disappearance happens. I will never yell at her again if she will only get better.” Sometimes anger will surface and is directed at what or whoever happens to be in the way. Sometimes underlying this anger may be a sense of guilt on the part of the pet owner. We think of “What if I had kept her on a leash or not gone out that afternoon.” We second guess ourselves.

There is often a sense of relief, reliving times when the care of the animal was a great burden. This is a normal thought and feelings like this truly set the stage for resolving the loss.

Grief is a period of profound sadness, and it is healthy. Grief counselors often consider this stage the point when recovery begins. This the difficult time when the task is to simply hurt, feel appropriate loneliness, and come to the point when it is time to get on with life. This does not mean to forget the pet or experience any more sadness. Loss of a loving pet will certainly include those feelings for a long

time, but to a lesser degree. Yet, there properly comes a time when those feelings would not interfere with normal involvement in life.

Resolution marks the end point in the grieving process. Now the pet owner may enjoy the memory of a lost pet without extreme hurt. A new pet is best selected once resolution occurs. In fact, desire for another pet might be a major signal that the worst is behind. However, it is important not to take a pet as a replacement for the lost companion. You will be choosing a pet with their own unique story to tell and develop.

Loving and saying good-bye is part of all our lives – friends, family, and pets. Today I was looking at a picture of 'CHANCE' remembering when he came to NHS in such poor condition, when he was adopted by a wonderful woman and the beautiful life they had together and how sad she has been because she had to say good-bye.

Dates to save:

August 11 – Bingo for NHS at Red Schoolhouse Wines in Stone Lake – 5:30 p.m.

September 12 – Dog Walk and Ice Cream Social – NHS Trails – 12:30 – Tickets may be purchased at NHS Thrift Shop, Art Beat of Hayward and the NHS Shelter.