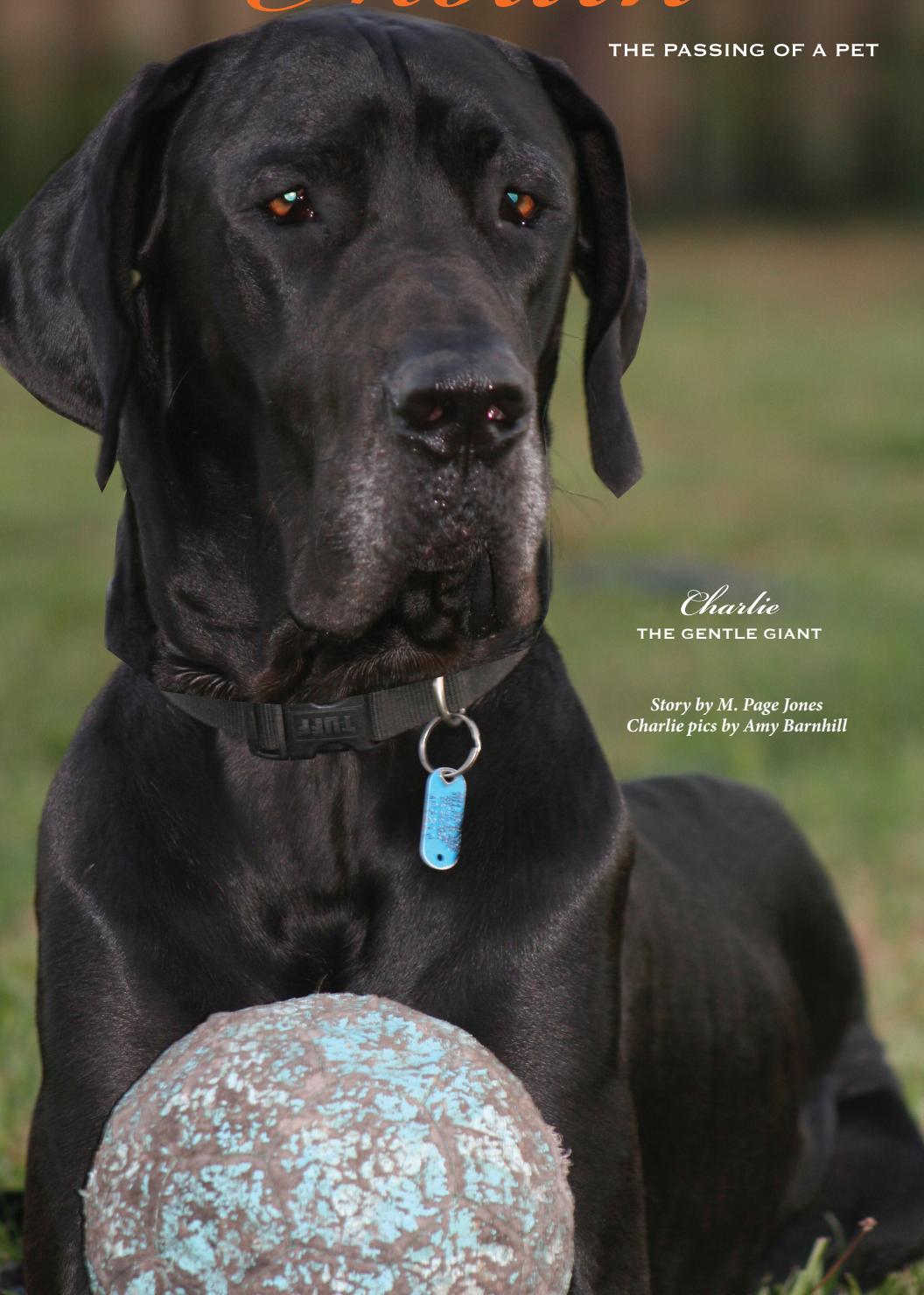


HELPING A FRIEND

# *Mourn*

THE PASSING OF A PET



*Charlie*

THE GENTLE GIANT

Story by M. Page Jones  
Charlie pics by Amy Barnhill

# *“Until one has loved an animal, a part of one’s soul remains unawakened.” - Anatole France*

Recently, I received a text from my best friend that her faithful dog of many years, Charlie, had passed away. I immediately expressed my sympathies and asked if she needed anything. I understood when she said she wasn't ready to talk about it and needed some time to “process” what had just happened.

I began to think what I could do for her and her family. Should I send flowers? Maybe I should donate to the local shelter in Charlie's name? It seems society knows exactly what to do if someone loses a family member but has not been taught what to do if it is a family pet. After all, some people would reason, it was an animal not a human being!

Recent studies have proven that the grief pet's owners experience after the death of their pet is comparable to the grief suffered after the death of a family member. (Like we needed a study to prove that!) I felt I needed some help to make sure that I was the best friend I could be during this time of mourning. I began to research “what to do when a friend has lost a pet”.

Here is some useful information that can help you if and when you ever need to reach out to your friends in their time of need.

## ***Provide Emotional Support***

Pets are loyal, faithful friends that become part of the family, and develop unique personalities while offering unconditional love. Just like grieving for humans, pet owners will often go through the 5 Stages of Grief. Be prepared to be there when you are needed.

## ***Be available***

Each individual goes through grief at their own speed. It may take several months for your friend to fully grieve the loss of their pet. Don't be surprised if weeks later, you find your friend in tears and needing to talk. Be present and in the moment to help them process their loss.

## ***If your friend has young children:***

Encourage their child to talk openly about their pet. However, keep in mind that it isn't your place to decide how to talk about death and any religious beliefs that you hold. Give plenty of hugs and help them say goodbye in whatever manner the family has decided is best for them.

## ***Don't forget the pets that are left behind***

If your friend has other pets in the home, it is inevitable they will be aware and affected as to the loss of their companion. Feel free to stop by the house with small presents for them. If it is another dog, ask to take them to the dog park or to walk them. Remember pets are extremely sensitive to a human's emotion. So, not only are they going through their own loss but they are also trying to help their master go through this hard time.



***Charlie & his buddy, Noah.***

## ***What NOT to Say***

Of course, there are certain things not to say when trying to comfort your friend:

- *I'm more of a cat/dog person, so I can't really relate.*
- *When are you going to go a new pet?*
- *You'll get to see them again, if you believe in heaven.*
- *You'll get over it, just give it time.*
- *Never tell a child that the pet was “put to sleep,” or that “God took your pet.” The child may start to have fears that God will “take” them, and may become frightened of going to sleep.*

## ***Attend the memorial service***

If your friend and their family are planning on holding a memorial service, plan on attending. These services can range from going to a pet crematorium or cemetery, to a simple tree planting ceremony or releasing of balloons in memory of their pet. Whatever it is, just being there will mean the world to the grieving family.



*Remember there is no foolproof,  
all-encompassing thing to say or  
do at a time like this.*

*However, you are a  
friend  
for a reason.*



**Still feel like you want to do more?  
Here are some ideas beyond the  
emotional support.**

#### ***Donate to a local no-kill shelter***

Locally, there is Paws Place Dog Rescue. ([pawsplace.org](http://pawsplace.org)). They handle dog adoptions, as well as, rescuing dogs from local kill shelters.

Call or go to your local shelter and ask specifically what they are in need of. Go to a pet store with the list and purchase the items, then donate them in memory of the deceased pet. This way, you know exactly where the money went, and they know who it is in dedication to. I have heard this is a very healing thing to do with your entire family (especially small children) to help in the process of mourning.

#### ***Donate to a local service training program***

Carolina Canines is an amazing program that trains service dogs. Their website has a link to donate money, as well as, a wish list of items that are needed. ([ccfs.talkinc.com](http://ccfs.talkinc.com))

#### ***Give a “Remembrance Gift”***

**A Framed Photo:** As people who have friends with pets, we often grow attached to the pet and

will find ourselves mourning them as well. Write some of your favorite memories, and share them along with a photo of you and the pet together!

**A Photo Album:** Give a personalized photo album the family can fill with their photos of the pet. This is a good bonding experience for a family who has recently suffered the loss of a pet.

**Custom Pet Portraits:** What an amazing way to express your support of the family, and keep the memory of the pet visible in their home!

**Sympathy Card:** So far, my favorite “Remembrance Gift” I have found is a plantable card embedded with a touching tribute to a beloved companion — forget-me-not-seeds. This is meant to be planted to grow flowers in remembrance of the beloved. Each card features a dog or cat made from handmade plantable paper. This can be found at [etsy.com](http://etsy.com).

#### ***Provide Education***

**For Adults:** Offer support by way of books that are written to help your friend and their family. You'll find it in Moira Allen's [Coping with Sorrow on the Loss of Your Pet](#). The book is filled with comfort, compassion and support, and can be found at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

**For Kids:** The loss of a pet whether it be a dog, cat, or a goldfish, is often their first interaction



with the concept of “death”. Here is a great list of books that can help them understand “death” and how to grieve.

- The Tenth Good Thing About Barney written by Judith Viorst and illustrated by Erik Blegvad
- I’ll Always Love You written and illustrated by Hans Wilhelm
- The Legend of Rainbow Bridge written by William N. Britton and illustrated by Dandi Palmer
- Goodbye Mousie written by Robie H Harris and illustrated by Jan Omerod
- When A Pet Dies written by Fred Rogers

Remember there is no foolproof, all-encompassing thing to say or do at a time like this. However, you are a friend for a reason. They value you, and will turn to you for any honest, authentic thing you can do or say. Most importantly, just be yourself and remind them often that you are there for them.

Later, if and when they decide to bring a new furry family member home, be the best “uncle” or “aunt” to the pet, and continue to be the best kind of friend to those who call you the same. 🐾