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## *Saying goodbye to a beloved pet*

Saying goodbye to a beloved pet is never easy and results in upheavals in our lives. When the pet lived with us for many years, we got some consolation from the fact that they had had a good life and brought us happiness for many years. But when the pet dies at a young age the bitterness settles in and increases the sadness. The major issue pet owners' face is when they have to say "goodbye" to their beloved friends in order to end their suffering. Some people are able to say "goodbye" right away, agreeing with their vet's recommendation that the time has come to say "goodbye," while others try to keep their best friend alive, sometimes extending their suffering.

Brandy, our Springer Spaniel, was 15 years old when she died. Being the only friend I had at the worst time of my life prior to meeting Ellen resulted in my being unable to say "goodbye" to her, extending Brandy's suffering for one year despite the wishes of the vet, Ellen, and our neighbors who hoped I could say "goodbye" and "let go." This episode happened over twenty years ago and still haunts and upsets me when I think about it. Living through this experience, I swore that I would never let a terminally ill pet suffer again because of my inability to say "goodbye."

Losing our cat Delilah without warning despite the fact we knew she was very sick created havoc in our lives. Speaking with my business mentor Dan Schaefer who is a dear friend about Delilah's death and the bitterness about her dying at the age of five he said: "when I had to put my son's dog 'to sleep' it was the hardest decision I ever made in my life. We must remember that when we have pets we are responsible for their well being since they depend on us. When our pets are very sick and we have to 'put them to sleep' it is our responsibility to do the right thing and prevent them from suffering." Dan's words did not comfort me but reminded me that saying "goodbye" to Delilah and preventing her from suffering, was our responsibility to her no matter how much it hurt.

## *Happy "fathers day" you got a new cat:*

In June '05 I was in Alaska on a 50 foot boat photographing the magnificent scenery of the inner passage for 11 days. Not having a cell connection, I was not able to call Ellen except once when the captain let me use the boat telephone that he used only for emergencies, knowing I always call Ellen when I travel. When the trip ended in Juno, Alaska, I called Ellen as soon as we docked. When she heard my voice Ellen's first question was: "did you have great time?" Next Ellen said, "Happy Father's day. We just got a new cat, she is totally black, has big yellow eyes and I named her Delilah. We all miss you and Delilah can't wait to meet you; she is very affectionate and you will love her."



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### ***Finding a stray cat in the street:***

Coming home and meeting Delilah was a shock. Hearing Ellen's description on the phone I expected to meet a beautiful black cat with big yellow eyes. Instead I met an emaciated cat whose rib cage showed through her skin and her hair came off when I petted her. Before I was able say a word Ellen said: "don't worry about her, she is helthy. I found Delilah in the street while walking Lily our cocker spaniel at 11 PM. She was behind a store gate and I could not leave her in the street. Knowing I couldn't bring her home before being checked by a vet since we have three other cats, I took her to the emergency animal clinic that is open 24 hours, 7 days a week and had them check Delilah and give her shots. The vet who examined Delilah said she was probably dumped in the street and had been hurt and was glad she had found a good home. After Delilah got a clean bill of health, I brought her home and now our challenge is to insure she eats since she is afraid of Ginger and Pandora our other cats, who gave her a very unfriendly reception. I am not too concerned about everybody getting along since in the past we got stray cats from animal shelters and the street, and eventually they all became 'one happy family.' Our biggest challenge is going to be making sure Delilah eats since she is emaciated."

Ellen's plans of "integrating the cats" did not work out as she hoped. Ginger, who is an "alpha" cat and as big as a male, decided that Delilah was not welcome, and Pandora, who was adopted by us at the same time as Ginger, decided to support Ginger. Being adopted by us at the age of six months and living with us for six years prior to Delilah's arrival, they behaved like littermates playing together and fighting. Resenting Delilah's arrival resulted in a major fight involving the three of them attacking each other. In order to break up the fight, I used a water gun to spray Ginger and Pandora. When Ginger and Pandora finally realized they were soaked and looking as if they had just gotten a bath, they broke up the fight and ran away to the other side of the living room giving us nasty looks and licked themselves to dry off. Since that day, Delilah decided not to interact with them and every time Pandora who is a peacemaker tried to apologize about the fight and make up, Delilah hissed and growled at her.

After this episode, Delilah decided that the kitchen was her territory and slept on the fridge coming down to eat or jumping on the widow sill to lie in the sun. Making sure she ate, I would bring her bed down from the fridge, pet her, and put her in front of the fresh dry and canned food. Delilah responded to this and started purring and eating as if there were no tomorrow, being afraid the food would disappear. After a while Delilah associated being petted with food. When Ellen would pet her on the fridge she would jump down and eat her food. Knowing that Ginger is an alpha cat and would harass Delilah, we had to watch her very carefully and used the water gun as a deterrent. Realizing that giving Delilah a hard time resulted in getting wet, Ginger and Pandora decided to leave Delilah alone and have a "Mexican stand off," sitting on the opposite counter in the kitchen and looking at Delilah exchanging warning noises. After being with us one year, Delilah gained weight and turned out to be a beautiful cat with a shiny black coat and big yellow eyes while Ginger and Pandora more or less decided to ignore her. Lily, who grew up with cats, tried to be



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Delilah's friend but got a "cold shoulder" from her saying: "I don't mind you but I don't want to be your friend. Let's keep a respectful distance between us. Play with Ginger and Pandora. They are your pals and Ginger likes to play rough." Knowing that the food would always be available Delilah became a finicky eater and would not eat the food unless it was her favorite and freshly put in her bowl. Wanting her to eat and gain weight, we put her left-over food in Ginger and Pandora's bowls knowing they were not so fussy and gave Delilah fresh food.

### *Not facing the reality:*

Just as we thought that life was becoming "normal" and everyone was getting along, Delilah developed a severe cough. At first we attributed it to the toxic fumes coming from renovations in the hallway and thought they were the reason for her coughing since it bothered Ellen as well who has asthma. Hoping to help, we moved the air purifier next to the kitchen so it could clear the air. When this did not help we got concerned and Ellen took Delilah to the vet for x-rays and diagnosed her condition as asthma, putting Delilah on prednisone for a month. While the coughing subsided somewhat, a month later the vet took a second x-ray of Delilah's chest. Finding no improvement, she recommended that we take Delilah to the animal hospital and see a Respiratory Specialist. When the specialist examined Delilah he gave Ellen and Lynn, Ellen's friend, the bad news that Delilah was suffering from a chronic, irreversible lung disease similar to those he had seen in cats from Florida or South America and asked Ellen if she knew anything about Delilah's background. Ellen explained that she had picked Delilah up in the street two years before and had no knowledge of her background.

Next, the Respiratory Specialist prescribed an antibiotic he felt would control the secondary pneumonia he felt was causing the severe coughing. When the medication helped and the coughing eased greatly, we hoped that Delilah was all right and her disease was under control. Since Delilah had lost weight as a result of her symptoms, we started to feed her more often and put out her favorite foods, trying to entice her to eat. Every time I came into the kitchen I said hello to Delilah who looked at me with her big yellow eyes telling me she wanted to be petted. After I petted her, I brought her down from the fridge and put her in front of fresh food. Delilah started purring and began to eat her food. Seeing that Delilah was gaining weight again, we were encouraged and hoped she would be with us a few more years. Not wanting to leave Delilah alone with Ginger and Pandora when we left for our weekend home in Vermont, Ellen decided that we should take her with us for long weekends in Vermont. This turned out to be an excellent idea since Delilah was a good traveler unlike Ginger and Pandora who "sang" the whole trip. Sitting with her cage door open in the back seat next to Lily did not bother Delilah, who chose to ignore her.

The house in Vermont was Delilah's "kingdom," patrolling around and ignoring Lily. Seeing how happy Delilah was in Vermont, we decided she would be the "Vermont cat" and come with us every time we go the house. This lasted for two months. Seeing Delilah gaining weight we felt her illness was under control and she would live with us a few more years. The illusion evaporated when Delilah's coughing pattern started



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again. Being concerned, Ellen called the Respiratory Specialist and he recommended starting the medication again. Seeing Delilah behaving like a normal cat and being very affectionate, we were not overly concerned, ordered the medication from the pharmacy, and were ready to start the treatment again assuming it would help again as it had the last time.

### *Saying “goodbye to Delilah:*

While having lunch with a business colleague, my cell phone rang. Seeing it was Ellen’s cell number I was surprised since Ellen never uses her cell phone unless it’s necessary. Before I had a chance to say hello, Ellen told me that Delilah was at the emergency animal clinic and had had a blood clot resulting in the paralysis of her back legs, and I should meet her right away at the clinic. When I got to the clinic shortly after, I asked Ellen what was the prognosis. The news Ellen gave me was devastating. After I left for my lunch appointment, Delilah was lying on the window sill enjoying the sun and all of a sudden started coughing. Then she began to vomit and next, lost control of her back legs. The vets at the emergency clinic told Ellen that Delilah had a blood clot blocking blood flow to her back legs which caused the paralysis and that her prognosis was poor. Asking what Delilah’s chances were, Ellen was told that she has less than a 50 % chance of survival. Despite this, we decided to try to save her. When we called at 10:30 PM we were told Delilah was in critical condition and the vet would call us back with the results of their blood tests. At 11:30 PM the vet who was treating Delilah carefully told us that Delilah’s vital signs were deteriorating and prepared us for the worst. Next the vet said: “I must go, Delilah is coughing up blood. I will call you later.” 30 minutes later the vet called us back and told us that Delilah’s blood pressure and body temperature had dropped to an alarming level. When we asked her what Delilah’s chances were, she said: “I can try to keep her alive until the morning since it is 12 AM, but I am not sure she will survive?” At this point, remembering my vow not to let our pets suffer, I told Ellen that we should go to the clinic and say “goodbye” to Delilah.

When we got to the clinic the vet, who was a young woman and very supportive, met us and told us that we were making the right decision since she did not think Delilah would survive the night, and all she could do is make her comfortable assuring us Delilah had no pain. When we walked into the examining room, Delilah perked up and tried to stand, telling us: “I want to go home.” Realizing she couldn’t use her back legs, she lay down again. Seeing Delilah’s behavior the vet said: “I can’t believe the calming affect the two of you have on her,” and left us alone in the room telling us to call her when we ready to say “goodbye.” Seeing Delilah lying on the table with tubes attached to her front paws broke our hearts. Petting her she was very happy and started purring. As this point I asked Ellen to call the vet back while Delilah was content. Saying “goodbye” was heart breaking: while we petted Delilah and she purred the vet administered the medication and she was gone in seconds. When I asked the vet if Delilah was dead she just nodded her head. In her death Delilah looked as beautiful as she was alive, staring at us with her big yellow eyes. When I asked the vet again if she was sure Delilah was gone, she assured me she was dead after she checked her heart again.



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Being home is the hardest part. Every time we go into the kitchen we expect to find Delilah on the fridge looking down at us with her big yellow eyes. One night after I finished writing, I picked up Ginger who was sleeping on the couch and put her in front of fresh dry and canned food while petting her. The minute I let her go she jumped off kitchen counter without eating. Next, I picked up Pandora who was sleeping next to Ellen and put her in front of the food and petted her, getting the same reaction from her. Ellen, who got up when I picked up Pandora and tried to entice her to eat, said: “they don’t need to be encouraged to eat. You are going to make them fat. Believe me they will eat when they are hungry.” Coming to the kitchen the next morning I got a startle reaction not finding Delilah on the top of the fridge looking at me with her big yellow eyes, and found the food bowls empty. While we were sleeping, Ginger and Pandora, who play at night, decided to eat all the fresh food I left on the counter.

#### **About the author:**

*Since 1980, Dani Kaplan has worked with Manufacturers, Distributors and Retailers as the trusted advisor helping them lower their Operating Costs, Streamline the Operation and Control the Inventory. Dani can be reached at 212-714-3536 <http://www.smcddata.com/> His business mentor Dan Schaefer, PHD, can be reached at [www.danschaeferphd.com](http://www.danschaeferphd.com)*