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Latham Letter

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FALL 2008

PROMOTING RESPECT FOR ALL LIFE THROUGH EDUCATION

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Veterinary Hospice Care



Guest Editor: Stacy Baar



SPECIAL ISSUE

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Edith Latham's Mandate:

"To promote, foster,
encourage and further
the principles of
humaneness, kindness
and benevolence to all
living creatures."



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The Latham Letter

Volume XXIX, Number 4, Fall 2008

**BALANCED PERSPECTIVES ON
HUMANE ISSUES AND ACTIVITIES**



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The Latham Letter

Balanced perspectives on humane issues and activities

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Guest Editorial

The Emerging Field of Veterinary Hospice Care



Stacy Baar and Maggie

How did I happen to go to the First International Symposium on Veterinary Hospice Care?

Amy Shever, founder of 2nd Chance 4 Pets (www.2ndchance4pets.org), an organization that encourages pet owners to make arrangements for the continuous care of their pets should they themselves die or become ill, forwarded a notice about the symposium to Latham. Then a friend at Latham who was aware of my interest in animal hospice, set the wheels in motion that eventually made it possible for me to attend this ground-breaking event. I'm grateful to them all. Special thanks to the Latham Foundation.

It was an honor to be among the professionals, service providers, and interested lay persons who gathered in March, 2008 on the campus of the University of California at Davis to discuss the heart-wrenching decisions that we all may eventually have to make for the pets we love.

I had fostered and cared for several terminally ill animals, and I had counseled and supported friends and family through numerous losses, but when my wonderful best friend, a 14½ year old Lab-Shepherd mix named Samantha, was diagnosed with cancer, I became an emotional wreck. I wanted to do what was best for her but I didn't know how to answer the many treatment and "end-of-life" questions that I faced. Do I opt for surgery and/or chemotherapy? What about holistic and alternative therapies? Do I invest in one treatment but not the other? Do I do nothing? Could I just give her physical

comfort and let her die? I thought if only I knew what she wanted. Would an animal communicator be able to help? There were cost considerations too, and those of time and energy. It was one of the most difficult times I've ever been through. But it was also one of the most profound.

Drs. Jeri Ryan and Kathryn Marocchino are the two phenomenal women who made the First International Symposium on Veterinary Hospice Care a reality. They hoped for 30 or 40 attendees – it's a relatively new field after all. Instead, there were 150 of us in the auditorium, all waiting in great anticipation.

We were never disappointed. Each presenter was highly knowledgeable and extremely motivated. They spoke from their hearts about their chosen profession and their contribution to this burgeoning field of veterinary hospice care. The two and a half days overflowed with information. For example, I learned about the history and philosophy of the human hospice movement and its migration to our family pets. I learned about the difficult issues facing the medical professionals that we as pet owners rely upon for guidance and support. I learned that the choices for our pets at the end of their lives are as varied as the lives they led and that we need to honor and respect both the needs of our pets and our own, because they are equally important.

The symposium prompted lively discussions, serious debates, shared stories of love and loss, and ultimately, this special issue of the *Latham Letter*. I hope you enjoy it.

Stacy Baar, Guest Editor





Of Note

The Latham Foundation Announces Disaster Recovery Program to Replace Humane Education Materials in Shelters Affected by Hurricanes

To assist in recovery efforts and add to the good work of the many organizations that are assisting hurricane victims, Latham will provide free humane education materials to any shelter or rescue group impacted by the hurricanes.

Organizations whose materials have been lost or damaged are invited to visit www.Latham.org and select up to three books and five videos or DVDs with which to begin rebuilding their educational programs. Shelters should contact Latham by phone, fax or mail to arrange to participate in this program. We ask only that they agree to pay the costs of shipping.

More on Veterinary Hospice Care Coming in Future Issues

A New Option:

Mobile Veterinary Hospice Care

by Anthony J. Smith, DVM, MBA

Loss and Grief:

Dimensions in Veterinary Hospice Care

by Betty J. Carmack, R.N., Ed.D., C.T.

Developing a Pet Hospice Care Center

Dr. Tami Shearer

*Susan Marino and Angel's Gate
Animal Hospice*



SAVE THE DATE!

2nd International Symposium on Veterinary Hospice Care

September 5-7, 2009

University of California at Davis
You will find further information at
www.pethospice.org
as soon as it becomes available.

Pet Loss Support Hotline

**Center for Companion Animal Health
School of Veterinary Medicine,
University of California at Davis**

Toll free: 800-565-1526

Hours 6:30pm - 9:30pm, Pacific Daylight Time,
Monday through Friday

www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/petloss

(for support, referrals, and free printed materials)

First International Pet Hospice Symposium: Drawing the Circle of Care



The Nikki Hospice Foundation for Pets

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On March 28-30, 2008, the first International Pet Hospice Symposium took place at the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of California (Davis). Organized by the Nikki Hospice Foundation for Pets (NHFP) and Assisi International Animal Institute, the Symposium brought together veterinary professionals, human hospice providers, counselors, animal communicators, business people, artists, and many breeds of lay animal lovers.

One thing was clear: Socially, our companion animals have arrived. They have entered the inner circle once reserved for human family members. Beneath that clarity is a struggle to move through some of the complex issues – personal and societal, technical and spiritual – that arise surrounding a companion animal's illness or death.

The Nikki Hospice Foundation for Pets grew out of Dr. Kathryn Marocchino's experience surrounding the decline of her cat Nikki. Dr. Marocchino was stunned that veterinarians on the case offered only two options to her, her husband, and their beloved Nikki: aggressive treatment or euthanasia. As a Kaiser Foundation Hospital hospice volunteer, she knew there was a better way.

Here are some of the most provocative questions raised during the weekend:

By Barbara Saunders

Question 1: How is the role of the veterinarian changing as human-companion animal relationships evolve?

From Mechanic to Pediatrician

Until about fifty years ago, veterinarians most commonly maintained the condition of working animals whose status derived from their monetary value and from their ability to perform as equipment. Small animal veterinarians today treat best friends who share their families' beds.

From Advocate for Animals to Counselor in a Multi-Being Family System

Most veterinarians were trained to regard euthanasia as the only compassionate and humane response to an animal who is medically suffering, not exclusively when an illness is terminal, but also where quality of life or dignity (as we human beings perceive it) is compromised. With the advent of increasingly sophisticated pain management tools and new attitudes about supporting pets with special needs or disabilities, multiplying layers of values, moral principles, and practical concerns have entered the veterinarian's consulting room.

From Authority Figure to Partner

The long-standing stature of medical professionals as authority figures has shifted. Assertive patients research medical information on the Internet and challenge

their doctors (whether MDs or DVMs). Some patients turn to alternative (and unregulated) practitioners for advice and care that varies in quality. Clients expect assistance in digesting the input of people ranging from animal communicators to nutritionists to product manufacturers.

Implications for Veterinary Professional Self-Care

Non-veterinarians may never have considered the toll that animal suffering and euthanasia takes on doctors, people who have devoted their lives to the care of animals and who may end hundreds of animals' lives over the course of a career. Veterinarians, like medical providers to humans, have no choice but to erect protective emotional boundaries that enable them to provide calm and supportive service to their clients and patients. The firm conviction that euthanasia is often the most humane course option for a terminally ill pet has been one of those boundaries. Though there have always been veterinarians who provide a continuum of curative and palliative solutions, articulating and naming hospice forces veterinarians to revisit a painful subject.

Question 2: What is the nature of the human-animal bond?

Language like “pet parent” and “companion animal” and “guardian” aside, psychology’s understanding of what animals mean in our lives is at the stage of rough analogy. Companion animals can be our mirrors and also representatives of “nature.” Service animals are both dependents and caregivers. Working animals are both agents and instruments. Legally, animals are property – a status which oncologist Dr. Alice Villalobos adamantly insists preserves the rightful authority owners have over pets’ care. At the same time, they are beings in their own right, as animal communicator Dr. Jeri Ryan emphasizes.

Theories of parent-child attachment are part of the foundational undergraduate psychology curriculum. Graduate students also learn about theories of romantic attachment. Dr. Richard Timmins put forward the case that neither model is adequate to the task of describing the human-animal bond. There is no model.

Question 3: Are our cultural norms about illness, death, and dying serving us?

In her keynote address, Dr. Marocchino made a pronouncement that is both obvious and radical: “Death is not a medical event.” Human physicians’ education steeped them in a mindset that labeled death a personal failure, and institutional structures reinforced that perspective. The nurses, social workers, educators, clergy, dying people, and family members who pioneered the hospice movement asserted otherwise.

Dr. Ella Bittel, a holistic veterinarian trained in Germany, urges us to consider how the convention of pet euthanasia has bolstered a kind of escapism from our own fears of mortality or of the dying process itself. She shared her own experience that, despite training in both conventional and alternative medicine, she felt at a loss when confronted with the death of her beloved dog Momo.

What do our relationships with our human companions teach us about how to live?

Weeks after the Symposium, I spoke with Dr. Marc Bekoff, author of multiple books on ethics in human-animal relationships and co-founder (with Jane Goodall) of Ethologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. Bekoff, who trains people and animals to deliver animal-assisted therapy in human hospice, had never heard of hospice for pets – even though he had already carried it out.

Bekoff’s advice: “[Hospice should be] the same way they make it for humans ... [companion animals are] part of the family... we owe them the very, very best treatment we can give them. We can’t be driven by economics or time.”

“Use your common sense,” he adds. “Do not abandon them at the time in life when they really need it.”

Dr. Bekoff’s Malamute, Inuk, got yogurt and cookies and ice cream during his old age. His Jethro got acupuncture and weekly massage for the last four months of his life. The lessons in love and trust Bekoff learned from caring for his dogs helped him through his parents’ deaths. Ultimately, we animals are all in the same predicament.

“In some ways,” he said, “we’re all doing hospice.”

Barbara Saunders is a writer with Pets Unlimited in San Francisco.



Veterinary Hospice Care: Its History and Development

By Kathryn D. Marocchino, Ph.D., FT

Photos by: Gianfranco Marocchino



Nikki

Veterinary hospice care, or pet hospice care – as it is commonly referred to in lay terms – represents the cutting edge of all that is alleviative, compassionate and supportive in veterinary medicine. A newcomer to the field of animal health and welfare, its first beginnings can be traced to approximately thirty years ago, when most notably, Dr. Eric Clough, Dr. James Harris, and Dr. Guy Hancock – practicing veterinarians in New Hampshire, California and Florida, respectively – began quietly exploring the hospice option in their clinics and promoting it to their colleagues.

As enlightened and avant-garde as these practitioners were, however, exceedingly few of their associates were ready to follow in their footsteps, and their message was, for the most part, unheeded. Only a select few heard the call, among them Jane Clough, the human hospice director who had been instrumental in developing the concept with her husband Eric, and later on, Bonnie Mader, founder of the nation's first pet loss support hotline at the University of California, Davis.

It wasn't until 1996, when our own traumatic experience with our cat Nikki led to the creation of The Nikki Hospice Foundation for Pets (NHFP),

that the concept of palliative care for pets in the home slowly began to grow as a veritable movement. It grew tentatively at first in veterinary circles but then primarily among pet caregivers who were already familiar with the benefits and rewards of human hospice. NHFP officially incorporated as a nonprofit in 1998.

Eager to unite proponents of veterinary hospice care under one banner, The NHFP worked tirelessly to promote the hospice alternative to animal health care practitioners and to the public at large. Since then, it has been leading the endeavor as the first and only nonprofit in the nation “devoted to the provision of home hospice care for terminally ill companion animals”. With human hospice care rapidly setting the pace in our societal attitudes towards death and dying,¹ it is not surprising that this revolutionary concept has more recently begun to make headway.

In the past, traditional veterinary medicine has only been able to offer aggressive (and often expensive) treatments for terminally ill animals – usually followed by euthanasia. Now, a more discerning and empowered public has decided that it needs more, and better, options. Based on human hospice models, veterinary hospice care addresses the needs of people who wish to care for their dying animals in the comfort of their own homes, under the guidance and assistance of veterinarians and a professional, qualified staff.

The veterinary hospice care that The NHFP promotes offers dying pets the same kind of comfort provided for people. It gives families the opportunity to make their own choices about euthanasia; it allows them to spend “quality time” with their animals; and it reinforces the human-animal bond that is such a vital part of our lives. For pet parents who are seeking humane and compassionate ways to deal with the impending death of their companion animals, veterinary hospice care is the answer. It places them at the forefront of the decision-making process and empowers them to determine when – and how – their companion animals will die.

Veterinary Hospice Care

It is essential for clients to understand, however, that veterinary hospice care in its purest form can also provide a comfortable, natural death for many companion animals. Ella Bittel, a holistic veterinarian in Buellton, California, has this to say about the true hospice experience:

“Caring for the dying is an art, and unless we prepare for it ahead of time, chances are we won’t feel up to the task. It will seem daunting to us rather than sacred. Whether the caretaker is aware of it or not, much happens in the last days and hours of a dying human or animal, in terms of getting ready internally for the great passage. It is a privilege indeed to wave our loved one off, not holding it back, not trying to rush it, embracing the process and the farewell.”²

Ideally, clients will learn to recognize the animal’s will to live, or not, because they are the ones closest to their pets, both emotionally and spiritually. As the availability of animal hospice care grows, more clients will opt for it over euthanasia. Veterinary hospice care gives primary caretakers a unique opportunity to deepen their relationship with their pet and to view the dying process as part of the life cycle. It is also crucial for all family members to share in the hospice experience, especially children, who should not be shielded from death. Rather, they should be encouraged to participate in the final phases of a pet’s life, so they may gain a deeper and less frightening insight into this natural cycle.

By providing good comfort care, veterinary hospice seeks a “kind death” for pets, thereby accomplishing good living – and good grieving, especially if the pet’s caregivers are willing to become involved in real “hospicing,” where proper pain management becomes the prime concern, coupled with “quality of life” issues. Veterinarians skilled in palliative care who have opted to provide this service to their clients are more than willing to help families through the entire process, dispensing advice when needed and establishing a schedule for house calls.

The veterinary hospice team envisioned by The NHFP will not only have a veterinarian on board but also veterinary technicians and other qualified staff



including mental health professionals to counsel the family through the difficult stages of impending pet loss, and hospice volunteers who can provide the family with “respite care” or “comfort care” on a daily basis, as needed. The team may also include pastoral counselors or animal chaplains, professional pet-sitters, massage therapists, veterinary chiropractors, and holistic practitioners who are well-versed in alternative or homeopathic palliation.

Furthermore, family caregivers willing to take on the task will be trained in how to administer pain medication to keep the pet as comfortable as possible and ensure that the animal’s last weeks or days are spent in the most soothing of environments – a familiar home with tender loving care. This is a far cry from the often frightening clinic that so many pets shun.

Predictably, those families who have opted for veterinary hospice care (and their numbers are on the rise³) have reported experiencing a strong spiritual bonding with their companion animals, almost no feelings of guilt (so often associated with end-of-life decisions), and the conviction that they would choose hospice care again for the other pets who share their lives. As more and more people shy away from “quick” euthanasia – an all-too-frequent reflexive response in our country – in search of more meaningful options for their dying animals, this alternative may well become the primary choice in veterinary clinics across the country.

By training families to provide palliative care (or comfort care) for their

Veterinary Hospice Care

pets, and by offering extensive support services, veterinary hospice programs give dying animals and the people who love them the opportunity for meaningful, quality time together.

It is here that The Nikki Hospice Foundation for Pets steps in to provide a much-needed and vital service.



Currently, The NHFP's primary activities are to:

- Assist the public in locating veterinarians willing to offer veterinary hospice care to companion animals;
- Disseminate information on veterinary hospice care to veterinarians and veterinary students as well as to mental health/hospice professionals and to the public at large;
- Provide information on pet loss support resources as well as hospice-related services and products;
- Promote standards of care for veterinary hospice and improve pharmacological protocols for end-of-life symptoms;

- Elicit the support of national veterinary organizations as well as pet insurance companies;
- Encourage the teaching of veterinary hospice care in university veterinary curricula nationwide;
- Work with pharmaceutical companies to advance the development of new and increasingly effective pain medication;
- Offer local and nation-wide training programs for veterinarians, veterinary technicians, mental health professionals, nurses, hospice volunteers and others who wish to offer veterinary hospice care services to their clients;
- Operate a 24-hour pet loss support hotline for those who are grieving the loss or the impending loss of a beloved companion animal;
- Conduct pet loss support workshops in partnership with our local humane society;
- Produce quarterly newsletters to keep friends and supporters apprised of The NHFP's latest developments in veterinary hospice care; and
- Recruit and train local volunteers to assist families who are hospicing a terminally ill or dying companion animal.

The NHFP also offers additional services that provide information on pet cemeteries and burial-related products, promote the memorialization of pets (or loved ones) through The NHFP's online donor listings, and encourage further exploration into the emerging field of animal communication. Each of these services honors the memory of another beloved pet who shared its brief life with us.

With the AVMA's approval in 2001 of the hospice guidelines originally created by advisory board members of The NHFP—and the likelihood that veterinary hospice care will one day become a true specialty in university curricula – veterinarians who are thinking of offering this new service to their clients can rest assured that not only will they be in good company, but they also will be highly sought by pet lovers nationwide who are avidly beginning to embrace this compassionate option.

As Betty Carmack has so aptly stated,

“Dealing with the dying pet and its owner is a challenge and responsibility for veterinarians. It calls not only for medical knowledge, but also for an understanding of the bond between animal and owner. It requires an appreciation of the grief response that accompanies the loss of a friend. And it begs for the sensitivity and sensitiveness that any bereaved individual deserves.”⁴



If veterinarians can come to appreciate and respect the ethical and individual dilemmas that so many clients are faced with when their animals are dying, and offer them the same alternatives they would reserve their fellow men, our society will indeed have come a long way towards preserving a high sense of personal responsibility in regards to animal death. 

Endnotes:

- ¹ As evidenced by the critically-acclaimed Bill Moyers PBS special, *On Our Own Terms: Dying in America*, which aired in 2000.
- ² Bittel E. “Leaving this Life, in Rhythm with Nature.” *Holistic Horse, Integrative Therapies for Horse and Rider*, Fall 2007: Issue 51.
- ³ Since 1996, veterinarians who provide home hospice care as an ancillary service have reported that the overall percentage of established clients who request this option has increased from 10% to 30%. Those now specializing in hospice/geriatric care as one of their primary services have reported that the overall percentage of established clients who request this option often exceeds 50%.
- ⁴ Carmack BJ. “When companion animals die: Caring for clients in their time of sorrow.” *Veterinary Medicine* 1986; 81:311-314.



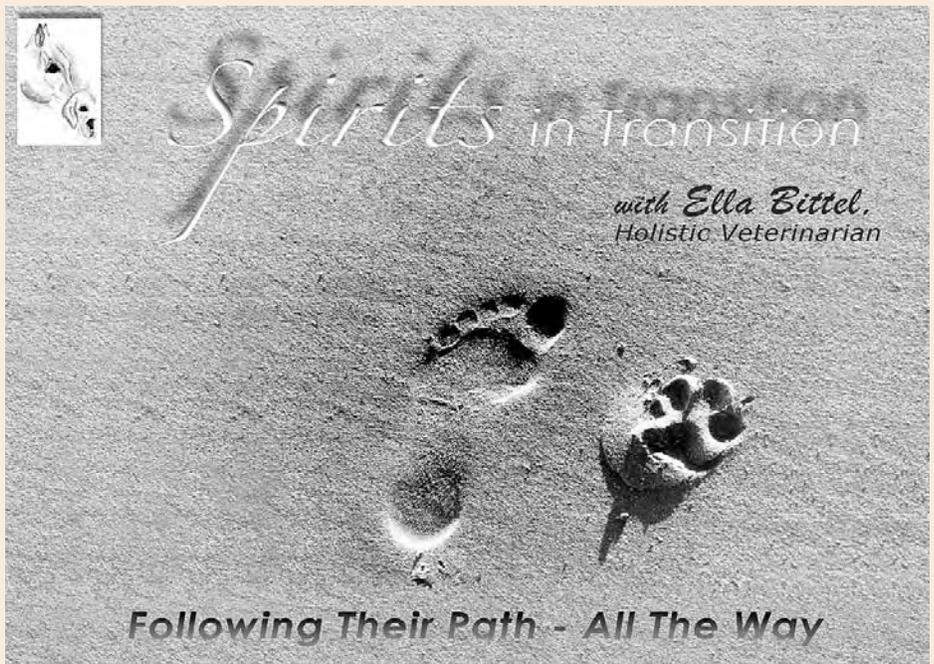
**See page 20 for
Dr. Marocchino's
Reading Suggestions.**

Dr. Kathryn D. Marocchino is a Professor in the Department of Maritime Policy and Management at California State University Maritime, a professional translator, the author of several books and articles, and the president and founder of The Nikki Hospice Foundation for Pets (The NHFP). She holds a doctorate in Modern Foreign Languages and Literature from the University of Turin (Italy), where she also completed pre-doctoral course work in biological sciences and where she held a lectureship for several years before coming to the United States. She provides grief support to pet caregivers on a nationwide basis through The NHFP's telephone counseling service and offers weekly pet loss workshops through a unique partnership with the Benicia-Vallejo Humane Society. She is also a Fellow in Thanatology (FT) through ADEC (Association for Death Education and Counseling) and holds a certificate in Critical Incident Stress Management from the International CISM Foundation. Presently, she is working on a book about The NHFP and on the first handbook of veterinary hospice care. For further information about The NHFP, to locate a hospice veterinarian in your area, or to learn more about the Second International Symposium on Veterinary Hospice Care (scheduled for September 5-7, 2009), please call (707) 557-8595 or visit www.pethospice.org.

Quality of Life ~

Quality of Death

By Ella Bittel



There is no doubt left even if there weren't studies to prove it: Our animal companions have loved their way into our families and few caretakers shy away anymore from admitting their pawed ones are their kids. We share our beds and dishes, pick the pet food with an ingredient list that reads most like the shopping list of a gourmet chef, and the pillow on our otherwise inviting looking grandfather chair warns uninitiated visitors: "If you don't like dog hair, don't sit down."

We drop Boomer off at doggie day care on our way to work, take him to doggie school in the afternoon and to the hairdresser alias groomer on the weekend. We are passed feeling embarrassed by being told we are anthropomorphizing; rather, we move on to having compassion for the accuser because he must never have felt the inescapably endearing and uplifting presence of a fur ball of love, nor met the eye of a four-legged or winged spirit connecting us with the source of our own being.

And, as we would with our human child, we don't hesitate when a health crisis arises. We take our beloved for more and more sophisticated medical care and go out of our way to restore its health and happiness.

But when it becomes clear that recovery is no longer achievable, many

When it was Momo's time to get ready to depart, it became clear to Ella that none of her traditional nor holistic veterinary training had prepared her for how to support a dying animal. The picture was taken one day before Momo's natural passing, marking the beginning of Ella's commitment to learn about and help further animal hospice.





Providing hospice to an animal can require a lot of time and strength, and finding support can be essential. Here Ella has joined Karen in watching over Fudge.

caretakers suddenly find a gap the size of an abyss between how to treat an animal and how to treat a human family member. Even if legislation would allow it, not so easily would we take advice from a doctor telling us our baby son, no longer eating, with his body in the firm grip of terminal disease, should kindly be given a final injection. Even with the most heartfelt desire to relieve her suffering we would not quickly, if ever, jump to ending the life of our three-year-old daughter fighting cancer because she has more bad days than good days.

We may call for the freedom to be permitted to also end a human's suffering when death seems unavoidable. But let's face it, when given that liberty we choose it only in rare exceptions. For ten years now the Death with Dignity Act has made taking a lethal dose of drugs available to terminally ill Oregon residents. The result of a decade of choice over dying quickly rather than slowly? Only one in ten thousand actually took those pills.

Wishes regarding assisted death usually expressed by physically quite capable and independently living individuals frequently change once the person reaches the previously

anticipated "limit of tolerance." This is no secret among hospice workers.

In the light of all that, do we really believe our animals' desire to live, even when under compromised circumstances, is so much less than our own that it justifies the standard practice today of euthanizing them? Yes, just as it can be comforting for Oregon residents to feel they have the power in their own hands over possibly ending their lives, it is a great relief to know we have euthanasia available if all our attempts fail to maintain the comfort of an animal at an acceptable level. Talking about acceptable: acceptable by whom?



By us, the caregivers? Our life partners, roommates, the veterinarian maybe? Are we sure that our human perceptions would match what an animal may find an acceptable level of discomfort?

The sentence "I knew this animal wanted to die as he always loved his food and he stopped eating" has been spoken many times, like echoes of a mantra. Yet it can fail to soothe a nagging sensation deep inside. We tend to go right "back to work" after making what we have been assured to be the "right choice," but we might have to hold still to be able to trace the doubts still rumoring under almost subconscious cover. Was it really the right choice at the right time?

Not that there would be any benefit to feeling guilty or regretting a now irreversible decision, but for the sake of informing possible future choices

Saying goodbye may not be easy, but embracing the dying process in its fullness also prepares our heart to say to our loved one, "I will be all right. You are free to go whenever the time is right for you."



Momo's kiss

Photo by
Sibylle Centgraf

we could dare taking a look at just this one example.

Maybe we were just unfamiliar with what dying looks like when it happens in its own good time? Maybe we were just unaware of the fact well known in human hospice that the body may no longer desire food when it is in the process of wrapping up its business? This usually does not pose a discomfort to the one dying, yet nonetheless consistently upsets those relatives who do not know what is involved with that process: they commonly confuse the possible loss of interest in food with starving. A dying body simply has no use for fuel for a future that will not happen. Yet this does not equal the ceasing of will of the dying to still experience all that is happening.

Does it matter? How precious can they be, those last days when let's say they are only spent lying down, requiring regular turning to avoid bed sores, and urine pad changes by the one who has received so much joy from the four-legged loved one's company throughout its

exuberant younger years? Why, instead of simply ending such situation, make the time to offer small bites of food if still of interest, or sips of water, loving touch and words of assurance and affection?

If we feel the love for our animal to be so similar to the one for a child, what is it that compels us to care for a dying human one without questioning? Is it just part of our genetics, or maybe

a vague sense that the value of life is not linear and defies being measured in abilities a being has, never had or does no longer have? If death is not the end to an individual's existence, might dying be like another birthing process in which we arrange ourselves with some labor involved?

It is human to be afraid of death, especially the one of our loved ones. Yet that very love connecting us to our human and animal children forms the core of our ability to question preconceived notions about dying and suffering, to inquire ahead of time how we can prepare for not only facing, but embracing the last season of life and the ultimate challenge it can be to support our loved ones throughout the time of farewell. We may just find that supporting a dying animal gifts us with the opportunity to prepare for fully being there, also for a dying human and for our own inevitable departure whenever it may come. 



Specializing in holistic treatment options for animals for over 20 years, Ella Bittel is a German veterinarian who lives and works in Santa Ynez Valley, California. Her special passion is hospice care for animals, which led her to create the weekend seminar "SPIRITS in Transition", for people interested in providing end-of-life care for their animal loved one. Visit www.spiritsintransition.org, or contact Ella at spiritsintransition@verizon.net.

A Family Veterinarian's Perspective on the Human-Animal Bond and Hospice Care-Giving

By Richard Timmins, DVM

The role of the veterinarian has changed significantly since the establishment of the first veterinary school in Lyon, France, in 1762. The original job of the veterinarian was to serve society by protecting the food supply and labor resources by preventing and treating diseases of livestock and horses. Of course, that is still important veterinary work. In the past few decades, however, there has been a dramatic revolution in medical knowledge and technology accompanied by a remarkable evolution in the relationship between humans and non-human animals. Consequently, the work of a majority of veterinarians now is to serve society by protecting the relationships between humans and companion animals by preventing and treating disease and injury affecting the latter. The value of the companion animal veterinarian's service is now more emotional than economic.

In the late 1970s, a group of veterinarians, psychologists and sociologists, noting that there was something unique about this human-pet relationship, labeled it the Human-Animal Bond.¹ Research has demonstrated a plethora of benefits humans receive from the pets in their lives: enhanced health, decreased loneliness and depression, social facilitation. During the past few decades, researchers have designed and tested a variety of surveys and questionnaires to assess attitudes toward animals, pet attachment, commitment to pets, and human/pet relationships.² In 1999, the American Veterinary Medical Association reported on the results of a survey of pet owners and non-pet owners in which 85% of respondents felt that people are more attached to their pets because the pets are becoming more like members of the family.³ A 2007 survey of pet owners showed that 53.5% of dog owners, 49.2% of cat owners, 51.3% of bird owners and 38.4% of horse owners consider their pets to be members of the family. Furthermore, for dog, cat and bird owners, being considered a member of the family resulted in more frequent visits to the veterinarian and greater veterinary expenditures, suggesting a greater commitment to health care of pets considered to be family members.⁴ This elevated status of companion animals not only has an impact on health care decisions made by their caretakers, but also demands new skills and services from veterinarians. This has given rise to the concept of Veterinary Family Practice.⁵

Psychologist Boris Levinson noted that "...it would be helpful for everyone concerned if the veterinarian were sufficiently trained in the behavioral

sciences to recognize the complex factors operating in these [human-animal interactions]...the veterinarian needs special training to provide the most skilled help to such situations."⁶ Levinson, who was one of the first psychotherapists to use animals in his practice, realized that pet owners' needs for emotional and sometimes psychological support often become apparent during interactions with their veterinarians.

It has not been easy for veterinarians to make the transition from a technical, repair shop approach to animal health care to being providers of services that encompass the pet and the human family, with all of the attendant emotional needs and demands from all of the members.

Epidemiologist Calvin Schwabe wrote "There has been great reluctance, accordingly, to suggest that veterinarians may have, in fact, even more significant and perhaps unique social roles to play vis-à-vis the emotional and even the closely related physical well being of animals' owners than of the animals themselves."⁷

It is no surprise that the death or impending death of a pet should elicit a powerful emotional reaction on the part of the other members of the family. The grief accompanying the loss of a pet has been a frequent topic in the literature for the past three decades.^{8,9,10} There are now a number of pet loss support hotlines, counseling services and internet support sites. Veterinary students receive training in grief counseling and staff the hotlines at a number of veterinary schools. Human mental health professionals have positions at veterinary schools teaching students and serving clients facing end-of-life decisions about their animal companions. Compassionate end-of-life care is an important part of the evolving role of the veterinarian in providing for the well-being of both client and patient.

Hospice care as an alternative for managing a companion animal at the end of its life has struggled to insert itself into the protocols of companion animal medicine. Increasingly sophisticated technology has promoted a hospital-centered practice that does not have the flexibility to support the home care necessary for effective pet hospice. Veterinarians have been quick to recommend euthanasia when death is imminent, usually based on the desire to avoid suffering. However, new options for pain management should give pause to this reasoning. The hospice movement in human health care has demonstrated that there are many benefits to both the patient and to the family members if the patient, with appropriate pain management, can spend his or her final days or hours at home, in the company of loving family and friends. Undoubtedly, the same is true for dying pets and the members of their human families. There has not yet been research that confirms that pet hospice helps family members deal with their grief more appropriately than hospital euthanasia. But Veterinary Family Practitioners who offer hospice services find that increasing number of clients will gratefully choose this approach. It is a natural evolution of the services veterinarians offer for the benefit of society and animal well-being. 

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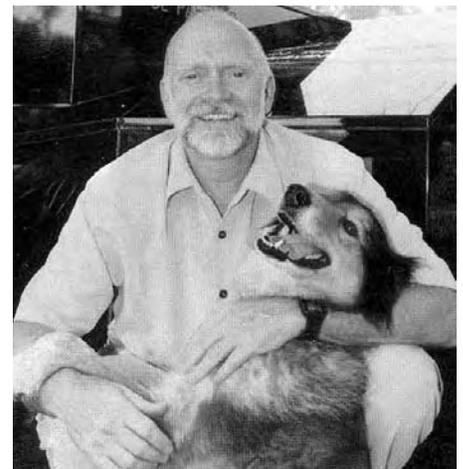
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The author is a 1977 graduate of the School of Veterinary Medicine, University of California, Davis. He has owned Veterinary Family Practices in Springfield and Eugene, OR. Most recently he has taught communication skills and professionalism to students at the School of Veterinary Medicine, UCD, and has conducted research into the impact of animals on child development. He is currently developing a Credential Course in Veterinary Family Practice through UCD. He is past president of the American Association of Human-Animal Bond Veterinarians and is a founder and past president of the Association for Veterinary Family Practice.

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Companion Animal Hospice and Animal Communication* See page 19.

By Jeri Ryan, Ph.D.

Of all the sensitive issues and situations met by animal communicators, the most sensitive are end-of-life issues, including pain and terminal illness. Having made euthanasia decisions, I am fully aware of how stressful and painful they are. People want to do what is best for the animal, but they often don't know what is best. They don't want the animal to suffer, but they don't want to do anything in opposition to the animal's wishes. In essence, they don't know what to do, and in their vulnerable condition, they may become captive to unsophisticated and insensitive bedside manners.

Fortunately, bedside manner within the medical professions is much better these days. Yet, there are exceptions. Some veterinarians continue to strongly suggest that people euthanize the animal with little or no delay without taking into account the emotional needs of the animals and their persons and especially without taking into account the animals' wishes. The major problem with this is that they could be wrong about the timing.

It is common for human and nonhuman animals to rally and crash repeatedly when the end of their lives is drawing near. Sometimes the rally lasts for a long time and the person believes their beloved companion is on the mend. Sometimes the crash lasts for a long time and the person believes it is time to say goodbye. It is uncanny that often, as the person

is defining the animal's state as its "demise," the animal emerges into a rally. These changes are unpredictable in terms of their timing and duration. The ups and downs of this final stage are not surprising. Death is final. There is bound to be ambivalence about leaving life. It would be a tragedy to send an animal to its death before it is ready.

*Every rule has its exception.
Some animals are very tired
of the state they are in.*

Some veterinarians give false hope by suggesting invasive tests and procedures that are likely to have minimal or no return. In each of these situations, the veterinarians most likely have the animal's and person's best interests in mind, as far as they know what those best interests are. To manifest this concern in a truly genuine manner, however, the person and animal must both be heard.

We, as the animals' persons, are in the role of parents. We are responsible for their survival and well-being. We make most decisions for and about them, many of them being "tough love" decisions, just as we do for our children. When Suzie declares that she has a miserably painful toothache, we do not ask permission to take her to the dentist. We also don't ask the dog or cat if it wants to go to the veterinarian for belly cramps

or itchy skin eruptions. They will certainly not want to go. We present those decisions with compassion and sensitivity and decide what is the healthiest food, how they can be safe, and so on. We decide what is best for our children and we do the same for our companion animals.

The exception to that decision-making authority, however, is the issue of when to end the animal's life. This is where, I believe, the animal chooses. This life belongs to no one but the animal. Through telepathic communication we can ask the animal what it wants. As an animal communicator, I inform the animal of what is going on in its body – and of the prognosis – in very gentle caring terms and tone. I relate the options, and I make sure it can make an informed choice about its life or death by describing the options and potential outcomes, and by describing euthanasia and its purpose.

I make certain the pet knows that the life or death decision is entirely its choice, and that it is neither considered a burden nor expected to stay for its person. (Some animals stay longer than they really want to because they think their person can't get along without them and some will leave sooner than they want to because they think they are a burden.) I also tell them what the possibilities are or are not for healing and/or for quality of life. I want them to be able to make an informed choice.

Animal Communication

Animals are quite sensible; they do not want to suffer. They also experience life as being precious, so they are not anxious to leave it. They are usually not afraid of death, but rather, they don't want to leave life because it is still meaningful and worth living. Often, people are concerned about their animal's incontinence. Most of the time, animals do not feel that incontinence is undignified. Dogs eliminate in public without batting an eye and also take pride in how high they can spray. Why would incontinence be undignified? Releasing waste products is just a natural event to them although they do want to be cleaned after an incontinence episode.

When they can be pain-free and enjoy some degree of quality in life, they do opt to stay. Most commonly they want to leave on their own, and rarely do they agree to euthanasia. If they are unable to do so in the face of great discomfort, however, they will accept help.

Every rule has its exception. Some animals are very tired of the state they are in, and then of life. Generally, these are animals whose histories include pain and/or abuse that has never been healed, or who feel a lack of love and connection at this stage of their lives. It is neither simple nor easy to honor that choice, but it is imperative that the animal

It is common for human and nonhuman animals to rally and crash repeatedly when the end of their lives is drawing near.

experience some emotional healing before leaving life. The therapeutic presence and actions of a loving being can go a long way toward healing old emotional wounds. Then there are those times when a given animal feels it has reached its limit during hospice. Thankfully, that ceiling is continuously rising, but if the animal so chooses, euthanasia can have its proper place at the end of the hospice experience.

There is another reason when quality of life slips for the animal. This occurs when boredom becomes depression and makes a being want to leave life. Most often the animal requests that life remain as normal as possible, so it becomes incumbent upon us to do our best to provide as high a quality of life as possible to prevent depression.

The human client needs suggestions and support for providing

Hospice is a gift we give to the animals.

quality of life on levels other than pain, physical cohesion and physical integrity. We address that in our "nearing-end-of-life" consultations. We ask the animals what would make them happy, what will help them to enjoy life, what they need, and what their persons can do for them right now.

Animals often have specific requests, such as certain foods, activities and experiences (relocating their bed or bedding; watching the sunset; spending special time with their persons; going to the beach; having their persons read to them, and so on). Some sleep a lot as a way

Animals are quite sensible; they do not want to suffer. They also experience life as being precious, so they are not anxious to leave it. They are usually not afraid of death, but rather, they don't want to leave life because it is still meaningful and worth living.

to replenish a very tired body and psyche, as a way to enjoy life, and as a way to prepare to leave. Sleep is a way to withdraw. It is fascinating and not uncommon for an animal who appears to be at death's door to rally after our discussion of euthanasia. They know that there is a way out should they need it, and that gives them freedom to live. It seems to provide them with some control over their lives at a time when any control seems out of reach.

The animal communicator's role in hospice is to be available to the animals and their persons on immediate notice. I check with the animal to find out how she/he is feeling physically and emotionally. I ask how life is for him/her and if life is still good enough to continue living. I ask in detail how hospice is working for her/him and what he/she needs now.

Most of the time, animals consider life to be precious. I recently worked

with an amazing senior cat who could not eat because of a throat inflammation. He went on for quite some time in hospice care and could get around, albeit feebly. He did not refuse euthanasia, but he did want to die his way. One day he did just that, by exhaling and never inhaling again. It was very peaceful for everyone. His strong will and the quality of hospice itself provided him with the opportunity to make his own choices.

Hospice is a gift we give to the animals. Given that life is precious to them, why not keep them in it as

long as possible to maintain their comfort and some degree of pleasure? Nonetheless, if animals feel they have reached a “ceiling” while in hospice care or have reached the end of their capacity to enjoy life as they know it, euthanasia becomes a gift we give them.

In such final life/death decisions, animals must have the final say. They may express it vocally or through body language or both. In the event of any uncertainty, telepathic communication is available. When hospice is in effect, animals have a chance to work through the ambivalence and

leave, without assistance, on their own schedule.

Finally, hospice for companion animals has not yet become mainstream although I always inform my clients about it as an option. Some are excited and follow up quickly; some listen but continue to follow the path of euthanasia. When hospice care becomes more established in veterinary practice – and we are well on the way to seeing this occur – it will become more acceptable and more real to the animals’ persons.



Dr. Ryan studied clinical psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where she received her Master’s Degree. Her doctorate was completed at the California School of Professional Psychology in San Francisco in 1972. She then trained mainly with Penelope Smith – renowned animal communicator, teacher and

author – who gave animal communication its reputation as a skill widely available to everyone. Dr. Ryan’s professional work includes psychotherapy, hypnotherapy, and animal communication. Her training and experience in the field of psychology have been appropriately useful to her work with both animals and their persons. In 1996, she founded a non-profit, the Assisi International Animal Institute (AIAI), to train professional animal communicators. The dual mission of the institute is to provide the public with a deeper and broader understanding of non-human animals and who they are in order to promote their well-being and establish animal communication as a full and respected profession.

Assisi International Animal Institute, Inc.
info@AssisiAnimals.org • AssisiAnimals.org

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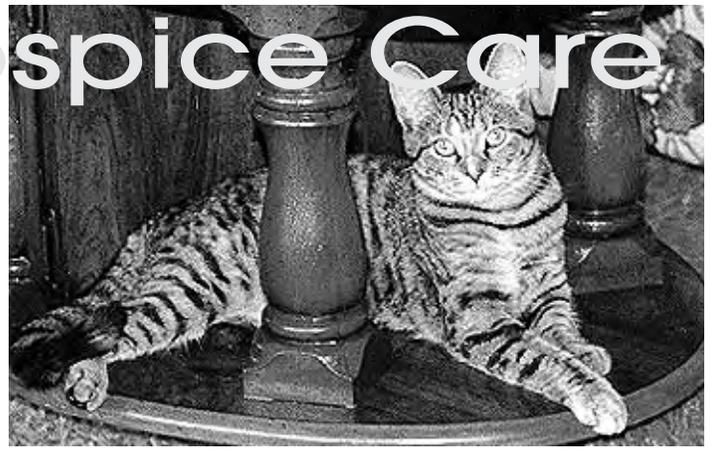
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* Animal Communication is the ability to converse with animals through telepathy (a “feeling across a distance” exchange of pictures, thoughts, words, emotions and feelings).



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Media Reviews

GOOD DOG!

Kids Teach Kids About Dog Behavior and Training

By Evelyn Pang and Hilary Louie

Reviewed by Barbara W. Boat, Ph.D.

So who are these “kids,” Evelyn and Hilary, and how did they come to write this extraordinary book about dog behavior and training? Many of you will not be surprised to know that a caring, generous and creative professional named Lynn Loar is responsible for this endeavor. In 2002, Evelyn and Hilary were nine years old. They participated in SHIP (Strategic Humane Intervention Project), an AAT program that Lynn was conducting in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco. The girls asked Lynn if they could do a project for extra credit and Lynn saw this as an opportunity to develop dog training materials aimed at children.

Evelyn and Hilary were very busy, attending both regular school and two extra hours of Chinese school daily. But Lynn recognized their interest, talent and commitment and the three of them embarked on their first project, a brochure for kids that described clicker training. Meeting with Lynn every Tuesday in a bakery across the street from the Chinese school, the girls created a second brochure for kids on teaching specific skills to dogs with a clicker. Then, they translated both brochures into Chinese (all the brochures, including a Spanish translation, are available at www.thepriorfoundation.org). With Lynn’s guidance, they next developed a clicker training glossary.



By now three years had passed and Lynn said “You have half a book. Would you like to write a whole book?” They certainly did. So, for two more years they met weekly with Lynn and researched and wrote about calming signals and safety around dogs. Evelyn illustrated the key points and made a dazzling drawing for the book’s cover. Lynn negotiated a book contract with Dogwise Publishing and here you have the final product – a first-of-its-kind book written by kids for kids. Let me restate that last sentence: this is a book written by kids for everyone, regardless of age. You will be impressed by:

- *The simplicity and clarity of their writing about use of the clicker and training techniques.*
- *Their wonderful examples of calming signals used by people as well as dogs.*
- *Their emphasis on gentleness, empathy and safety.*
- *Their highly readable glossary of terms noted in the text by a little dog paw print.*
- *Their “Test your knowledge” sections at the end of each chapter. Try taking the tests before you read the book.*
- *The amazingly expressive drawings that capture the essence of the text.*



So Evelyn and Hilary have published their first book at the age of 14. Lynn has tried to convey the significance of the book being listed in the Library of Congress. Evelyn and Hilary, however, believe that proof of success is to be listed on Amazon.com. Lynn is resigned to the fact that she and the girls represent different generations. Their common goal, however, is that each young author will one day attend the college of her choice. With Lynn as their agent, I have no doubt that will happen.

Good Dog! Kids Teach Kids About Dog Behavior and Training

By Evelyn Pang and Hilary Louie
Distributed by Dogwise Publishing, Ingram, B&T

www.dogwisepublishing.com
ISBN 978-192924250-0
Item # DTB1029

Single copy price is \$12.95. Buy 10 or more copies and receive a 20% discount. Resellers who qualify can receive Wholesale Terms. Send inquiries to mail@dogwise.com with "Wholesale Terms" in the message line.



Above:
Evelyn Pang

Right:
Hilary Louie

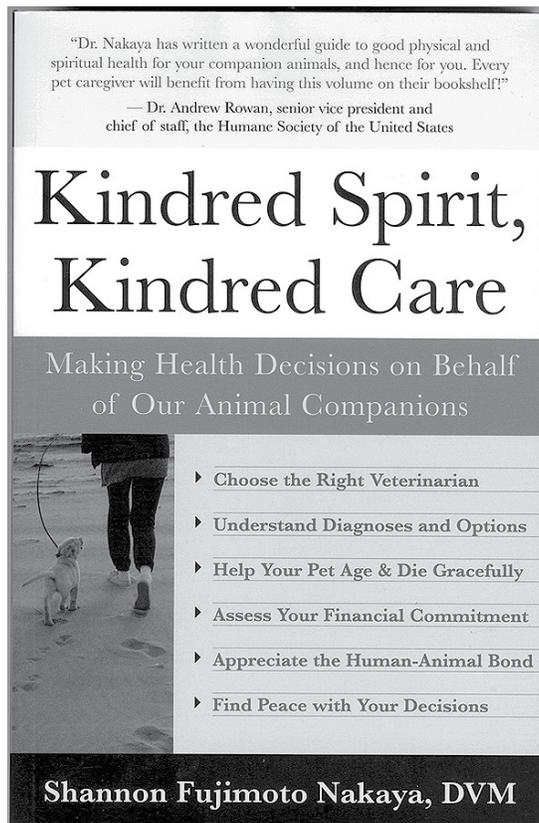
Kindred Spirit, Kindred Care

This book belongs in the library of anyone who cares for animals. Dr. Nakaya has written a compassionate reference guide for the end of life issues that face all of us who share their lives with pets.

Kindred Spirit, Kindred Care provides information on the medical, theological, emotional and financial issues that we experience when caring for our beloved pets at the end of their lives. Dr. Shannon Nakaya has practiced veterinary medicine for over 20 years and she shares her personal experiences working with her patients and clients to illustrate her philosophy on how to make the difficult decisions that need to be made when a beloved pet reaches the end of their lives.

This book doesn't tell the reader what to do but instead it reflects on the different views about human-animal relationships, life and death, Western and non-Western medicines, and pet care and commitment. Dr. Nakaya helps her readers make well-reasoned decisions by informing them of their options and recognizing that each of us have different circumstances to consider when making those decisions.

"Dr. Nakaya, has written a wonderful guide to good physical and spiritual health for your companion animals, and hence for you. Every pet caregiver will benefit from having this volume on their bookshelf."



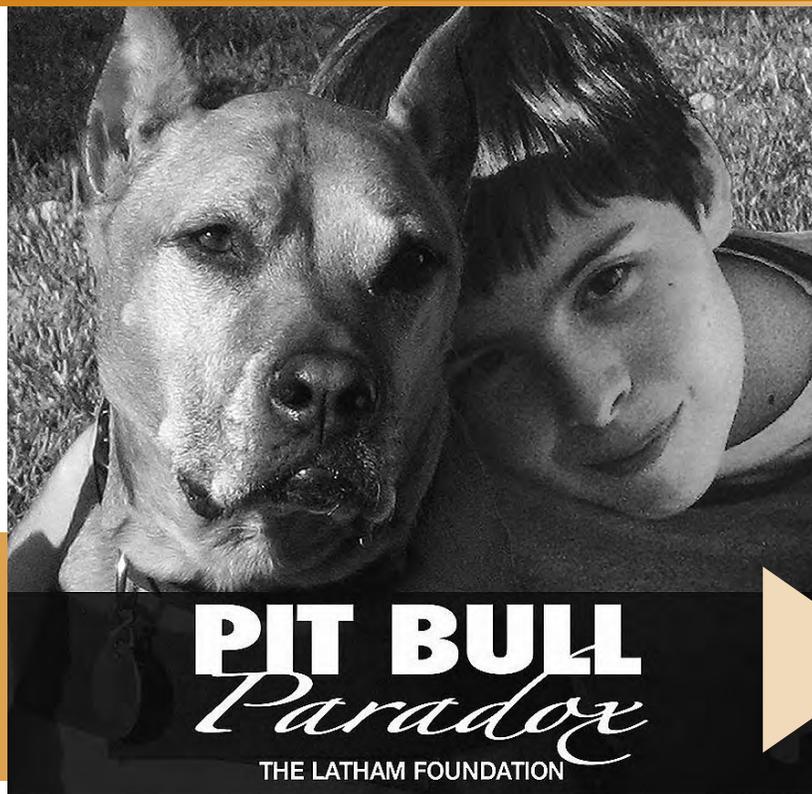
Reviewed by Stacy Baar

Dr. Andrew Rowan, senior vice president and chief of staff, the Humane Society of the United States.

"Dr. Nakaya offers a wise and compassionate approach to decision making for our animal friends. This book will be of great assistance and benefit to all animal lovers when making choices for their kindred spirits." Dr. Allen Schoen, MS, DVM, author of *Kindred Spirits: How the Remarkable Bond between Humans and Animals Can Change the Way We Live*.

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A new DVD for potential Pit Bull adopters, new owners, shelters and rescue groups

Produced by the Latham Foundation for the Promotion of Humane Education

Written and Directed by Tula Asselanis

The purpose of the **Pit Bull Paradox** is to promote understanding and appreciation of the breed and encourage lifetime adoptions by well-informed, responsible owners/guardians.

October 25th is Petfinder's™
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It's a tragic sign of our times that in some communities shelters euthanize all Pit Bulls and in others many who would make wonderful additions to a home and family wait in vain for adoption.

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The *Pit Bull Paradox* offers sound advice from breed experts for successful, rewarding adoptions. It emphasizes the need to consider one's lifestyle and personality, and the dog's need for daily, hard exercise, and thoughtful, consistent training and management.

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*" Pit Bulls
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one heart.
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severe shyness,
and fearfulness
are not
characteristic
of Pit Bulls and
are undesirable in
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Photo by: Ella Bittel

University of California at Davis • March, 2008



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