

# Author's Note

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The loss of a beloved pet is devastating. Can the pain and sadness of pet loss grief be eased by a book? I hope so! My objective is to not write a book that will sit on a shelf with a collection of other such books, as evidence that someone looked for help but didn't find it.

Remember the saying, "It's the journey, not the destination"? Prepare to take a journey. I will be your guide. The journey may not be as much fun as a trip to Tahiti, but it will be meaningful, enriching and well worth taking. This book will help you integrate into your life the experience of loving and losing a pet, *without* pushing grief away or avoiding it and *without* neglecting to recognize the real purpose of grief as an opportunity to pay tribute to your pet. This book will show you how to experience the grief journey in a meaningful, positive way, pay tribute to your pet and find the bridge to healing.

Do you want your sadness to vanish so you can feel better right now? If so, you are reading the wrong book! Losing any loved one is painful. That pain is cathartic, healthy and appropriate. It's a tribute. It may be possible to sidestep grief, sweep the emotional turmoil under the rug and feel better. Instead, I would like you to take the journey, pay tribute to your pet and turn your grief back into love.

I offer something much more valuable than simply making your sadness go away. I will help you see that while grief hurts, it is also

a rite of passage that allows you to pay proper tribute to your pet and help you through your loss in a way that you will value for the rest of your life. Your grief journey is actually the bittersweet last chapter in the long, wonderful story of you and your pet.

This book is a tool to help you on the journey from loss to legacy. It will help you move from despair, anger and unbearable sorrow to a new understanding of the loss as the price we pay for the amazing privilege of experiencing the magical person-pet bond. The final destination of your journey will be an appreciation of the love you had and the memories you will always have.

While reading this book and writing your personal answers to the questions, your sadness will lift. You will feel stronger and less alone. Your grief will become less sad, painful and difficult. It will become an expression of love for your pet.

## BULLET

From September 19, 1992 until November 20, 2004, I shared my life with a remarkable Siberian Husky. I found Bullet at my local SPCA when he was 18 months old. His previous caretaker had relinquished him as pay back for running away too many times. I was entranced and intrigued by this dog's beauty. I was mesmerized by his stare and I was compelled to take him home.

Like Bullet's previous owner, I was confounded by the Siberian's favorite game—escape and run. I lost track of how many times I frantically chased him down streets, through woods, over hill and dale, while he had the time of his life watching me try to catch him.

As luck—or destiny—would have it, Bullet and I developed a strong and beautiful bond. He became an integral and essential part

of my life. I remained entranced and intrigued for the 12 years, 2 months and 1 day that Bullet graced my life.

In July, 2000, when Bullet was 9 years old, he was diagnosed with lymphoma, a terminal cancer. I thought I would lose Bullet to cancer. The hoped-for survival for dogs with lymphoma who have chemotherapy is 12 to 18 months, but the Universe smiled on us. Bullet was in a very small percentage of dogs to survive the disease. With chemotherapy, a special homemade diet and a home care regimen that I designed, Bullet lived out his natural life in remission from lymphoma. He survived four years and four months after his diagnosis and was still in remission at the end.

In 2002, Bullet developed a heart condition. The prognosis was 6 months at the outside, but Bullet survived five episodes of congestive heart failure over the next two years. His veterinarians gave him a new nickname—the Magic Bullet. Now, I expected to lose him to heart disease rather than to cancer.

In 2004, at the urging of Bullet's oncologist, I released the book, *Help Your Dog Fight Cancer* to help others fight cancer for their dogs as I fought cancer for Bullet. That book has helped more than 20,000 families and their dogs. That same year, I founded the Magic Bullet Fund, to finance cancer treatment for dogs whose owners could not afford it. For dogs in the Fund, I raise funding to pay for cancer treatments, educate owners about canine cancer and help them make decisions about treatment, side effect remedies and home care. The Magic Bullet Fund has helped more than 100 dogs fight cancer so far.

And I continued to take care of my own Magic Bullet, my cancer and heart disease survivor, always aware that I might lose him at any time but enjoying every moment he was still with me.

## B RUNO

In July of 2000, I brought Bullet to a veterinary clinic for his first chemotherapy treatment. A woman was at the front desk, waiting to settle her bill. After Bullet was taken back for his chemo treatment, the woman caught my eye. She removed a photo album from her purse and showed me pictures of her dog. The woman proceeded to flip through the album, page by page.

"Here's Bruno just after he died.... Here he is from another view.... This is Bruno an hour later, after I combed his coat, Bruno with his favorite toys arranged around him, Bruno at the crematorium...." Here is a photo of my shrine for Bruno.

Then she told me that Bruno had died several years ago. At that moment, my sympathy turned to dismay. I thought about the woman long after I left the clinic. Her grief for Bruno had become a gaping wound that remained open for years. Her grief haunted me.

I searched the faces of strangers and friends. I wondered who they might have lost and what grief they might be carrying, just below the surface. Were they holding back grief poised to explode at any remote reminder, or was it carefully and deeply buried where it would fester but never be acknowledged or examined?

## B ULLET'S LEGACY

On November 20, 2004, it was my turn to grieve. At nearly 14 years old, cancer free, Bullet died in my arms. I began to revive him, but stopped. I realized later that Bullet had had a perfect death. If I had revived him, it wouldn't have been for long and a second death would most likely not have been as perfect.

Through the Magic Bullet Fund, I witness the person-pet bond every day. Upon learning their dog has a terminal disease, owners are shocked and desperate to help their pets survive. We discuss their fears about losing their pet and their profound devotion.

When a dog does well in treatment, owners are grateful and optimistic. When a dog doesn't do well, while owners prepare for the loss, I continue to provide support and guidance.

When their cancer-fighting journey is over, their grief journey begins. Each loss is heart-wrenching, but the magic of the bond is so strong, beautiful and enduring that I know I am lucky to be in its glow every time we lose a Magic Bullet Fund dog.

Now, 5 years since Bullet passed, I still honor him every day by offering my book to people who are fighting canine cancer and in my work as administrator for the Magic Bullet Fund. If had not written a book or founded a charity in his name, I wonder how I would then have honored Bullet. I know I would have found a way.

## YOUR PET'S LEGACY

Bruno's mom and many others relive the grief every day. The text and questions on these pages will lead you through a new way to experience your grief—not by sweeping it under the rug, hiding it or toughing it out, but by embracing it and creating a tribute. Then, you will cherish the memory of your precious pet for the rest of your life.

We each need to find our own way through grief. As you find your way, you will become less focused on the sad end of your pet's life and more focused on all of the wonderful days you had together. You will cherish the happy memories every day, and find peaceful joy in having had and lost a very special friend.