



## Celebrating the Life of Your Pet through Ceremony

Human beings have always acknowledged the passing of a member of their family or community, with ceremony. Around the world, such remembrance ceremonies exist to pay tribute, but also to unite the participants in healing after the loss.

As your pet was truly a part of your family, we urge you to have such an event, bringing together everyone touched by their life, and their passing. We've helped families just like yours to stage remarkably moving ceremonies in tribute to their animal companion – and always work with the creativity of the family to create a personalized tribute.

Here are some of our suggestions, based on experience. It doesn't matter if you've chosen private burial, or cremation, a ceremony gives you time to pay tribute to your cherished pet; time to reflect on the many gifts they brought into your life. It also binds people together, and helps them in the healing process.

**1. Pick a time and place for this event.** If you are choosing to bury your pet in a private location, the burial itself becomes the focal point of the ceremony. However, if you've chosen cremation, our location may provide the setting for a simple viewing and remembrance event. Or you may choose to have a private ceremony after the ashes are returned to you.

**2. Create the ceremony structure.** Many families like to really personalize the event. One family sang "All You Need is Love" as they dug their pet's grave together. They then planted a tree over the grave, and surrounded it with abalone shells (their dog's favorite "toy") and candles, lighting the candles in the evening hours. They described it as absolutely beautiful. Each of the guests lit a candle, while sharing a memory of a special time with the animal they all loved.

**3. If you plan to bury keepsakes with your pet's remains, gather them ahead of time.** Some families choose to include their pet's toys, collar, or other items as part of the ceremonial structure. If that's your intention, have a special box for all these items, and bring them to the ceremonial site. Each participant can select an item, and then place it in the grave, while sharing their memory.

**4. Always give voice to your sorrow, and gratitude.** While we often have "moments of silence" in tribute to someone, silence doesn't necessarily heal broken hearts. Speaking of your loss, sharing your feelings, reaching out for comfort from others – that's what ceremony is all about. Invite each participant to speak, but never force the issue. If they're not ready to share, so be it. It may take time for them to find the right words.

To that end, we suggest simple ceremonies on the anniversary of their pet's passing – a month, a year... you'll know the right time. Often, it's the younger children in a family who are the catalyst for such an event. Be watchful of their hearts – they are usually more in tune with feelings than us adults.

Setting aside a time to remember and commemorate your companion is the first step toward healthy healing. The event will be a mix of tears and laughter, as those memories come to the participants.