

Understanding the Grief That Deserves to Be Heard

A gentle guide for those who loved deeply—and are hurting deeply

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Every pet relationship begins as a Contract of the Heart …

- ***If you've ever been told "it was just a pet"–this guide is for you.***
- ***If you've found yourself apologising for how much you're grieving, hiding your tears at work, or wondering why you can't seem to just move on–this guide is for you.***
- ***And if the loss of your beloved animal companion has left a hole in your life that feels impossible to explain to people who haven't experienced it–this guide is for you.***

You are not alone, and you are not overreacting.

Not even a little.

The bond between a human and their animal companion is one of the most pure, unconditional relationships we will ever know.

- They never judged us
- They never kept score
- They were simply, completely, always *there*

And when they leave–the silence they leave behind is profound.

What you are feeling is grief. Real, legitimate, and deeply human grief.

The Uniqueness of Pet Loss Grief

Here is something the world is only beginning to understand: **pet loss grief is not lesser grief.**
It is, in many ways, its own uniquely complex experience.

A 2026 study published in PLOS ONE found that **1 in 5 people reported that losing a pet was MORE distressing than losing a human loved one.** Not because they loved people less–because of the singular nature of the human-animal bond.

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Consider what you may have lost alongside your pet:

- Your daily routine and sense of purpose
- A source of unconditional love and comfort
- A confidant who never judged, never argued, and never left the room
- A physical presence—the weight of them, the sound of them, the warmth of them

And unlike many human losses, pet grief often carries an added layer—**the absence of social permission to grieve openly.**

People return to work the next day. They hear *"you can always get another one."* They grieve in silence, wondering if something is wrong with them…

Nothing is wrong with you. Your grief is the full measure of your love.

What You Might Be Feeling Right Now

Grief is not one feeling—it is many, arriving in waves, sometimes all at once. You may recognise yourself in some or all of these:

Anticipatory Grief—If your pet is aging or ill, you may already be grieving before they are gone. This is real grief, and it is exhausting.

Overwhelming Guilt—"Did I do enough? Did I wait too long? Did I decide too soon?" The second-guessing loop is one of the most common—and most painful—parts of pet loss grief.

Practical Overwhelm—The arrangements, the belongings, the empty bowl, the leash by the door. The practical reality of loss can feel unbearable in the early days.

Loneliness and Emptiness—Their absence reshapes the entire texture of your day. The silence where they used to be can feel deafening.

Sense of Isolation—Finding a new normal without them feels impossible, especially when the world expects you to be "over it" far too soon.

Needing to Be Strong for Others—If children, a partner, or other pets are also grieving, you may be carrying everyone else's pain alongside your own.

Tears are not a weakness, expressing your grief is not falling apart. It is, in fact, one of the most important and healthy things you can do.

If you see yourself in even one of these—you are in the right place.

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Healthy Reflection vs. Harmful Ruminating

There is an important distinction that doesn't get talked about enough in pet grief—the difference between **healthy reflection** and **harmful ruminating.**

Healthy reflection has a gentle, disentangled quality. You think of them, you feel the love, you allow the sadness to move through you. It has a natural flow—like a wave that comes in and recedes.

Rumination is different. It is repetitive, circular, and pulls you under. It replays the same moments over and over—"what if I had called the vet sooner, what if I had chosen differently, what if, what if, what if..." It doesn't resolve. It keeps you stuck.

Both are a natural response to loss. The difference is what happens over time.

If you find yourself caught in the rumination loop—returning again and again to the same painful thoughts without relief—that is your mind's way of telling you it needs support to process what happened. Not more time. **Active support.**

Time alone doesn't heal this. The right tools do.

Can Things Actually Get Better?

Yes. Genuinely, wholeheartedly—yes.

Not in the way people mean when they say *"time heals all wounds*"—as if grief is simply something you wait out. It comes in the way of actually moving through it, with the right support alongside you.

Healing from pet loss grief doesn't mean forgetting them. It doesn't mean the love diminishes or that you've somehow moved on and left them behind. It means learning to carry that love differently—integrating it into who you are, rather than being trampled by its weight.

The Phoenix Rising Way™ is a holistic approach to pet grief recovery that works with your **mind, body, and spirit**—helping you process grief at the level where it actually lives: beneath the surface, in the unconscious, in patterns and responses that keep so many people stuck.

Rising from the pain. Rebuilding with purpose.

When you choose to take action, you can reclaim your resilience, emerge stronger, and begin to taste joy once more.

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Here are a few things that have helped others—and one that helped me personally…

Grief needs somewhere to go. These small rituals can give it a place:

When I lost my animal companion Kaara, I wrote a letter to her. I purchased a beautiful hand-blown vase made in Poland that was in her colours. I'd had her cremated and put the letter in with her.

You can create a journal of lovely memories, every time you think of something, write it in there.

Build a little shrine with a picture, a toy and a candle to light when you want to visit and honour them, maybe talk to them.

Have conversations with other people who know and loved your animal friend, share stories.

Your Next Step

Living fully and remembering can coexist. Allowing yourself moments of lightness doesn't diminish your love or your loss. It honours it.

Let's start with a conversation.

In our complimentary 30 minutes together, we'll talk about what you're experiencing, what you'd like to be different, and whether The Phoenix Rising Way™ could be the right support for you.

Not ready for a conversation? You're welcome to explore my https://www.youtube.com/@ValerieAsherBCH, where I share a different understanding of grief and the human–animal bond.

The Phoenix Rising Community is coming. If you'd like to know when it opens, email me with PHOENIX COMMUNITY in the subject line.

I'd love to connect with you personally.

You loved them completely. Now let's help you find your way forward.

Published by Way of the Phoenix Press

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