

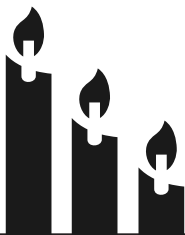
Solstice

Pet Memorial Ceremony



December 16th, 2022 | 7:00 p.m.

May the warmth of the candlelight bring you comfort in loneliness, peace in distress, and joy in remembering; and may this light lift your heart in gratitude for the gift of companionship you have known. For those who had to make the difficult decision to end your pet's suffering, take comfort in knowing that you made your decision from a place of compassion and kindness. And for those who still have living pets by your side, may this light encourage you to care for their needs, find comfort in their friendship, and seek their healing energy as you remember your pets who are no longer with you.



A reflection from a 22 year client of St Francis Animal Hospital and our menagerie of pets

by Gayle Marsh

We gather tonight from various areas of the Twin Cities as individuals and families bound together as friends of St. Francis Animal Hospital. How many times have we traveled here? Sometimes rejoicing with the adoption of an animal companion or scheduling annual wellness checks and labs, the teeth cleanings, the dreaded panic trips after eating the, “No-No- not the dark Chocolate!”

Our pets age and there are chronic conditions to monitor, acupuncture to explore, palliative care and hospice options to discern. We trust in the wisdom of talented veterinarians, technicians, assistants and those working behind the scene in client service, administration, and cleaning team ever ready to deal with the assorted OOPS! deposited on the floor.

We have lived the cycle of welcome and release. We welcome new veterinary students who are mentored and launch. Sometimes personal and professional changes require goodbyes. We live the same cycle in the early years, the maturing years and the declining years of our lives and our pets’ lives. We live with saying hellos and goodbyes. We pause tonight to honor the memories and stories of animal companions we have met and loved and released. We unashamedly grieve because we have loved deeply and well and are changed forever by love. Death ends a life, not a relationship.

We’ve enjoyed adventures with chinchillas and rabbits and rats and cockatiels and dogs and cats; all bound in the sacred trust of animal welfare. We hold sad stories of rescue and firm commitment to redeeming traumas and cruelties inflicted by the human animal

upon the innocent ones. And, we delight in stories of trust recovered and antics from unique personalities and nonreplaceable pets. We will risk future broken hearts knowing the profound privilege of a companionship unlike any other. Without knowing each another's names we know one another's hearts. We know the power of love. We know the saying is true, "whatever is loved is never lost". Changed, yes; lost, never.

We've shared the QUIET sign placed on the desk when the Candle of Departure is lit. Authorizing that final act of compassion is the tough part. We feel for one another. If prayer is our practice, we ask for strength for one another and for ourselves as we return home to emptiness, to collect bowls and toys. We offer gratitude for the staff who cradle our beloved pets into peace.

When word of our loss goes out some friends draw alongside. Others, the Clueless Ones, awkwardly attempt to cheer us up and minimize the depths of grief. Pity them. Maybe they have not known the unconditional love or the privilege of whispering secrets to the best listeners ever. Their declaration that our pet is "just an animal" is not true. We KNOW differently. We are the BLESSED ones. Looking back we do not regret walks in subzero weather or pillows overtaken by purrs or furniture nibbled and destroyed. We would happily accept an eternal season of shedding. We would vacuum over and over again, if only they could return; if only. Instead we console ourselves with treasured memories and live in awe of the mystical bond among species.

We gather tonight to honor the "All of It" even the hard parts, especially the hard parts. We are better humans because of our animal relationships. It remains a privilege to shepherd the lives and deaths entrusted to us. Tonight is winter solstice- the longest night in the year. Generations have gathered, built fires, lit candles, huddled for warmth and peace. And, hoping, always hoping for light to return again in greater fullness.

This year we gather with candles and memories in a fellowship of kindred souls. We realize that 13th century St Francis of Assisi Italy, patron of this clinic, attracted outcasts and creatures both domestic and “wild”. St. Francis’ is recognized as a humble soul, with an inner quietness and healing touch.

May the inner quiet and deep healing of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Francis of Larpenteur comfort the broken-hearted and lighten one another’s burdens as we travel together into a new year. Together may we human animals learn the practice of abiding respect for all creatures great and small.



The First Time Percy Came Back

By Mary Oliver

The first time Percy came back
he was not sailing on a cloud.
He was loping along the sand as though
he had come a great way.
“Percy,” I cried out, and reached to him—
 those white curls—
but he was unreachable. As music
is present yet you can’t touch it.
“Yes, it’s all different,” he said.
“You’re going to be very surprised.”
But I wasn’t thinking of that. I only
wanted to hold him. “Listen,” he said,
“I miss that too.
And now you’ll be telling stories
 of my coming back
and they won’t be false, and they won’t be true,
but they’ll be real.”
And then, as he used to, he said, “Let’s go!”
And we walked down the beach together.

All Hallows Blessing

Who live
in the spaces between
our breathing

in the corner
of our vision

in the hollows
of our bones

in the chambers
of our heart:

nowhere can they
be touched
yet still

how they move us,
how they move
in us,

made from the
tissue of memory
like the veil
between the worlds

that stirs at
the merest breath
this night
and then is
at rest.

—Jan Richardson

A Special Boy

By Vicki Verinis

I stole you away from danger,
and from that moment on you charmed everyone you met.

You were the most even tempered cat,
my “Ghandi-cat”,
lover and peacemaker.

Always the first one to welcome the newcomers,
always the first one at the door, even with strangers.
All the kitties loved their “Uncle Big”
and came to you with lowered head
to get their kisses from you.

The only time I saw you bite
was when Rufus got your sleeping spot
at my right hip,
Even that was just bite enough to make a point,
not to hurt.

I always felt that I was blessed
to share your life,
you had so much love in your heart,
it could have been anyone.
You know, there was a waiting list for you
if I died first.
All my friends had volunteered,
“I’ll take Bigger!”

No wonder -

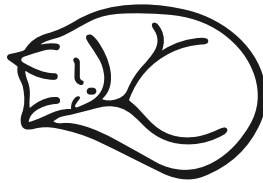
The way you gazed up at all of us

as if you could see our souls,
but because you were such an angel,
you only saw and reflected back
the best of us.

People said to me,
“He’s almost human!”

And I would think,

“No . . . better,
so much better. . . “



To my best friend

by Debranique Pitter, St. Francis Veterinary Assistant

I'm scared I'm going to forget what your ears smell like. Not because I like the smell of wax, but because it brings me back to our childhood when I was nine and you were one, and you used to sleep in my bed every night.

I'm worried I'm never going to go back to Como Lake. Not because I don't like to walk but it just doesn't feel right doing it without you, and that was your favorite.

I'm scared I'm never going to get another dog again. Not because I don't want one but because you were the best, and I don't want to feel like I'm replacing you.

There are days I can't see beyond the tiny pools swimming on my eyelids and there are days I laugh about the stupid things we did when we were kids.

There are days I still feel like I have to rush home to let you outside, and there are days I feel relief that you don't have to go through your pharmacy of nightly meds.

There are days I feel an estrangement to the world because I can't remember the last time you weren't in it.

There are days I feel a pit of guilt within my subconscious mind when planning an evening without you.

I miss my best friend.

I miss my first friend.

I miss my longest running friend.

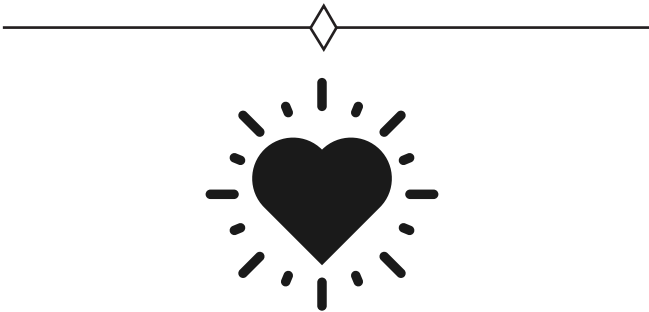
I've come to understand the saying of
hug while you have
For a moment is only a step from a memory.
For the memories are closer of the time I will not have, than the
memories of the moments when time was all we had.

Though I feel dark
I will not dim the light you brought.

I will cherish the joy, the lessons, the spice, the life you gave me.

Thank you for teaching me
Love
Patience
Companionship.

To my best friend,
Thank you.





ST. FRANCIS ANIMAL HOSPITAL

*As you go on your way,
may the love of your beloved pet accompany you,
empowering you to love both creatures and creation;
may your grief be a gentle companion,
a sign that you truly opened your heart to another;
and may this community go with you, too,
strengthening you for the days ahead.*



Thank you

Thank you to Gayle Marsh for writing and sharing her piece about her experiences at St. Francis and her thoughts on grief, to the authors of the poems and prose we shared this evening, and to Dr. Jessica Lewis, Dr. Patti Novak, Dr. Megan Schommer, Sabrina Reed, CVT, and Debranique Pitter who shared these readings with our community. Also thank you to St. Francis Animal Hospital staff and their families who helped create a memorial slideshow and personalized luminaries, all of which made this event possible.

