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End of life decision-making for pet guardians

June 16, 5:11 PM = Seattle Alternative Veterinary Care Examiner = Darla Rewers

The dreaded question is "To euthanize?—or not to euthanize?'

This is likely the most painful and

difficult part of having a companion animal in our lives. If the animal has inconsolable pain, the choice would seem a little easier. But it is never

easy, nor fun. As a veterinarian and

an empath. I feel a lot of the pain

that the animal is going through. I

have agreed to administer humane euthanasia to animals who were terminally ill. Most of these animals

were ready. Some of them would

more. When that happens, I have

become physically ill, sometimes for an entire week afterwards. This made me wonder if I was accepting some sort of energetic karma for

them. What if they needed that last

purpose or get a message across?

Some animals are ready long before

little bit of time to achieve their

have preferred to wait a day or

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No matter what kind of pet, animals create a lasting bond to be remembered.

their people are to let go. This can be equally as difficult to watch from a compassionate viewpoint. Even though the decision is troublesome to come to, it is much easier to make informed decisions if the animal and the guardian have established a relationship with a veterinarian they trust. The pet's physician should be willing to provide tools to help with the process, whether through pain-

alleviating techniques or medications, or support for grief counseling. A person should never feel "rushed" into making this life and death decision. Also, if the animal is not in obvious pain, I would recommend not pushing to speed up fate, either. Even if an animal has cancer or a deformity, if they are otherwise healthy, comfortable and happy, it may not be appropriate for you to request a veterinarian to perform euthanasia. Calm, rational communication and an open mind should make it easier for everyone involved to discuss these issues either when they are imminent, or earlier in

preparation. Whenever a pet passes, whether naturally or assisted, it is important to honor the grieving process. If we feel stuck in a certain part of the process for too long, then therapy may be helpful. There are local support groups for anyone who needs them. Often the loss of a pet opens up all the pent-up pain and distress that we otherwise kept contained, such as loss of a job or significant other.

Animals, even in their passing, are still helping us—by assisting in the expression and release of emotion and guilt. Animals would never want us to feel guilty—that is a human construct. Animals also do not judge us, so if hospice care, heroic surgical intervention or chemotherapy are not within our ability, the animals would not fault us for that. When trying to decide if "it's time" for our beloved pet, take time. Take time to slow down, and feel with compassion. Be honest and be compassionate enough to allow them to go if they need to. Also be brave about the upcoming "journey" they are

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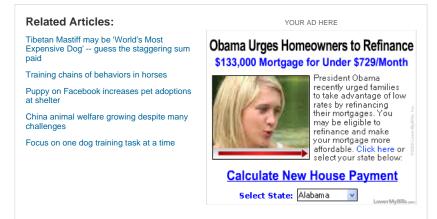
about to make—chances are, since energy is never created nor destroyed, only transformed—there is likely new adventure waiting for everyone.

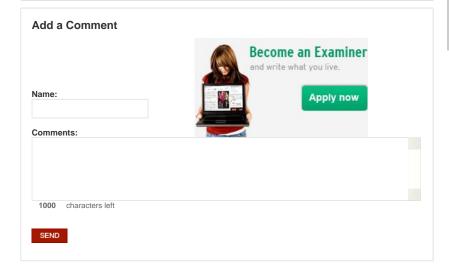
The unconditional love we learn from animals is a tangible healing tool that can help us make their transitional time a little easier. The joy and memories of fun and mischievous times shared will always be with us, if we can focus on those instead of just the pain and hurt.

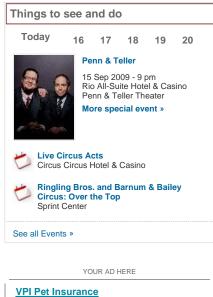
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