

Euthanasia: What To Expect

By Dr. T.J. Dunn, Jr.

You pick up that new kitten or puppy for the very first time. Involuntarily and with no unconscious effort, the bond takes root. Despite the thrill of acquiring a new pet, though, your imagination races years ahead and uncomfortable, fleeting thoughts pass through your mind. "I hope this little rascal lives a long time" is a typical thought. Or you can't help hearing that inner voice whisper, "I can't imagine this cute little puppy as an old dog," or "Someday this little furry kitten will be old and unhealthy." We always fear losing these pets that mean so much to us. Nevertheless, that time inevitably does come. And we pet owners simply have to face our pet's mortality. I have often thought how wonderful it would have been if my Golden Retrievers and wonderful feline friends would have had life spans of 60 or 70 years! [Editors' note: And who among us ferret owners wouldn't love to give our ferrets the lifespan of a house cat?]

Every individual pet owner faces that final day with a beloved pet slightly differently from every other pet owner. I have seen totally objective (and even outright callous) pet owners simply drop off their pet for euthanasia with no more respect or empathy than a robot. I have never been able to understand this type of pet owner who seems to be saying, "When you're dead, you're dead." They can still comfort or simply be with their pet at the time of euthanasia; but for their own reasons they choose to separate themselves from the final moments of their pet's life. Maybe we humans are so close to our pets that we somehow project our own humanity and mortality into them and we actually see ourselves at our own last moments. Do

some pet owners act out how they think they would view their own passing?

On the other hand, I have witnessed seemingly strong, objective individuals that seem to be somewhat cold and distant who completely fall apart at the time of their pet's passing. The theme to keep in mind, then, as you contemplate how you will act at your pet's final moments is to remember that it is a completely personal experience. You have to decide what is best for you and your pet. I have had people actually say to me, "I am sorry, Doctor, but I don't know how to act right now." My usual response is, "Act like you. Your pet has been a huge part of your life for a long time and this is not an easy thing for you to do."

Most people really have had no guidelines to follow, had no firm ground on which to stand while partaking in their pet's final time. For those of you who have had no

experience with euthanasia of a pet, I would like to offer a few guidelines so that you will have some firmer ground to stand on when "that time" does come.

MAKING THE APPOINTMENT

Be sure to tell the receptionist that you would like to schedule the appointment at a time when the veterinarian is not in a hurry with other appointments or surgery. You might even request that your appointment be the last one of the day or the first one in the morning. Explain that you have never had to go through this experience before and would like to know what to expect regarding the euthanasia procedure. You have a right to take your deceased pet home for personal burial. You may also choose to leave your deceased pet with the veterinarian for burial or cremation. Always ask what will be done with your deceased pet af-

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PATTY ASHEUER

The decision to euthanize a pet is always a very difficult one, and there are no real guidelines to follow. Know your options, and keep your pet's best interests in mind.