

The Spiritual Wisdom of Pets





Remember your beloved pet
with this rainbow photo frame.

go.unity.org/petframe

YOUR SUPPORT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Generous gifts from friends like you allow us to make Unity literature available to those most in need of spiritual encouragement. You may give at unity.org/donatenow.

A Proliferation of Pets

If you ever need a conversation starter, ask someone whether they have a pet. Chances are they do and will tell you all about it. With pictures. Half the people in the world live with pets, including two-thirds of Americans and even more in Central and South America. There are far more American households with pets than children. Dogs, cats, fish, birds, assorted reptiles, even guinea pigs and hamsters work their way into our hearts.

They also teach us spiritual lessons if we pay attention. In this booklet, you will read stories from New Thought writers reflecting on the wisdom of their pets. Pets can teach us love, forgiveness, play, and certainly how to be happy in the present moment. You will also learn about a fairly new branch of ministry called animal chaplaincy and about the Rainbow Bridge we have built at Unity Village, Missouri, to honor pets who have passed on.

When we open our hearts, we can be blessed, enlightened, amused, and comforted by our nonhuman friends. We hope these stories (and yes, pictures) will entertain you and touch you as you consider the importance of the many creatures with whom we share the planet.

Your friends in Unity



Table of Contents

- | | | | |
|----|--|----|---|
| 4 | Happiness Wears
a Fur Coat
Rev. Robin Volker | 20 | Loyalty, Devotion, and Love
Trish Yancey |
| 8 | A Role Model
for Boundaries
Lila Herrmann | 24 | A Spirit of Persistence
Angie Olson |
| 12 | Living in the Moment
Rev. Edith
Washington-Woods | 28 | Unwrapping Playfulness
Rev. Bronte Colbert |
| 16 | The Blessing
of Forgiveness
Rev. Juan del Hierro | 32 | Learning to Trust
Rev. Carolyn Warnemuende |
| | | 36 | A Wagging Tail
of Unconditional Love
Rev. Kathy Beasley |



- 40 Self-Care in Old Age
Amy Ellis
- 44 My Cup of Tea
Rev. Kelly Isola
- 48 An Animal Chaplain
Finds Wisdom Through Loss
Sarah Bowen

- 52 Honoring All Animals
Jill Angelo
- 56 Finding Comfort
at the Rainbow Bridge
Sandy Eastwood
- 60 Pet Messages
from *Daily Word*



Happiness Wears a fur Coat

REV. ROBIN VOLKER



Oh, how we loved our Junebug! She spoke to our hearts when we saw her that day at the animal rescue center. She was gorgeous, an absolute gem—a full-black Labrador retriever with a sweet personality. My husband Rick and I easily welcomed Junebug into our home. We agreed that the spiritual rewards of companionship and opportunities for happiness were worthy of adding to our family.

Junebug was only 2 years old when her little sister, Abby, joined us. I remember the day well. We received a call from the rescue center about a female black Lab mix. With Junebug in tow, we went to meet her. Instantly, Junebug and Abby connected, playing joyfully, and soon our two happy dogs were on their way home with us. I was over the moon with joy!

Over the next 10 years, Junebug and Abby were inseparable, sharing every adventure together. Rick and I are passionate campers, and our girls caught the camping bug from us, embracing the spiritual journey of connecting deeply with nature and each other. Junebug and Abby mastered the art of campground kindness and the cozy art of sleeping in a camper. On camping day, bursting with excitement, they'd hop into the truck, their faces alight with joy, eagerly questioning, "Where are we going, Dad?" Their smiles were as bright as the journeys ahead, a testament to the spiritual growth and joy found in exploring the natural world together as a family.

Junebug and Abby also adored their favorite pastime—giving the squirrels in our yard a playful chase. Drawn by our bird feeders, squirrels found themselves in a lively game of tag



Junebug and Abby

with our dynamic duo. Together Junebug and Abby would dash and dart, creating a spectacle of fun although they never quite managed to catch a squirrel. There was one thrilling moment when a not-so-speedy squirrel narrowly escaped, leaving behind just a snippet of its tail. Watching them, Rick and I learned the value of coexistence and the simple joys that nature's interactions can bring.

Every time Rick or I returned home, Junebug and Abby would dash over, their tails wagging furiously, showering us with genuine joy and excitement. It was a heartwarming reminder to cherish every moment with our friends and family. Daily walks were nonnegotiable adventures, come rain, snow, or shine. No matter the destination, even if it was just a quick lap around the block, they were bursting with eagerness, ready to explore every rock and tree with boundless enthusiasm.

Instantly, Junebug and Abby connected,
playing joyfully, and soon our two happy dogs
were on their way home with us.

As the seasons of life have unfolded, we've embraced countless moments of joy together. Junebug has journeyed over the Rainbow Bridge, leaving Abby, now 12, to bask in the quieter pleasures of life. These days her bliss is found in the comfort of her mat in my office or in the gentle embrace of a sunbeam through the window. As we all venture further into our golden years, Abby remains our unwavering guide, embodying the pure, unadulterated joy of existence. She teaches us to cherish and fully engage in the sacred simplicity of each moment, encouraging Rick and I to find contentment and happiness in life exactly as it presents itself.

*Rev. Robin Volker is a minister, speaker, and coach
in Blairsville, Georgia.*

A Role Model for Boundaries

LILA HERRMANN



Boundaries. Mental health experts and advice columnists emphasize the importance of boundaries. Setting them. Enforcing them. Respecting them.

It is challenging! Especially if you are a people pleaser or too shy to be direct or grew up in a generation frequently told to just get over it when others were rude or demanding or just plain mean.

My daughters began urging me to practice using boundaries.

“Mom, you can say *no*.” (But then I am letting someone down.)

“Mom, you can ask directly for what you need/want/prefer.” (But I feel selfish doing so.) “Mom, speak up when someone hurts you.”

(Or I could just let it ferment inside me while I think about it every day until I die. It would be easier.)

Boundaries are easy in theory, but the actual setting and enforcing of boundaries requires, at least for me, superhuman powers.

And then came Axl Rose, our new cat. Her (yes, this Axl is female) and her sister, Stevie Ray Vaughan, came to live with us at about 6 months old. Stevie is a fearless extrovert. She flaunts boundaries—hers, mine, anyone’s. She walks through the world on her own terms.

Axl is an introvert. Like, professional-level introvert. Axl arrived in our home, came out of the pet carrier after a two-hour flight and a car ride, and immediately went under our bed. I had been forewarned that she might stay under there for days. We knew we might not even see her for weeks, and made sure food and water were close enough for her to reach without being watched.

As an introvert myself, I could relate and was more than willing to give Axl the space she needed to find her comfort zone.

She came out from under the bed in the first 24 hours. My husband Jim and I thought this meant we were just the best pet parents ever. Well, not so fast. If we moved, she darted right back to her safe place under the bed. Same thing happened if we spoke aloud. Just looking at her would send her flying under the bed or to the quickest exit.

Did we feel offended? Did we feel disappointed? Disrespected? Mad? No, because we knew she was doing exactly what she needed to do to feel safe. To feel okay. To be comfortable in her own skin. Don't we all deserve that?

When someone sets a boundary, it is not our place to push against it, demand answers, or make it about ourselves.

Axl got a little bolder every day. It didn't take long for her to get on the bed with me. At first she would just hang out. Then she would snuggle next to my legs. I held my breath the first time she crawled into my lap. Now she is quite a cuddly kitty, but she still has boundaries. I cannot pick her up. That causes her enormous stress. And she doesn't want anyone touching her feet. Her claws need to be trimmed, but we will wait. Because we know she is learning to trust us within her boundaries. We respect her feelings and needs.



Axl Rose

Brené Brown, renowned author, speaker, and professor, said, “Daring to set boundaries is about having the courage to love ourselves, even when we risk disappointing others.”

Boundaries require trust and respect. When someone sets a boundary, it is not our place to push against it, demand answers, or make it about ourselves. And when we set a boundary for ourselves, we should expect that same trust and respect. Boundaries allow us to create our own comfort zone. Find your zone. Love yourself.

Lila Herrmann is the former director of publishing for Unity World Headquarters.

Living in the Moment

REV. EDITH WASHINGTON-WOODS



Even before the pandemic, my wife Akosua and grandson Taevion thought it would be a great idea to have a dog. I was not interested. A dog meant vet visits, immunizations, grooming, walking, poop scooping in a bag to dispose of later. The more I thought about it, the more I did not want a dog.

But they kept asking, and one day toward the end of 2019, I heard myself say, *I am willing to have a dog*. Akosua started searching pet adoption sites, shelters, and private owners, looking for the perfect dog!

When nearly everyone was forced to stay home during the pandemic in 2020, many people began looking for pets to bring into their families, and we had to qualify to get one. We were turned down for not having had a dog for many years. We were turned down for being a same-sex family. We were turned down because we were brown.

We attempted to live in the moment as Akosua searched, but there were times it was frustrating and we were sad. I used spiritual principles as a rallying cry, affirming: *We create our life experiences through our way of thinking*. We started to see beyond the limitations before us and live into possibilities.

Finally in October 2020, Akosua said, “There is a dog available at a shelter in Palm Springs,” but we’d need to pick up the 1-year-old dog that day. Akosua, Taevion, and I stood in our living room looking at each other as excitement rose in each of us.

We drove two and a half hours from our home in El Cajon, California, to the shelter. There she was, looking scared and

lonely. Shortly after we were in the car, the dog jumped from the back seat into Akosua's lap in a beautiful moment of bonding.


We named her Sukari, which means *sugar* in Swahili.

One day, they left Sukari at home with me. She jumped up on the couch and put her head in my lap. Her big, brown eyes looked at me and she wagged her tail back and forth. We were living in the moment. The dog and the reluctant one. My heart opened wide. I totally melted.

Today Sukari reminds me to live in the moment. When any of the three of us come home, she is waiting in the window. Once she sees us, she leaps up and down, grabs her lamb chop toy, and brings it to the door. As soon as the door opens, she drops the toy and jumps up and down, waiting briefly for one of us to pet her. Then she grabs her toy, squeezing it and running. She wants to play now.

I did not know I could love an animal like this. I take her to be groomed, I take her to the vet, I take her for walks. I do all the things I did not want to do when I thought about owning a dog. I even rub her under her chin. No one can rub her like I do. I continue to understand that I create my experience by what I choose to believe. I appreciate saying *yes* to this beautiful addition to our family. Thanks, Sukari, for blessing me.

*Rev. Edith Washington-Woods is senior minister
at Unity of Gaithersburg, Maryland.*

A fluffy white dog, possibly a Papillon or a similar breed, is sitting on a brown couch. The dog has long, curly white fur and dark eyes. It is wearing a dark collar with a small tag. The background shows a living room with a patterned pillow, a framed picture on the wall, and a lamp. The dog is looking slightly to the left of the camera.

Sukari

The Blessing of forgiveness

REV. JUAN DEL HIERRO

I remember the moment of realization and the guilt that followed. While scrolling through my cell phone photos, I could see the shift so clearly. I could tell exactly when my husband and I became parents to our son, Lucas. Before that, the subject of most of our pictures had been Rita and Roxie. After our son was born, there were hardly any pictures of them.

Rita and Roxie, our Chihuahua mixes, were my “forever puppies.” We adopted them as tiny pups, showered them with attention, and took them everywhere. The arrival of our newborn shifted our focus. Our attentive care for the pups dwindled, and they often found themselves edged out of their cozy spots at the foot of our bed by our growing son. Sometimes, in the exhaustion of the day with a toddler, there was little time for the puppies. Things just changed.

Despite feeling guilty, I noticed that Rita and Roxie never seemed to hold any resentment that they were no longer the center of attention. They continued to shower us with love, find joy in what we could give them, and remain present with us. They truly exemplified unconditional love.

As our son and puppies grew older, we became more intentional about giving Rita and Roxie attention. They eventually reclaimed their spots at the edge of our bed, especially when my husband traveled for work. I often held them like babies, cherishing the moments.

The years passed and our puppies became older. As their energy waned and fur turned gray, people were quicker



Rita and Roxie

to question why we still called them puppies. I said it was because they never got bigger than 12 pounds and had the energy of puppies for most of their lives, but it was mainly because I always considered them my babies.

As I reflect on our relationship and all they taught me, I see that Rita and Roxie showed me the importance of forgiveness, starting with forgiving myself for not always being there for them during our son's early years. They taught me it's never too late to seek forgiveness, not only through words but

through actions. Rather than dwelling in guilt, I learned to shift my focus to being present and showing love.

They taught me it's never too late to seek forgiveness, not only through words but through actions.

Rita passed away this past New Year's Eve, and Roxie followed a few months later. Almost 16 years of love and lessons seemed to come to a close. I held Roxie as she took her final breaths. I'd lie if I did not say I had some moments of guilt about things I could have done differently, but I quickly remembered the lessons my puppies taught me. Through tears, I spoke words of love and gratitude. Looking into Roxie's eyes, I could sense the forgiveness and unconditional love she held for me. As she slipped away, the love became even more real.

Rita and Roxie, my most beautiful puppies, taught me so much about expressing love. They showed me that unconditional love is possible both toward myself when I miss the mark and toward others as they try their best to show love.

Thank you, Rita and Roxie. You are my forever puppies and forever my teachers. I love you.

Rev. Juan del Hierro is senior minister at Unity on the Bay in Miami.

Loyalty, Devotion, and Love

TRISH YANCEY



It's a running joke in my family that if you ever want to find me, all you need to do is follow the trail of furry family members. When I settle somewhere, even briefly, every living being in my home is inexplicably and magically drawn to be on or around me. I try to tell this ever-evolving herd that I can, in fact, use the restroom or work at my desk or do chores or sleep all by myself, but they will have none of it. If I'm ever going through a tough time, they are immediately by my side. Silent, stalwart, steadfast support without hesitancy or question, every single time.

It's been this way through the generations of rescues and strays that have found their forever home with me. I simply must be loved and protected—and supervised—every step of the way, every single day. It's not my rule, mind you, it's theirs. I consider it one of the highest honors I could ever hope to have bestowed upon me—the sacred gift of absolute, unshakable devotion.

It's true I am the bringer of food and the healer of boo-boos. Some of their initial allegiance surely comes from that fact. Over time, though, a level of utterly faithful reverence develops that feels a lot like unconditional love to me. There is a constancy to their commitment that I have never experienced at the level of human emotion. It feels incredibly sacred, and it has taught me how to show up hopefully and openheartedly in the world.

If I committed to all my relationships as deeply, loyally, and unconditionally as my pets commit to theirs with me, if I



vowed to view the world and all its people the way they view me, my life would be utterly immersed in love and gratitude. I would never feel disconnected or alone, and I would find myself effortlessly seeing the very best in everyone and everything around me. My whole paradigm would shift.

What if we all did it? The depth of connection experienced would likely have the power to heal the planet and every relationship on it within minutes. Can you imagine that world? If someone felt blue or disconnected, someone else would rush to be right next to them in quiet solidarity. They would receive committed companionship and total love and



Silent, stalwart, steadfast support without hesitancy
or question, every single time.

acceptance without question. No words would even need to be exchanged for them to know they were being embraced and supported every step of the way. What an amazing world that would surely be. What an amazing world it can be.

May we rise to such an occasion. May we show up in our lives with open, grateful hearts, always quick to assume the very best is on its way. When others fall short or make mistakes, may we meet them with compassion and understanding, eager to offer support and second chances. May we return love with even more love, and may we earn the love so freely given to us by our furry, faithful, fantastic family members.

*Trish Yancey, LUT, CSE, serves as spiritual leader
at Unity of Sebring, Florida.*

A Spirit of Persistence

ANGIE OLSON



I went to my local shelter planning to adopt a kitten. As I was moving from cage to cage, a little white puff screamed so loudly it caught me off guard. She was standing, raising her paws to me as I walked by. I'll never forget her face as she cried with all her might. She was clearly communicating, "Get me outta here!"

That was it for me. Her very vocal nature got her adopted, and I went home with a loud, miniature cotton ball who had a single black spot on her side. I named her Anabel, and she has been my constant companion for 13 years. Of all the cats I've had, she is the best at communicating what she wants and needs at any given moment. And she doesn't stop until you listen.

Some might describe Anabel as needy. Or a squeaky wheel. I've gotten pretty good at understanding what she is communicating. For instance, she patiently waits every day for her giant water bowl to be refreshed. If I'm busy and don't get to it quickly enough, she lets me know. Her behavior escalates until I notice. Waiting, then staring and pacing, and then meowing until the bowl is clean and filled to the brim with cold water. She does not retreat until she's accomplished her task. Persistence.

There is a spiritual wisdom to Anabel's personality. Her persistence is not anything I've seen in another cat. She can be described as a pushy cuddler. If I am sitting, Anabel is there. If I am in bed, Anabel is there. And not just lying meekly beside me. She's on top of me with her paw touching my neck. Or her face is in my face trying to figure out how to get closer. Now as a 50-something woman who prefers the cold, I often come to words with Anabel around 2 a.m. when I wake up wrapped with warm

fur and cat whiskers tickling my face and neck. But I do appreciate that she isn't afraid to show her love openly and freely all the time. I don't do this quite as easily.

And she's not afraid to try again and again, even if she doesn't get her way the first time. The real lesson is that eventually we compromise and find something that works for both of us. She never gets her feelings hurt and leaves. She stays and pursues her goal—to snuggle as much as she can. Persistence.

Her very vocal nature got her adopted, and I went home with a loud, miniature cotton ball who had a single black spot on her side.

Anabel clearly has our whole household trained. Her quirky personality has shown me that it's okay to proclaim what your needs are—because you really are more likely to get your needs met if you do. Sometimes persistence is the key to making your dreams become a reality. While I sometimes grumble about finding her paws resting on my neck once again, I'm grateful for all the love she gives and that she yelled at me so loudly when we met.

Angie Olson is chief marketing officer for Unity World Headquarters.



Anabel

Unwrapping Playfulness

REV. BRONTE COLBERT

Mr. Pancake

“Happy birthday,” my friend said, handing my gift—in a shiny gift bag with brightly colored tissues peeking out—across the coffee shop table.

“It’s so pretty!” I turned the bag this way and that, then sat back in my chair reveling in its colors. My friend, bestie that she is, knew who had taught me to love gift bags: Mr. Pancake.

It started years ago when I saw a neighbor in our condo complex walking an adorable shih tzu. I loved dogs but hadn’t had one in a long time. As I petted it, she told me she’d been grieving the passing of an elderly dog and decided to adopt a new pet. She proclaimed: “I am ready for my next dog! It will be a white shih tzu, and I will name him Parker.” Just two days later, her sister who works at a vet’s office called to tell her they had an abandoned pup in need of a home—a white, male shih tzu.

I loved her happy story! I felt that her positive words and details surely helped manifest her new companion.

Six months later I moved to another city in Georgia. One day while feeling a bit lonely in my new place, Parker’s story came to mind. Was it time? Suddenly I declared, “I am ready for a dog!” I gave no further details. Before the week was out, I got a call from my daughter. A college student friend could no longer keep her year-old puppy. Was I interested? Oh, yes!

He was a white shih tzu. His name was Mr. Pancake.

For the 12 years he was with me, that little dog added immeasurable joy and playfulness to my life, and he shared it with others. He’d run up to people at the beach just to wag and

lick and say *hi*. He loved hikes and dog parks, the games we made up, and playing with his stuffies and toys.

He especially loved getting gift bags at Christmas or on his birthday. At the first sound of a happy birthday song, his ears then his whole body would perk up. And when he spotted his gift bag? He'd stand up and dance in circles, barking and pawing the air. He didn't tear it open right away. He nudged it with his nose, pushed it around with his paws, tossed it into the air, grabbed a piece of tissue and ran about shaking it, then barked at the bag before starting all

for the 12 years he was with me, that little
dog added immeasurable joy and playfulness
to my life, and he shared it with others.

over again. I would remind him there was also a gift inside, which eventually got his attention, although not as much as the bag and its wrappings.

He knew how to focus on the joy of receiving. As I laughed, took photos, and joined in his playfulness, he taught me to find more joy, too. At times when I sat working for what he believed was too long without play, he'd drop a throw toy at my feet. While I miss his physical presence, his joy stays with me.



At the coffee shop, I did not nudge my birthday gift bag around with my nose nor grab tissue paper with my mouth and shake my head while dancing in circles. But I did linger on the wrappings, feeling the shiny paper of the bag and the crinkles of tissue paper before appreciating the gift deeper inside. As I did, I sent out a quiet *thank you* to my beloved Mr. Pancake.

Rev. Bronte Colbert is a retired minister in Athens, Georgia.

A photograph of a cat sitting on a windowsill, looking out at a sunset over a suburban neighborhood. The cat is in the foreground, its back to the camera. The window frame is visible, and the view outside shows houses, a car, and a bright orange and yellow sky.

Learning to Trust

REV. CAROLYN WARNEMUENDE

Simon

The family was not looking for another pet. In fact, my son-in-law had adamantly said, “No more animals. The menagerie we have is plenty.” The four-leggeds that ran the household were two dogs and three cats. Then my daughter Kara encountered a situation where she couldn’t say *no*.

On a warm spring afternoon, Kara was walking their year-old puppy along a busy neighborhood street. She spotted a woman holding a large golden tabby cat and sobbing. “May I help you?” she asked. It appeared the woman was in the process of abandoning the tabby. The woman spoke little English but thrust the cat toward Kara, saying, “Take. Take!” Unwilling to see it dumped, Kara reached toward the cat.

Terrified, the cat flailed wildly, scratching Kara’s face and nose so deeply that she would require stitches. She was bleeding profusely.

Without thought for her own wounds, Kara took flea-ridden Simon, the name she immediately gave her attacker, to the vet. Twenty-four hours later, flea-free, groomed, and diagnosed with an autoimmune disease common to cats, he was ready to go to his new home.

For days, Simon hid under a bed in a storage drawer filled with blankets. He only came out to eat at night after everyone had gone to sleep. Each day the family talked to Simon without seeing him. His fear kept him isolated from any nurturing touch.

After weeks, Simon ventured out of hiding one evening. My granddaughter sat quietly on the floor hoping Simon would come to her. Slowly and stealthily, he walked toward her and gently rubbed against her leg. After several such forays, he allowed her to pet him.

As Simon learned that he was safe in this household and could trust his new family, he began to play. He tackled a string or feather wiggled on the floor for him. He batted a small ball hanging on a string. All his attacking instincts were directed to these games. After his first terrifying experience of being pushed into a stranger's arms, he never scratched anyone again.



Simon

Simon could not play with the other cats because of his disease and spent most of his day hiding in the blanket drawer or in the closet. When a family member sat patiently waiting and lulling him out with gentle words, he emerged, stretched, and rubbed against their body. Trust had been established.

When a family member sat patiently waiting and lulling him out with gentle words, he emerged, stretched, and rubbed against their body.

As I became acquainted with Simon and watched his journey from fear to trust, I thought about myself and others I know who have experienced hurt or abandonment. He reminded me of the tenderness and fragility of relationships. Like Simon, when I feel wounded or rejected, I withdraw. When care and love are offered, I may initially resist out of fear of experiencing further hurt. It takes time to learn whether what is being offered is genuine. It takes discernment to know whether established boundaries will be respected. It takes willingness to risk emerging from solitude to connection. As with Simon, slowly and with patience, trust blossoms. The love given is received. The love received is returned. Life becomes rich, full, and filled with wonder.

Rev. Carolyn Warnemuende is senior associate minister of congregational care at Unity of Sacramento, California.

A Wagging Tail of Unconditional Love

REV. KATHY BEASLEY

Shanti

In the quiet corners of my healing journey, my furry companion Shanti, a 10-pound miniature dachshund with a flair for bowties and colorful bandanas, emerged as my unexpected source of spiritual wisdom, joy, and healing. A lovable mix of mischief and unconditional love, he has taught me profound lessons through his comical antics and peaceful presence. Several years ago, he lost his left eye to an infection, and I never left his side. This is a story of how, after I received an unexpected diagnosis, he has never left mine.

Shanti has a unique talent for finding joy in the simplest of moments. One of his quirks is dancing to music only he can hear. Whenever an imaginary tune catches his ear, he prances around the room, his tail wagging in rhythm like an invitation to join him, so I oblige. His joyful abandon reminds me that amidst life's challenges, there's always room for laughter, spontaneity, and a dance party.

Shanti has his own rules for playing fetch. Unlike traditional games where the goal is to bring the ball back, Shanti chases after the ball with gusto, pounces enthusiastically, and then engages in a playful solo game, tossing the ball around and delighting in his own company. He has taught me about embracing creativity and finding joy in the activity rather than fixating on outcomes.

One quiet evening as I sat wrapped in blankets, Shanti decided to play a game of surprise. With a mischievous glint in his eye, he quietly burrowed under the blanket beside me, disappearing from view. Moments later, he popped his head

His ability to offer solace without words
reminded me of the power of silent
companionship and the healing
potential of love.



out, tail wagging furiously as if to say, “Gotcha!” His playful spirit never failed to make me smile and reminded me of the importance of playfulness in healing.

Shanti’s unconditional love has been a constant source of comfort. During the difficult days of multiple medical appointments, he would curl up beside me, his warmth and presence a soothing balm to my weary spirit. His ability to offer solace without words reminded me of the power of silent companionship and the healing potential of love.

Through Shanti’s companionship, I found respite and joy amidst the moment’s challenges. His games and dances became symbols of hope and resilience. He showed me that healing isn’t just about physical recovery but also about nurturing the spirit and finding joy in everyday moments, no matter what.

Today, as I reflect on my journey, I am grateful for Shanti’s spiritual wisdom. His unconditional love and quirkiness have taught me to embrace life fully, find laughter even in difficult times, and appreciate companionship’s beauty. Shanti’s paw prints and wagging tail remain etched in my heart, a testament to an animal’s profound impact on our lives and the healing power of unconditional love, laughter, and joy.

*Rev. Kathy Beasley is a senior manager
for the Unity Prayer Ministry.*

Self-Care in Old Age

AMY ELLIS

Sweet Pea



There are moments when I think my cat, Sweet Pea, is so wise and intuitive that I refer to him as my Higher Power Kitty. I wouldn't say that I look to him for guidance, but he seems to provide it when I need it most. His most powerful lesson has revealed itself recently as he navigates his own frailty and perhaps approaches the end of his time here.

Sweet Pea has had a tougher time in the past few years than any cat named Sweet Pea should have to endure. Multiple surgeries to remove tumors that stubbornly keep returning. A myriad of related health issues that entail far too much poking and prodding, along with the indignation of pills or syringes of liquid, all of which he is a pro at evading.

Every visit to the vet has broken my heart a little more. Yet as I watch him, I can't help but admire how he has adjusted to his new life circumstances. There seems to be a level of acceptance within him that I have not always had in relation to my own health challenges. He seems to know when to slow down, take care of himself, and simply rest.

He seeks quiet or isolation when he needs it, particularly from my other cat. He communicates his needs, sometimes loudly. He does what he can and no more. While he used to be quite the athlete with his high jumps and mid-air flips, he now walks and plays much more gingerly and seems absolutely content with his new reality.

Although he has obviously slowed down, he seems as happy as ever. There is a peace and contentedness about him in every moment that is beautiful—and enlightening—to

His most powerful lesson has revealed itself recently as he navigates his own frailty and perhaps approaches the end of his time here.



witness. He purred during an acupuncture session recently. It was a strange new procedure with people he'd never met, but he seemed to intuitively sense that it was all okay. He relaxed into it as if having tiny needles in his face and all over his body was the most normal thing he'd ever done.

I can't help but reflect on how this is precisely the way I should face my own physical challenges or health issues. Do I remember to take it easy? Give my body the rest it needs? Or do I push myself to keep doing all the same things regardless of how I'm feeling? Do I ease into my doctor's suggested treatment plan, or do I resist what I know to be good for me?

By example, Sweet Pea reminds me that it is okay to slow down and take care of myself. I can tend to my needs without feeling guilty or worrying what others might think. For Sweet Pea, it is not complicated. He simply listens to his body and proceeds accordingly. That has been his superpower in facing the challenges of the past few years. It is simple yet sometimes hard for some of us to do. I think I will try to be more like Sweet Pea.

Amy Ellis is a former newspaper reporter now working at the University of Miami. She sings with Unity on the Bay's music ministry.

My Cup of Tea

REV. KELLY ISOLA



He was 8 weeks old and fit into a teacup. It is a fitting memory because he was definitely “my cup of tea.” It’s an expression used to describe something we feel passionate about. Interestingly though, tea is a metaphor: It has the ability to strengthen one’s spirituality, ease a broken heart, as well as spread joy throughout the body. And so it was with Murray, my beloved companion for the next 19 years.

He came into my life quite accidentally. I had two dogs, mother and daughter, and it was time to let mom go. While I knew her daughter, Mwelu, and I would grieve, I could not have anticipated the inconsolable grief I saw. It was so intense and scary, I thought perhaps I needed to release Mwelu too. Then along came Murray, a rescue kitty. I had not wanted another pet, yet it was clear we needed each other; we rescued each other. Sadly a year later Murray and I would love Mwelu out.

A month later I packed up our lives and moved to Missouri for seminary. This was his first car ride. We learned a lot in that 20-hour drive. Mostly I learned he was my owner. I also learned that if I packed my car like a complicated hamster cage, he would be more than happy. So that’s what I did over the years. Every road trip I made sure the car was arranged with lots of cubby holes, spots with bright sunshine to lie in, and unknowns to explore. He never rode in a crate or box. Some people told me I was crazy. I never thought so. You see, he was being Murray.

When I remember Murray as that “cup of tea” it’s because, like tea, every facet of my life has been infused with him. Just as tea often accompanies rituals, we had many of our own. Gently

poking my shoulder from behind when needing something, playing “Where’s Waldo?” with the comforter, sleeping in the small of my back or behind my knees, Zoom bombing at the most inopportune times, “helping me” when working at the computer, practicing his “ballet feet positions” while sitting and staring at me, meowing incessantly for whatever he needed in the moment, offering decision-making support through conversations, clearing his side of the chair to curl up next to me and bring to life the eternal sound of affection—purring. The list is unending. I painfully discovered just how long that list was, and also our interbeingness, when it came time to love him out.

Just as tea often accompanies rituals,
we had many of our own.

It’s been 6 months. I have to remind myself that time means little with the loss of your beloved companion. I see him everywhere, I hear him every day. I still sometimes look for him curled up on the bed when I enter the bedroom. He was, and is, my lifetime companion. Every single day he made me laugh. Like his mother he was silly, passionate, vocal, loyal, compassionate, a foodie, and a gentle soul with a whole world behind those beautiful eyes.

*Rev. Kelly Isola is a Unity minister, teacher, writer,
and consultant based in Lee’s Summit, Missouri.*



Murray

An Animal Chaplain finds Wisdom Through Loss

SARAH BOWEN



“**W**hat the fluff?” I screamed into the abyss through tears streaming down my face. My husband had just delivered grim news. He had found our cat, Max, behind the garage, the back half of his body paralyzed. The veterinarian held little hope that the 3-year-old ginger cat could recover.

I’ve lost animal companions before. But in that moment, I had had enough of the Universe trying to prepare me for my animal chaplaincy vocation. Max was the third cat we had lost in four months. Ringo succumbed to diabetes and Cocktail never returned to the house after an outside adventure. This triple whammy had me questioning why I even lived with animal companions at all. The pain was unbearable. That was it for me. No more cats.

A week later, a bright orange squirrel appeared at my window chittering away. I was intrigued. “Are you Max?” I asked, leaning heavily into spiritual traditions that suggest the transmigration of souls between species is possible. “Chit chit chit chit cha chit,” replied the loquacious creature.

Hmmm ... I thought, pondering how it seemed fitting that our rambunctious cat—who previously chased many a squirrel up a tree—might now be a squirrel. Karma strikes again! Vivid images of Max flashed through my mind. I remembered my joy playing with him. I thought of how he taunted Ringo and how the older (and slower) tabby cat showed me what it meant to have equanimity in the face of teasing. This led me to think about how Cocktail tended to be the peacekeeper and how much I admired his compassion for his fellow furry creatures.

That's it! I thought. "To get through this time, I need joyful moments. I need to have equanimity, remaining unbothered when people invalidate my loss. I must be compassionate toward myself, letting grief take its course." The memories of my feline roommates provided wisdom for navigating the loss of them in my life.

I'm hardly alone in trying to make sense of an interspecies grief experience. Sadly, in most cases, we are going to outlive our furry, finned, and feathered roommates.

That's precisely why I eventually became an animal chaplain. I wanted to help animals through death, create sacred memorial rituals, and support humans grieving animal loss. Further, I wanted to advocate for their wild and captive kin. I felt a deep need to raise attention to exploited and endangered species, insisting that we attend to the grief that can come from these challenging contexts.

Through chaplaincy relationships with the earth's creatures, human and other-than-human alike, I've learned that when we stop turning away from the presence of animal death, we honor the messy adventure of life here on Earth. We live our lives more fully and help other creatures to live fuller lives. As Jack Kerouac once offered in *On the Road*, "What is that feeling when you're driving away from people and they recede on the plain till you see their specks dispersing? It's the too-huge world vaulting us, and it's goodbye. But we lean forward to the next crazy venture beneath the skies."

Life on this planet is indeed a crazy venture. And perhaps our afterlife—whatever that looks like—will be remarkably so as well. I, for one, hope it includes plenty more animal encounters.

Sarah A. Bowen is executive director of the Animal Chaplaincy Training program at Compassion Consortium. She is also author of Sacred Sendoffs: An Animal Chaplain's Advice for Surviving Animal Loss, Making Life Meaningful, & Healing the Planet and a regular columnist for Spirituality & Health: A Unity Publication.

I wanted to help animals through death,
create sacred memorial rituals, and
support humans grieving animal loss.





Honoring All Animals

JILL ANGELO

I was 21 when I got my first dog on my own—an incredible, fluffy, snowflake-white Samoyed I named Chynna. She was perfection. (Aren't they all?) She had shiny, dark, olive-size eyes with a jet-black nose and the main characteristic of Samoyeds, the “Sammy smile.” She was lively, friendly, and social. Chynna would traipse through the mud on rainy days, come in dripping wet, and then play a game of chase with her muddy paws all over my townhouse carpeting. Somehow, I readily forgave her.

She opened my heart to the unconditional love that animal companions have for us humans. The spiritedness of this incredible breed inspired me to get involved in animal rescue once I discovered the great need.

We welcomed those animals for their final days—no matter how little time they had—and we loved them as if they had been with us forever.

Then an old friend and I crossed paths and met for a martini to catch up. She had worked in an open intake shelter, and she told me they were hiring. Open intake shelters can be like MASH units for animals because they see the worst of trauma, pain, suffering, neglect, and starvation—as well as the joys of survival, healing, birth, and adoption—for myriad species. In these shelters, no animals are turned away. They take all animals coming through their doors, giving them care and shelter. I applied and was immediately hired. I ate, slept, and drank



shelter work, absorbing as much as I could and loving every minute.

Many animals arrived in terrible shape, and those were the creatures that spoke most deeply to my heart. My husband Scott and I began fostering them. We would take them into our growing home of animals and provide them a very soft place to land and heal until we found them adoptive homes ourselves or until we returned them to the shelter, where they were eventually adopted.

Our greatest honor was hospice. We welcomed those animals for their final days—no matter how little time they had—and we loved them as if they had been with us forever. We stayed with them as they crossed over. To this day, not one has ever crossed alone as I have always been with them.

In 2017, Scott and I moved to a modest ranch home on an acre of land near Chicago, where I founded The Moon Dog Farm—named after the night sky and all the amazing dogs we had the pleasure of fostering. I've continued to do what is my most favorite work and privilege in the world, helping the creatures that come through our doors. We provide rescue and foster care for homeless companion animals with physical challenges, short- and long-term medical needs, or hospice. We also rescue guinea pigs and rabbits.

In my daily spiritual practice, I always ask for guidance and direction in this calling of mine. Various signs led me to Rev. Sarah Bowen, cofounder of the Compassion Consortium, which offers a robust animal chaplaincy training program for people who feel called to spiritual service on behalf of the more-than-human world. I couldn't sign up fast enough.

In June of 2023, I joined my cohort in upstate New York's Catskill Mountains, where we took a vow to serve animals and the planet. This program injected new life force into me and into The Moon Dog Farm. As I reflect on all the steps I took over the years that eventually led me to become an ordained animal chaplain, I continue to give great gratitude for the opportunity to live up to the Compassion Consortium's motto: "We honor animal lives and heal human hearts."

*Adapted from an article in Spirituality & Health:
A Unity Publication.*

*Jill Angelo spent two decades in business management
before changing direction to pursue an inner calling.
Visit themoondogfarm.com and jillangelo.com.*

Finding Comfort at the Rainbow Bridge

SANDY EASTWOOD



Many pet lovers know about the Rainbow Bridge, a fictional place where pets go after they pass away. This soothing notion comes from an essay by Edna Clyne-Rehky, which begins with these touching lines: “Just this side of heaven is a place called Rainbow Bridge. When an animal dies that has been especially close to someone here, your pet goes to Rainbow Bridge. There are meadows and hills for all of our special friends so they can run and play together.” The idea of the Rainbow Bridge offers assurance that our beloved pets find peace and joy while they wait to reunite with us after our passing.

The brightly colored bridge, set in a calm landscape near the Carl L. Chinnery Nature Trail, is even more beautiful than I imagined, and I'm so grateful for those who brought it to life.

At Unity Village, Missouri, a place known for its peaceful and spiritual atmosphere, the Rainbow Bridge idea has come to life in a real way.

As an animal lover who has lost and grieved many pets, I was greatly comforted by the idea of the Rainbow Bridge.



As a longtime Unity employee, I knew that many human scatterings had taken place on our beautiful Unity Village campus, so I suggested a similar area for pets would be a fitting addition. Where better than a real-life Rainbow Bridge? The wooden bridge was built by the Unity facilities team then lovingly painted with a vibrant rainbow by volunteers from the NextGen Unity group.

The brightly colored bridge, set in a calm landscape near the Carl L. Chinnery Nature Trail, is even more beautiful than I imagined, and I'm so grateful for those who brought it to life. Visitors may scatter their pet's ashes, attach a leash or collar to the bridge, or simply spend time reflecting on how pets enrich our spiritual journeys, offering us companionship, comfort, and lessons in unconditional love.

I hope the Rainbow Bridge at Unity Village offers a special place for others to heal and cherish their memories of pets who touched their hearts and souls. To read more, visit unityvillage.org/rainbowbridge.

Sandy Eastwood is senior communications manager for Unity World Headquarters.

Loving Companions

Daily Word | May 3, 1999

Thank You, God, for the companionship of loving pets.

Every creature that God has created has an important role to fill, and the pets that share our lives are no exception.

As companions, pets offer an unlimited supply of joy and unconditional love. The dog that is wagging its tail and the cat that is purring are speaking in a language of the heart that tells us of their great love for us.

Pets can break down barriers between strangers. Many a conversation has arisen in a park when the mere presence of a pet sparks a comment from a passerby. Two people who have never before met discover a common bond of appreciation for pets.

As loving companions, pets repay the kindness they receive—not merely act by act, but with enthusiastic displays of love and affection every time they are with us.

*“In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.”*

—PSALM 104:24



Pet Blessing

Daily Word | May 22, 2020

I am grateful for the love and companionship of pets.

Pets effortlessly express the unconditional love of God. Every time I am with my pets, I experience the joy and comfort that feed my soul. My companion animals are compassion in action, accepting me exactly as I am no matter my mood. Even after my beloved pets pass away, I think of them often and can feel their loving presence. Their memory warms my heart. The bond I have with my animals is part of me forever.

I will spend part of today thinking about the animal companions that have blessed my life. Whether they are my pets or those of friends or family, I cherish their presence. I give thanks for the love and fidelity that they give so openly and freely. I bless all pets and am grateful for the gift of their companionship.

*The Lord is good to all,
and his compassion is over
all that he has made.*

—PSALM 145:9





UNITY—Discover. Grow. Experience.

Find Meaning and Insights—*Unity.org*

Articles, videos, meditations, online events, booklets, and products available at your fingertips.

Experience the Power of Prayer

Unity has provided supportive prayer for 130 years. Contact us 24/7 at unity.org/prayer or call 816-969-2000.

Connect with Like-Minded Friends

Daily inspiration on your favorite social media channels—unity.org/social.

Feed Your Spirit

Daily Word® magazine offers encouraging messages every day of the year. In print or digital at dailyword.com.

Deepen Your Spiritual Journey

Our magazine *Spirituality & Health*®: *A Unity Publication* explores the mind-body connection, holistic living, science, and spiritual practices. Visit spiritualityhealth.com.

Renew at Unity Village

Unity Village offers a gorgeous setting for spiritual renewal. Find a retreat at unityvillage.org or call 816-251-3540.



1901 NW Blue Parkway | Unity Village, MO 64065-0001 | unity.org