

Thoughts about Grief in Pet Loss

by Angela Garner

Having watched a TV programme called ‘Super Vet’ recently, based in an animal hospital where pioneering surgery and treatment is carried out for pets which would otherwise possibly have to be put to sleep, I was again reminded of the depth of connection that is formed between people and their companion animals. As was so clear in this programme, when faced with the possibility of losing a much loved pet, the emotions of grief can be intense and overwhelming.

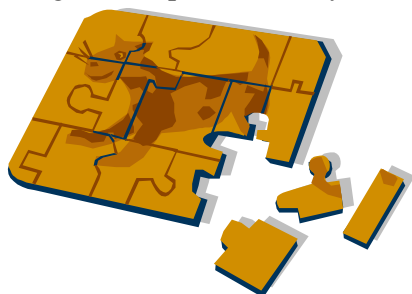
It makes one wonder ‘what is grief?’, and ‘why does it cause so much shock and anguish?’ On one level it may seem obvious in that losing someone you love is going to leave a huge gap in your life, but in an attempt to deepen the understanding, I’d like to offer the following way of looking at this process that we all find ourselves in from time to time.

We each have our own day-to-day routine which comprises the holding patterns we’ve formed during our lives. Obviously these patterns change over time, but at any given moment they allow a level of stability and ease, and therefore, to some degree, a harmony. This is the case even if our life seems anything but harmonious because at least it is what we are used to and familiar with.

Shock and grief cause a major disruption to these holding patterns, thereby disturbing one’s on-going harmony or ‘normalness’. One way of considering this is by analogy: think of your daily routine as being made up of the many facets fitting neatly together, like a jigsaw puzzle, forming the overall picture that describes your life. Each piece is an integral part of the whole, including your relationships and everyone whom you value and care about. A significant shock, such as a death or the devastating news of terminal illness of a loved one, causes the many pieces of your life to come apart – as though the jigsaw puzzle, previously intact, has now been dashed to the ground, scattering into separate components. Then the overall picture, which up to now has been familiar and secure with the normal interconnectedness of your everyday goings-on, disappears. So

in effect you may feel as though your life is suddenly ‘in pieces’.

This naturally leads us to another question, which is ‘what can be done about it?’ Well, firstly time is needed to take on board the reality of what has or is happening. This is often followed by strong waves of emotions; it is important to find ways of releasing these emotions which may take many forms but mostly include tears. It’s natural to cry during grief, and tears are a necessary release during such a turbulent time. Consider a waterfall or weir and how the pressure of the water cascading over the rocks increases when it has rained heavily, causing a fast and often fierce flow in the river. This is one way to look at the emotions, because, as with the waterfall, the more the build-up of emotions, the greater the pressure there will be internally, and so the greater the need to release them.



As one progresses gently but surely through the grief process, there is a healing – difficult to see at first perhaps, but it is there. It's in the courage of picking up each new piece of your life, and carefully placing it where it fits best, so that, in time, a new picture is formed. Of course, the one who has moved on will always be missed, but perhaps they remain nearby, held within memories which fortify and strengthen you on your journey ahead.

