



**Maryville Daily Times, February 1, 2009**

## **Fearless**

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We realize, as time passes, that animals have a way of teaching us about loving, about loyalty, joy, and friendship.... Unknown

Fearless was a dog rescued from the side of the road where he and his two siblings had been left. He was soft and cuddly and even though he weighed about seventy pounds he thought he was a lap dog and wanted nothing more than to be with his people sharing what he had the most to give...his love. He lived with us for over twelve years and greeted me excitedly with a howl every time I returned to the house; even if I only went to the mailbox. He could not control his enthusiasm any time company arrived; he was at the door to greet them. He moved happily with us into five different houses and traveled to the beach numerous times, but with every transition his only desire seemed to be our presence and to bring love and joy into our lives. Fearless always seemed to know what the people around him needed and was more than willing to give. And when it was time for him to go, he seemed to know before we did and chose for the last two weeks he was alive to spend every possible moment giving us as much unconditional, unending love and companionship as he could. Then on the night before his death he slinked away to one of his favorite spots in the yard and quietly slept for one more night. He died peaceful the following night and is buried in our backyard under one of his favorite trees, but he will never be far from our thoughts and hearts.

Pets are often a beloved companion and are considered part of the family. So, when a beloved pet dies it is natural to feel sorrow and be overwhelmed by the intensity of emotion. The Humane Society of the United States website has some useful information and guidance for dealing with the scope of emotions that may accompany the loss. The grief process is as individual as the person and may last a few days, months or even years. It typically begins with denial and progresses through anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. However, not everyone follows the classic stages of grief; some may skip or repeat a stage, or experience the stages in a different order. The final stage of acceptance occurs when the reality of the loss is acknowledged. Acceptance is the realization that the pet is gone and memories bring decreasing sadness. The loss of a pet may be a child's first experience with death. He may feel depressed and frightened that others he loves may be taken from him. Trying to protect a child by saying the pet ran away could cause the child to expect the pet's return and feelings of betrayal after discovering

the truth. Expressing your grief may reassure the child that sadness is all right and help him work through his feelings. Coping with the loss of a pet can be particularly hard for seniors. Those who live alone may feel a loss of purpose and an immense emptiness. The pet's death may also trigger painful memories of other losses and remind seniors of their own mortality. If the bond between humans and animals is understood and accepted, this is the first step toward coping with pet loss: knowing that it is okay to grieve when a pet dies. Understanding how you grieve and finding ways to cope with the loss can bring you closer to the day when memories bring smiles instead of tears.