

SAYING GOOD-BYE TO OUR PET - August 28th 1999

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Shiva has been with me for fourteen years, even longer than my husband. She has fibro sarcoma, a rapidly spreading, locally aggressive tumor in her soft and hard palate and down into her throat which is larger than a baseball. We found this out after a biopsy was recommended the end of August by our Veterinarian. She had had her annual check-up at Easter time, and in the following four months she became lethargic, began to loose weight, and to drool from her mouth. She has always been a quiet, good natured dog and we can not recall hearing her bark for several months.

Now we have some hard choices. We can choose to put her under anesthetic again this time to have x-rays to determine if the bone or nasal passages are affected, and if not precede with surgery with the hope of removing as many of the cells as possible and therefore part of her soft and hard palate. The Vet predicts that this option would buy her some months with many of those weeks involved with the pain of healing. Or we can choose to love her and to courageously say good bye. As a farmer's daughter, I know that if my father was alive he would encourage me not to let her suffer, nor to let her feel abandoned going through surgery and hospitalization. In my heart, I know this is the choice for Shiva and I. The process of making the phone call to invite the Vet to our home however has not been as clear cut. I needed some time. I took two days off work to be with her and myself.

The shock, the numbing disbelief, the intense feeling of lose, the creeping guilt which asks if it has a place, the inner self resource of faith and confidence, the overwhelming experience of gratitude for this experience of unconditional love, and the deep sense of loss and aloneness all spoke to me. In order to hear these inner conversations I have had to pull back from the world and to turn inward to listen. So, I walk, pet, and talk to Shiva about my attachment to her and my need to find a way to let go in order to respect her needs and my belief that she does not deserve to suffer. Here I am in mid life making what is the courageous choice for me with the support of my husband and my best friend, also a farmer's daughter. This time has been essential and I am so grateful that my life has allowed me to be with myself to take care of my emotional and spiritual self.

Grief is an exhausting, and yet cleansing emotion for me. The unconditional love and trust that this animal has given to me everyday for fourteen years has been as fundamental as the love and nurture which I received as a child. Making this decision has triggered memories and layers of unresolved loss regarding my father's death when I was eighteen, and the ongoing losses of loving my mother who is 88 years old and suffers with Alzheimer's and dementia.

I watch my mother suffer memory loss, struggle with the resulting anxiety and confusion, and I am powerless to relief her suffering as our love and caring no longer offers her the calm and peace it once did.

I waffle between feelings of guilt for making powerful choices like euthanizing my dog and institutionalizing our mother, to feelings of powerlessness at not being able to care for my mother in my own home any longer. Acting on my power requires the courage to take responsibility, and the need for self care to examine and accept the required outcomes and resulting emotions.

Shiva is an animal. Therefore, I have the choice of euthanasia to end her suffering. My soul searching has been a long journey which has led me to say:

Shiva, it is time to rest. Your love and obedience have made everyday fuller and more joyful. The discipline I needed to care for you has carried over into all aspects of my life. You laid at my feet as I wrote on the computer through nine years of completing an Undergraduate and a Graduate Degree. You played and competed with the children in our home. You hiked, mountain climbed, kayaked, canoed, slept on beaches, and even flew in planes with me. The last six months that the my mother lived with us you slept by her bed, rested hardly further than six inches from her feet because she consistently dropped little morsels of treats for you, and you brought her the joy of companionship. For fourteen years you did your job well. It is time to rest, you deserve it! Rest in peace.

We will love you forever!