

## Northwoods Humane Society – Deanna Persson, President

Recently, friends were over and I asked how their dog was doing after they had lost their other dog. They felt their dog was doing well and they were giving her a lot of attention. Another friend from another gathering commented on how lonely her dog was after the loss of her other dog.

Our family has had many dogs over the years and usually three or more at one time. I do not remember any that grieved when one of ours passed. I do remember when my big old yellow lab, Pooh, was dying. We chose to bring her home. Mike carried her to our 3<sup>rd</sup> floor apartment in Chicago and we made a bed for her in the living room. We had two other dogs, Gus and Frankie, and Fred, the cat. They all chose to sleep next to Pooh thru the night. In the morning she was gone. They knew she was dying.

The following information was taken from an article by Lynn Buzhardt, D.V.M. for VCA Animal Hospitals. Pets develop relationships. They bond with human and non-human family members alike. Since their world is fairly confined to the home environment, these family relationships are the center of their universe. Pets see family members, human or otherwise, as a pack much as their ancestors did in the wild. They depend on the pack for a sense of safety and well-being. When one member of the pack dies, the surviving pets may feel unbalanced.

Pets recognize their position in the family and find comfort in the stability of the pack. The death of a pack member disrupts the family unit. A pet's response to changes in his pack may manifest as grief. The surviving pet may exhibit signs of distress and anxiety or develop behavior issues. Grieving the actual loss of a pack member is bad enough. To make matters worse, our pets also respond to *our* sadness as we personally mourn the loss.

To put pet grief in relatable terms, pets, especially dogs, respond to loss much like human toddlers. They may not totally understand the concept of death as an everlasting separation, but recognize and feel a current sense of loss.

Our pets don't verbalize their thoughts, so how do we know they are grieving? We observe their behavior changes. A study conducted by the ASPCA showed that over 60% of pets experience four or more behavioral changes after losing a companion.

These behavior changes included: A change in appetite. Changes in vocalization they may increase their barking or whine more or they may quit barking at all.

Changes in habits. Some pets sleep more than usual. In a New Zealand study about 30% of grieving dogs and 20% of cats napped more. Other habits may change too. For example, some pets pace about constantly. Some hide. Some sulk.

Changes in personality. In this same study about 60% of dogs and cats clung more to humans after the loss of a pack member. On the other hand, some may become withdrawn. They may lack interest in play time. Other may show signs of separation anxiety or become destructive in the house.

Changes in grooming or bathroom habits. If your normally fastidious pet soils the house or misses the litter box, this should raise a red flag. If your cat or dog doesn't groom himself, take note. He could be grieving.

**Seeking behavior.** Approximately 60% of pets repeatedly look for lost companions in their normal napping spots. If your pet constantly returns to his deceased friend's favorite sleeping or resting place, he may be brokenhearted.

To be continued next week.

Dates to Save:

August 7 – Tag Day – Marketplace

August 26 – Been There Done That Band – Flat Creek Saloon – 7 p.m.