

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

BY FAITH BANKS, DVM >>

MOBILE VETERINARY SERVICE BRINGS GOOD DEATH TO AGING AND SEVERELY ILL PETS



PHOTO COURTESY FAITH BANKS

Faith and Smudge

Dorothy knew it, and Fluffy and Fido know it, too — there really is no place like home. Many people comment to me that their pets dislike going to the veterinary clinic. They often say it with a hint of guilt, because most have been cared for by an amazing veterinarian and support staff. I get it. I often tell clients I have the nicest dentist, ever. He's an 80-year-old gentleman who hugs me, pats me on the head and gives me a kiss on the cheek whenever I have an appointment. But, my heart starts racing and my palms sweat every time I see him. I just don't like going to the dentist.

When it is time to say goodbye to our old, ailing pets, there's no place they would rather be than in their own home, in their soft beds or in their favourite spot. So, why do so many people say goodbye in the environment their pets dislike most?

I have helped many families say goodbye in their backyard, on the front porch, in bed or on the couch. Two years ago, I said goodbye to my beloved Smudge outside, nestled in soft, fluffy snow. That was her favourite spot.

Knowing your pet was not stressed in their last moments — and knowing you

were there for them throughout the entire euthanasia process — is a very comforting feeling. A beautiful death, a peaceful death, with sweet, tender moments make this goodbye a treasured moment and allows pet parents to move through their grief journey a little swifter. When I get emails from bereaved pet parents who are getting back into the pet owning/loving relationship again, I know their recent pet's death did not scar them or scare them. Grief is the price we pay for loving. But healthy grieving can also be a positive learning experience.

For many children, the loss of their pet is their first experience with death. Allowing children to be present, ask questions and see their parents manage sadness in an open and safe space allows them to become more comfortable with their own feelings of grief. Often, the vision of euthanasia they have conjured in their minds is far more ghastly than the peaceful goodbye that is experienced first hand.

There are many factors that go into providing a good death. I have spent countless hours reading and researching, taking online webinars and courses, attending hospice and palliative care conferences and

becoming certified in pet loss therapy. I've consulted with like-minded colleagues in the U.S. about best practices in the art of veterinary medicine with regards to helping a family say goodbye in the gentlest, most painless of ways.

So why doesn't everyone say goodbye at home?

There may be a slight increase in the fee for an in-home euthanasia, as we are travelling to your home and more time is allocated to the process, so families do not feel rushed. Some pet parents feel they will look at the spot where Fluffy died and have a constant sad reminder of the loss. However, I want people to think about that moment, and then smile, knowing they did what was best for their pet even when their hearts were breaking. Taking on your pet's pain and suffering to relieve them of it is the greatest gift one can give.

Is it sad? Absolutely. That part I can't change. Is the pet stressed? Not at all, and this prevents added stress and guilt being thrown into the sadness soup. Less guilt means processing feelings of grief quicker and being able to look back on their pet's life with a smile.

Twenty years ago I graduated from vet school anxious to save pets. Now I am here to help them to die. In pets with severe cognitive dysfunction, cancer, organ failure or significant mobility issues, euthanasia may be the kindest treatment available. When families tell me they wish their own two-legged loved ones could have had a passing as gentle as the one I provide, I know the comfort, safety and privacy of being in their home has a role in this.

But I also know that I give good death. 🐾

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