



10 Ways to Memorialize Your Animal Companion

Just as with the people in our lives, it's important to acknowledge and honor the role your pet played in your life. It helps bring meaning to your loss and is an important part of the grieving process.

When we work with families who have lost a beloved animal companion, we urge them to summon up memories —as a means of comfort, but also to keep their pet's love and presence in their heart. Often, we suggest activities or events as a focal point, a catalyst for tapping into the well of memories stored deep within. Here are some of our most popular suggestions.

1.) Create a craft tribute. When my sons and I lost our beloved Boston Terrier, we created plaster garden stepping stones, created from kits we purchased at a local crafts store. Those stones have been carried from rental home to rental home, and lovingly placed in the garden. There are services that will create a needlepoint kit from a treasured photo, or a paint-by-number portrait on canvas. A Google search will bring up many reputable online vendors.

2.) Make a photo tribute. Gather a collection of photos of your pet engaged in different activities with the family, and at different ages -- and turn them into a collage. You can purchase art mats with cutouts for as many as 20 photos. Put into a frame, this becomes a keepsake.

3.) Give voice to your feelings and memories. People who love to write enjoy this activity. The poem to or about your pet, a letter to your pet (or even "from" your pet to you), or account of your pet's life, can be read at a remembrance ceremony as a way of expressing your feelings and memories. We've seen use this as a family project, where everyone creates something: words, drawings (little children love that!) can then be assembled in a single scrapbook that can be shared by all.

4. Create a printed Remembrance Book. With today's printing technologies, you can even extend this option by having an actual bound book printed that includes both written tributes and photos. There are many print-on-demand publishers that can print as many as you'd like, at minimal cost.

5.) Post a tribute online. Our website, www.familypetloss.com, is an archive of love. Many of our families choose to create an online memorial webpage, and we invite you to do the same. These tributes include videos, pictures, and memory sharing options. Talk to us to learn more.

6.) Create a memory garden, or plant a tree. Whether it's in your own garden, or as part of a charitable organization, such as Treegivers (www.treegivers.com) or Plant a Tree USA (www.plantatreeusa.com) will plant a tree in your pet's name, in the state of your choice. Your city parks department might also allow you to plant a tree in a city park in memory of your pet.



7.) Contribute to an animal welfare organization. Often, animal shelters will provide a plaque or paving stone with your pet's name on it for a minimum donation.

8.) Create a Memory Box. Put your pet's picture in a photo-display box (one that has a place in the top for a photo). Put some of the pet's treasures inside the box, such as a collar or a lock of hair.

9.) Keep a journal. You're on a journey of healing, and a journal can help you through the grieving process. Take the time to record your pet's life story in that journal.

This next suggestion is at the heart of everything else.

10.) Have a remembrance ceremony. Setting aside a time to remember and honor your companion is the first step toward healthy healing. Whether you choose private property burial or cremation, setting aside that time when all can gather to share in memories and support can make all the difference in the days, weeks, and months following loss. The event will be a mix of tears and laughter, as those memories come to the participants. We usually ask each participant to share just one memory of their pet, and usually that one memory opens the floodgates, and many more memories come tumbling into the mind and heart.

Whatever you choose, please take the time. Know there's no right way, no wrong way to say goodbye. But saying goodbye is essential. If you'd like to read our suggestions for ceremonial activities, you can download our guide from the Family Pet Cremation & Burial Services website.