



### The Last Day: Stories and Experiences of End of Life

We share these stories to help you consider your own desires, priorities, and opportunities for your loved ones. We hope these examples help you consider what you and your loved ones want to create around the end of life. Consider asking yourself and your family:

What does letting go with love look like?

What can you do to create loving energy to honor their lives?

We don't always get the opportunity to choose the perfect transition for our beloved pets. If you do have the opportunity to influence the end-of-life story, however, it can be a very meaningful and connected way to say good-bye.



#### Frisky

Our pup was 16 when the doctor told us that he was in the final stages of organ failure. We could give him medication to keep him comfortable for 24-48 hours. Anything more would be unfair. We wondered if we should say good-bye now or wait another day and give our children - ages 7 & 9 - a chance to say goodbye. We decided on the later. We explained to the kids that Frisky's body was dying and if we waited too long, he would suffer. At first, they were very angry with us and accused us of "murdering our dog". It was really hard and emotional, and we asked a dear friend to come over and help us. I think her less emotional presence helped the kids, and together we were able to explain more fully. We re-explained that Frisky's body was dying. We explained that the doctor could give Frisky pain medicine to help him feel better for one more day, and then the doctor could give him medicine to help his body die more peacefully without pain and suffering. The kids realized that Frisky deserved our love and kindness - and he shouldn't have to suffer. We decided to have a slumber party that evening, to say good-bye to Frisky with his favorite snacks (popcorn and ice cream) and a whole lot of love. We cuddled, we looked at pictures and told our favorite stories, and ate popcorn and ice cream in our pajamas. Frisky was literally surrounded with love. We gave the kids the choice of going to school in the morning or grandma's house. They wanted to be with their friends at school. So in the morning, the kids said good-bye to Frisky. My husband and I took him together to the clinic, and we stayed beside him as he peacefully passed. As hard as it was, I knew we had done this together as a family.



### Phoebe

Phoebe was almost 18 and we had been treating her renal failure for a few years. But the treatments were getting more frequent and invasive. And she was starting to become fearful and angry with us. She had always been a fiercely loving cat, and now she would run as soon as we arrived home from work. We knew that it was unfair to keep her going. And we couldn't bear the distress the treatments were causing her. We always said we would do anything to keep her with us, but that no longer felt right. We realized we needed to be willing to do anything to protect her from pain and suffering. It was time. We decided to stop the treatments and spend two more days together. We took time off from work, had a euthanasia service come to our home, and held her as she passed. It felt good to have her in my arms again. I wish it was different. I still miss her so much. But I know in my heart that, in the end, I put her first.

### Lonny

Our Lonny was 15. He was being treated for laryngeal paralysis, mega esophagus, an optic tumor, and congestive heart failure - all well managed and his quality of life remained good - until one day in October. We were looking forward to a week at the beach, but as soon as we arrived Lonny took a turn for the worse. He was unable to keep food down and became very lethargic. We called our vet and returned home first thing in the morning. He was diagnosed for the second time that year with pneumonia, a risk with laryngeal paralysis. His first bout had involved a few days stay in the emergency hospital, and we wanted to avoid that separation and anxiety for him, but we just weren't ready to say good-bye. By the next day he had stopped eating altogether. In a phone conversation our doctor explained that if he didn't eat within 24 hours, we should think about letting him go. His health issues were now compromising his quality of life too much, and we couldn't effectively treat one issue without exacerbating another. I tearfully explained this to my husband and Lonny. Lonny's head popped up, he got to his feet, walked to his food bowl, and ate dinner - every bite. We knew he wasn't ready. And we suspected it was because he knew we weren't ready. He kept the food down, but had a miserable night. He couldn't get comfortable, and he was exhausted. My husband lay beside him through the night. In the morning, we told him that we would not let him suffer any longer, we told him that we loved him and we didn't want him to stay for our benefit. If he was ready, we would help him transition with peace and love. I left the room for a moment and when I returned, Lonny looked into my eyes and his message was loud and clear - "Mama I'm done." I looked to my husband who said: "I just told him it was ok to go." He was waiting for us to be okay. We made the call to arrange at-home euthanasia for that evening. And we called to schedule a witnessed cremation with Dignified Pet Services for the following morning. We spent the day with Lonny cuddling, listening to music, sharing stories, telling him everything we loved about him and how grateful we were to share our lives together. He remained calm and peaceful all day. It was remarkable that the moment we made the decision to let him go, his relief was profound. The doctor arrived just before bedtime and Lonny died peacefully in our arms. We kept him with us overnight to honor his body. Though his spirit was gone, we felt the need to hold sacred space for him. We were following our heart messages all the way. In the morning we drove him to Dignified and participated in the placing of his body. We stayed for the cremation and returned home with his ashes two hours later. For us, it was the keeping of a promise to never leave him again after that first hospital visit. We look back with deep gratitude for his wisdom through the years and for the gift of sacred knowing that came to us with open hearts and unconditional love beyond words.

