

Paw Prints

There we were, the four of us lying on the bathroom floor, Buns and I, and our dog Bailey... and the vet.

Bailey was our German shepherd cuddle puppy weighing in at a svelte 96 pounds of coal black fur and a set of choppers that would scare the bejesus out of Clyde Beatty, the lion tamer. Bailey didn't have a weight problem; she had a Cheez-It addiction and I was her enabler feeding her one for each of my two while she lay beneath my desk keeping me company, and warming my feet.

Bailey replaced our first German shepherd, Chablis, who had the most gorgeous eyes you have ever seen made even more dramatic by a pure white coat. We called Bailey, Boo or sometimes the Boo Meister, but most often she was just Little Girl.

Little Girl got old and gray and it didn't take a vet to know she was in pain. First she stopped racing for her leash when someone would say, "Who wants to go for a walk?" We knew she was really hurting when she ignored the sound of ice cream being scooped, although for a long time she would lift her head and wait for her bowl to be delivered to whatever spot seemed to offer the most comfort at the time.

And then it was "Time" and the four of us were lying on the bathroom floor saying our good-byes each in our own way. (I love the vet for sparing our girl from a last ride to the clinic. She wasn't afraid of thunder or wild animals and certainly not of UPS drivers but she was terrified by the clinic.)

The vet left his white coat in the truck and joined us on the cool tile and did what he had to do. Boo didn't wince or cry. She just closed her brown eyes and was gone. I still, two years later, catch her in the corner of my eye, as she skirts around the edge of the room looking for a comfortable place to nap and wait.

A neighbor and I were talking about pets when suddenly she was reminded of an experience her daughter had involving her pet and Dr. Cynthia Bates, DVM at the Lincoln Heights Animal Hospital in San Antonio, TX.

I couldn't wait to give her a call. By phone she was as congenial as you would expect. I wished I were a puppy!

Dr. Bates states the obvious when she says that vets in general are a compassionate bunch while trying to modestly talk about herself. She says vets genuinely like their patients, whether two or four-legged, and that, because the decision to euthanize a member of the family is never easy, most vets do everything possible to be gentle with both pet and owner.

The treatment, "depends strictly on the client because every one is different." Dr. Bates invites the owner to be present, hold their pet, and where appropriate, administers hugs to both pet and owner...anything to ease the pain. Owners are invited to exit through a private entrance...and the truly upset are offered a ride home.

But the truly remarkable service... which I can only describe as cool... is yet to come.

When the owner returns to pick up the ashes from the pet's cremation, the doctor presents an oven-fired clay mold of the pet's paw. If the pet was a long-haired animal, a lock of precisely snipped hair tied with ribbon is also presented. And a sympathy card soon follows in the mail.

The death of a loved one, furry, feathered, or otherwise is never easy. But it can be less difficult when good docs think to write *The Service Prescription!*