



Many of us own the dearest dog. The dearest cat, the dearest rabbit. But what if our loved one is suddenly dead in our arms? I took my dog, Koen, home with me, and the days that followed were full of sadness and full of experience.

I number them among the richest days I have known.

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**An inspiring tale about saying farewell to your dearest pet**

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## 1. Introduction

There are worse things in life. That's what people say, and it's true. I myself have been through things that may well be bigger and worse, but still...

Pet-owners understand. People who once owned a pet will see what I mean, too. No matter if it's a dog, a cat, a rabbit or a canary.

It is all about the emotions that have grown between you and your pet.

Friendship. Trust.

I first saw my dog Koen when he was three weeks old. Not much later, he was there all the time. Frisking about, lying at my feet, snoring on the couch. I have always found it remarkable how the room is 'suffused' with the presence of a sleeping dog. Later other people told me the same thing, How an animal can be asleep and still change the atmosphere, the 'feel' of a room.

Koen got me talking to total strangers. In the street, just like that. Always about the same thing. About your own dog and about the stranger's, who later might become an acquaintance, or a friend.

One day, Koen told me that his time had come, that he would go. It was not a question, but a given. On that day, Koen knew more than we did.

And so he went, but not without an injection.

The moment I heard him breathe his last in a snore, the realization I would never again look into his brown eyes, is etched in my heart.

Later on, I understood that I am not the only one. Many people remember their dreams about pets that have long since flown away from the earth.

But what do you do if your loved one is suddenly dead in your arms?

I took him home with me, and the days that followed were full of sadness and full of experience.

I number them among the richest days I have known.

That's why I stress this point: say farewell!

Saying farewell is good and rewarding. And your pet, too, is allowed to say farewell to home, human and spot.

That first night I dreamed I had wings, and I woke up smiling. This is a true dream and it is not included in the book Koen & Katie, a farewell to your dearest pet, which I wrote immediately afterwards. On the whole, the entire story is true.

And the part that is not true is what I believe: that behind the veil, in a different shapeless reality, man and animal go on with what we call 'life', in which we are and continue to be infinitely connected.

The book does contain other dreams and occurrences, as well as thoughts and diary notes, and random sentences paying tribute to 'the animal' that chose to share life with us.

I still dream of Koen. That is my story. Koen gave me a pen to write and thus he became the start of my own publishing house Miramah House.

Other stories and books will follow. About the tiny milestones of that awesome everyday life we are all, man and animal alike, so much part of.

My story is small. I will never forget it, because of its sheer size.

And because I have told mine, I have been told other stories. Often by people who didn't really dare admit how hard it is and was.

That's what this Great Little eBook is for. To let you know it's all right to be sad, to tell you there will be something else afterwards. The memory, the gratitude. And sometimes the sharp pangs of loss once again.

## **2. Human sorrow for a dead pet**

### **Don't hold back your tears**

That afternoon at the vet's is etched in my memory. It was growing dark and the weekend was about to start. The vet took us to a separate room where it was to happen.

I looked at Koen and time stood completely still; there was no sense of time at all. All time converged in that bizarre moment, when I had to tell the vet to give my dearest an injection.

My dog Koen looked at me and said it was all right, I saw it in those brown eyes of him.

And I? I felt the tears in my stomach, sickening tears. And something else as well: shame for those tears. An attempt to swallow them and to postpone crying, until later, when I would be home alone.

After all, people know that an animal has a shorter life than a human, right?

They had been good years, hadn't they? Fourteen good years?

The vet was very kind and nodded to me. The tears trickled down my cheeks and I too knew that this was all right.

Koen and I, we let go together.

## **Celebrate your grief**

Only much later, I understood how important this moment of genuine grief had been. Human sorrow for a dead pet is big and beautiful. It is the flipside of love.

If you just lost your pet:

- \*Why pretend to be so grown-up?
- \*Why pretend to be brave?
- \*Share your experience with others!
- \*Celebrate your grief! It's allowed, it's liberating!

You may be surprised to find how many people:

- \*know exactly what you mean,
- \*want to talk about their loss,
- \*still have tears in their eyes years on, whenever they talk about that one animal,
- \*still dream of that one animal after many years,
- \*are able to love a new pet, but differently.

### 3. The moment

#### The magic of the moment

*“That one animal that has joined his very life to that one human being. And then it suddenly flies free, free... like a butterfly roaming higher than the clouds.”*

(Koen & Katie, a farewell to your dearest pet, p. 15)

I wrote these words a few hours after Koen died. They are also in the book Koen & Katie, a farewell to your dearest pet, which I began to write that night.

But what can you write and feel about that moment, the moment the soul leaves the body? It is soundless, impalpable, as soft as a butterfly and it has a magnitude we humans can hardly grasp. It is magic and you'll never forget it.

It's different for everyone, but I myself look at this moment as a rich experience. If you can choose and if you need to have your dearest pet put to sleep by means of euthanasia, there is much to be said for being there. If you cannot, for whatever reason, there is still no harm done. You can also say farewell by means of the farewell ritual (page 12).

Being there at the moment of passing on:

\*your pet senses your presence, which in many cases has a calming effect,

\*the magic of the moment often has a healing effect (not just for grown-ups, but for children as well),

\*you'll have no doubts, regrets or questions later on.

## **Before**

To me, deciding to have Koen put to sleep was utterly unexpected. I was driving around with a dog that was literally fatally ill and had to make a snap decision.

When I went to the vet that day, I didn't know I would take Koen back dead.

In other cases, the moment is arranged with the vet a few days in advance. You can consciously pass the remaining time by:

\*giving him/her all the time in the world (all the time in the world!),

\*sitting down close to him/her,

\*lots of stroking,

\*saying, whispering and/or thinking sweet things (how good he/she is, what he/she means to you now, and will mean to you later),

\*preparing his/her favourite food,

\*or whatever else you can think of,

\*but most of all...before all... saying thank you!

### **After**

How empty the house feels when the basket is empty! The house is incredibly empty and the heart is heavy. How you spend those days is entirely personal. I cannot and will not fill that in for you; the main thing is that everyone finds their own way.

For the house is empty and the basket is empty, and nobody can do anything about it.

Many people continue to have dreams about their dearest pet for the rest of their lives.

And years on, many people still get tears in their eyes whenever they talk about their pet.

What may help:

\*having a farewell ritual (page 12),

\*making a memory box (page 17).

## 4. Saying farewell

Saying farewell is something very personal. To me it was evident that I had to say farewell to Koen in a ritual with candles and flowers.

Koen had remained at home for longer than a day, covered with the red blanket he had died in. White tulips had been strewn over him and fourteen night lights sparkled around him, one small flame for every year of his life.

Friends came to take their leave of him, grown-ups and children alike. They brought him flowers and said farewell to him. There was beautiful music, and people talked about him both merrily and sadly. We drank tea and we drank wine.

Other dogs and the cat sniffed at his basket and said farewell in their own way.

Children ventured to stroke him and laid drawings by his side.

Later on, people told me how good it had been and how unusual. Indeed, we don't have mourning cards or calls of sympathy for animals. But why don't we?

## **Farewell ritual**

Here are some ideas for what you can do when you say farewell to your dearest pet. Even if your pet has been buried or cremated already, recently or longer ago, or if your pet has been left at the vet's, a ritual can help you and can even be healing and enlightening.

You don't need to do everything; you can just make a choice. Or you can think of an act that feels right for you. You can do it by yourself or invite others along. I know a woman who dug up her cat from the garden after a day, because she felt that her farewell had been too fast and too easy. She had been so sad that she had quickly dug a hole. Once dug up, her beloved puss had lain on the favourite spot on the window sill for a day. In the end, that had made saying farewell much easier.

She no longer wanted to feel ashamed of her grief, she said.

What the ritual does not do is:

- \*taking the heaviness from your heart,
- \*putting an end to your sense of loss.

What the ritual does is:

- \*honouring the life and death of your beloved pet,
- \*lend lustre to the experience,
- \*helping you to deal with your grief,
- \*making space for regrets and forgiveness.

What you can do when saying farewell to your dearest pet:

If you can, if it's (still) possible, put him/her on a nice spot in the house for at least a day:

- \*Give him/her time to take his/her leave of you, of his/her house, his place on earth.
- \*Light candles, one for every year of his/her life.
- \*Put flowers by his/her side and strew flowers over him/her.
- \*Say out loud how much you love him/her.
- \*Say what you liked most about him/her.
- \*Say what you didn't like about him/her at all.
- \*And most of all, say the things you are sorry about!
- \*Or write a letter and lay that by his/her side.
- \*Play music and sit down with him/her, alone or with others. Maybe you or a friend plays an instrument, maybe there's someone who wants to sing a song.
- \*Talk about him/her and about the good times you had together.
- \*Then bury him/her in the garden (if you have one and if it's allowed in your town)
- \*Or take him/her to a pet cemetery or a pet crematorium.
- \*Do this by yourself or invite other friends, but whatever you decide, make it a really good farewell. He/she's worth it and so are you.

And also:

- \*Put a picture by his/her side, as well as flowers and a candle.

\*Add something that belonged to him/her. Maybe you still have his/her milk teeth. Or else a toy or a biscuit.

\*Leave his/her picture there for as long as you like, maybe for the rest of your life. I still light a candle by his portrait every day.

\*Often talk **about** him/her with other people. How much fun he/she was and how much you miss him/her. How glad you are to have known him/her.

\*Often talk **to** him/her and ask him/her to enter your dreams. One day, he/she will turn up in your dreams, even if you cannot always remember in the morning.

\*Realize he/she'll approve if you decide to take care of another pet one day.

Love is infinite.

## **Regrets & forgiveness**

From the stories I have since heard other people tell me, one thing has struck me most of all. Many people still feel bad about something or other. Those regrets can still surface years later, whenever they talk about their pet.

It's usually about small things, really. Maybe they'd be annoyed if their pet didn't listen. Or maybe they'd pull their lead too hard when he/she traipsed. Or maybe they'd be exasperated when he/she couldn't hold his water. Had the food been right for him/her? Had he/she enjoyed it? Hadn't he/she been home alone too often?

Questions, questions and regrets. I can well remember those moments when I was less than kind and those times I didn't really understand him. When Koen had peed in the bathroom on that dark morning, I hadn't realized he was suddenly very ill. And how had he felt in the car, when I took him from one vet to another next morning? Couldn't I see he was dying, it was all over?

Afterwards I told him I was sorry. When I was sitting by his dead body, I said all those things, however small they were, and I felt the force of forgiveness. Koen forgave me and I forgave myself. Personally, I think this is one of the most important things you can do for yourself.

## **5. Reminiscing**

Memories get sweeter as time goes by. Sometimes they don't. Sometimes they still sting from time to time.

### **Mood Box Farewell Pet**

The first night after Koen died, I started writing a book about saying farewell to your dearest pet. It is a poignant, visual tale that prompts experiencing and reminiscing together.

The book can also be bought in a beautiful handmade box that is mailed in an envelope and fits through the letterbox. The box contains beautiful 'things' that stir the imagination and that you can use to perform a small ritual. The Mood Box Farewell Pet is meant to be sent to someone who lost a beloved pet recently, or longer ago.

Or as a gift to yourself.

Apart from the book, the Mood Box Farewell Pet contains a number of beautiful 'things' that you can use to perform a small ritual by yourself or with other people. For a moment of parting and feeling connected.

You can also use it to create a memory corner, to which you add things that belonged to your pet and/or you.

To render the memory of your dearest pet sweet and rich.

The handmade black box contains:

- \*the book Koen & Katie, a farewell to your dearest pet,
- \*the Mood Card Farewell Pet, (to help create a memory corner, with a space for the picture of your pet),
- \*seven candles made of pure beeswax,
- \*an inspirational book explaining the ritual.

The sumptuous box can serve as a ‘memory box’, in which you can keep some small things.

Dog tags, (milk) teeth, tufts of hair, vaccination certificate, pictures...

Surf to the Miramah House website (<http://www.miramah-house.com/>) to watch an inspiring movie about the ritual.

### **Memory box**

Of course you can also feel inspired to make your own memory box. The great thing about a box is that you can open it and close it again. That sounds simple, but that is not what I mean. Opening and closing a box can actually have a symbolic value. You can choose a special day for opening the box, for example on your pet’s birthday, or on the anniversary of his or her death.

Composing a memory box can be a healing ritual in itself. You sort through the (small) things that used to belong to your pet, by yourself or together with others, and decide what you want to keep through time.

In the memory box, you can keep all kinds of things, such as:

- \* a tuft of hair,
- \*a lead,
- \*dog tags,
- \*pictures,
- \*(children's) drawings,
- \*vaccination certificate,
- \*milk teeth,
- \*toys,
- \*cards you received,
- \*a farewell you wrote yourself,
- \*a poem you wrote yourself,
- \*another poem you like,
- \*rose petals, gem stones,
- \*joss sticks,
- \*gem stones.

## **Dreaming**

At night we close our eyes and enter the realm of dreams. To me, dreamland is a source of inspiration and a fount of meaning. Of course this is not the same for everyone, but I have noticed how many people go on dreaming about pets that flew away from earth a long, long

time ago. Grown-up men and women who smile or have tears in their eyes as they talk about all those dream moments spent with their pets.

For a long time, I myself had intense and heart-rending dreams, in which Koen kept dying in my arms only to open his eyes again. I have interpreted them as a sign from the other world, and consequently the dreams stopped.

The souls of men and animals let go of their earthly shapes, but that doesn't mean they disappear. And it doesn't mean that you have parted forever. The very dream can reveal to us the spiritual dimensions of life. The very dream can invite us to reconnect to and yet let go of each other, because it has to be.

If you ask for a dream about your pet just before you go to sleep, you'll be amazed at the wonders of the night. Don't forget to have a notebook and a pen by your bed, as many dreams are wafer-thin like butterflies and tend to swirl from our memory as we wake up. Writing down a few key words during the night can be sufficient to help you remember your entire dream in the morning.

## **Thanking**

What else can I say? Thank him! Thanking has such beautiful overtones, such force. The pain at parting is nothing but the flipside of love.

Thank you!

Thank you for being there!

Thank you for all those beautiful, wonderful moments!

Thank you for what you taught me!

Thank you!

I wish the best of luck to all of you who are saying farewell to your pet.

Thank you for reading this eBook.

If you wish to read more stories about saying farewell to your dearest pet, you can subscribe to the Miramah House eStoryletter.

Do you have a story you wish to share? Send an e-mail to [josephine@miramah-house.com](mailto:josephine@miramah-house.com)