

## **When You're Not Ready To Say Goodbye**

**by Jill Moss**



Unlike death from natural circumstances, the sudden loss of a life companion or family member whether human or animal leaves the person behind with no time to prepare for an ending: one day life is normal, the next we saying goodbye to a loved one – and the world has changed forever.

This kind of loss rends the fabric of our lives and the wound is much harder to heal. Grief is that process by which we heal hurt and adjust; in order to go on with our lives we need to let go of those we love who are no longer with us.

The process of mourning is gradual; it is a coming to terms and acceptance of our loss. Usually, at the end of mourning, there is still sadness, but it is a wistful sadness that is tempered by the happy memories that we still possess of the loved one that we have lost.

With any death that has happened suddenly, and especially due to the irresponsible actions of another, this grieving process is much harder to endure.

And in the death of a pet it is not simply a pet we lose, but a member of our family that has not had a peaceful natural ending to their lives. They have been ripped from us, perhaps due to negligence or incompetence and, if that is not enough, we are often categorized by the vets who treated our animal as deranged or mad because we express feelings of profound loss.

We are faced with the reality that we are living in a world that is now suddenly unsafe, that professionals we trusted are now incompetent, and that the establishment is not there to protect us. We want accountability; We want

justice; and we want acknowledgement of our loss of a loved companion taken from us because of bad clinical practice.

Rather than simply grieving and moving on, we become, when faced with this kind of ending, a survivor of trauma, stuck in anger, seeking justice, and living through our loss is like swimming through porridge.

And if the last memories of our loved one are disturbing, we play them over and over again like a tape recorder that haunts us – leaving us overwhelmed with grief and guilt because we chose the professionals that let our pet die.

I know what it is like to lose a loved one to incompetence because I have lived through this nightmare not once but twice.

In the year 2000 my fiancé, the man I planned to spend my future with, was taken from me suddenly. The light aircraft in which he was a passenger crashed and he and the pilot were killed. I coped with that loss because Bella's needs were of paramount importance to me. Without her I can't imagine how I might have got through that time.

Following Norman's death Bella and I became inseparable. She was the reason I rushed home; she was my family; my life companion and her presence in my life helped me heal the wounds of the loss of a very special man. In this way Bella and I were a little team, constantly together, exploring new places and new people. A bond formed between us that was much more intense than that shared between many pet carers and their companions.

Bella was so endearing to all of those she came into contact with. I would venture out on many lonely days with Bella and end up being surrounded by strangers who felt compelled to make contact with her, and some of those strangers later became good friends.

Bella brought into my life so much pleasure, fun, and comfort. I did not consider Bella my pet, but rather my friend and companion, and rather than own her, I nurtured her need to be a free spirit. Bella grew from a traumatised puppy that I had rescued into an adult dog full of personality. Bella was truly unique and she would decide, depending on her mood, whether she was up for playing, socialising, or simply to be left alone. As well as seeking her companionship, I also respected her space and in this way we harmonised our lives. All I ever wanted was for Bella to live a healthy and happy life and then reach an ending that was peaceful and dignified.

To watch her suffer in the way that she did has left me with profound feelings of anger. I am taking my issues with Medivet through the appropriate channels; I am raising awareness of MRSA in pets through the media; and I hope that in the next year to be leading The Bella Moss Foundation forward in ways that will make a difference to the way vets and veterinary staff deal with postoperative infections.

MRSA is not a death sentence. It need not be fatal if detected in time. MRSA is a relatively fragile bacterium. Postoperative infections in pets, on the other hand, are not just bad luck, just one of those things that happen in life. Infections that kill animals are bad clinical practice and there is no room for argument on this issue.

What happened to Bella should not happen to a dog, a cat or any other animal and I am haunted by the memory of her last day. I watched her motionless body lying on a veterinary floor, her eyes looking at me for release. I was overcome with feelings of helplessness as Bella struggled to breathe, drowning in her own fluids as ignorant staff refused to care for her on the grounds that they could not risk becoming infected.

This will not happen again.

I shall never stop campaigning to ensure that the veterinary profession takes responsibility for infecting animals unnecessarily with serious post operative infections. I will never stop trying to make sure that they put into place all the necessary infection control procedures so that other animals are spared the inhumane experience that Bella had to go through.

Losing Bella to veterinary negligence has left me feeling as if a piece of me have been torn away. I live with the horror flashbacks of seeing her suffer so much. I live with reoccurring nightmares; smells of death get in the way of me enjoying pleasant memories. I want to be able to remember, but all I can do is relive. My GP calls this Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. My anger has no place to go and, like a fuelling fire, it acts as a vehicle to drive forth my awareness campaign that I pray will make a difference to the lives of companion animals in the future.

Over the past year I have learned that I am much stronger than I ever thought I was; I have learned patience, tolerance of others, and, by helping other people, I have learnt that this is the best testimony I can give to my beautiful Bella who was taken from me far too soon.

Bella occupied such a very special place in my heart; losing her is like losing a part of myself. She cannot be replaced...any more than a body part or some fond memories can be.

Many people have asked me over the past year if I will get another dog, and in some ways this offends me. Do they really think that Bella can so easily be replaced? Do they really think that she meant so little that I can just get another dog and forget her? But I also know that I have so much love to give and could not deny that to a creature that needed it. In time, if an animal came just as Bella did, into my life then who knows?

