



A Day In The Life of a Pet Funeral Director

It's been four years now since Pet Angel Memorial Center opened its doors and what a four years it's been!

Many times my funeral colleagues have asked what a "day in the life" looks like for a "pet funeral director." Many times my answer is that it looks much like the days of every funeral director, cemeterian and funeral celebrant across the United States. I recently had an opportunity to chart a day for you. Come join me as we start our day early in the morning, with Kathleen and the death of Mr. B.

It's very early in the morning – around 6:00 a.m. – and Mr. B had a very bad night. A few minutes before six o'clock he took his last breath with his human mom right next to him. Even though she was expecting the death – it still hit her hard. I get ready for the day – and then head off to Kathleen's house. We spend a bit of time talking about Mr. B and how he was an ornery pet. As I get back in the SUV, there is a voice mail from the local emergency clinic that a dog has just come in – hit by a car – and the family really needs some help. Since I am not too far from the clinic – I make my way there.

A single mom and her seven year old child were waiting on me. They decided they would like to come to the center after the child finished school that day – for one more good-bye with Bernadette. I asked the child to write a letter to Bernadette, so that we could read it later. Bernadette had some mild head injuries from the car accident – but we will have her looking beautiful when her family comes in at 4:00 pm.

It's now 8:00 a.m. – and I run by another emergency clinic to drop off brochures. They've had a busy night, but uneventful, without tragedies. A wonderful thing to hear given the start to my morning!

The center is ready to open – and Mr. Bucich is coming in to pick up Gizmo. We've been holding Gizmo while they prepare a grave at his in-law's home for Gizmo's final resting place. We've placed Gizmo gently in a casket/vault combination – and have him lying in the chapel for the family's arrival. They've brought along his favorite sweater, toy and some treats. He's a beautiful 18 year old Chihuahua – who's had a wonderfully spoiled life!

The phone is now ringing off the hook and my team is on their way in. Another death call has come in from a clinic on the south side of town; I send my step son by to assist the family. They wait on him to get there and to assist in loading their Labrador named Mo, into the SUV. They are ready for

us to move forward with cremation – and are already anxious to have Mo back home. As with all of the pets, we get a fur clipping and a paw print for their families to have, which we will do here too.

A phone call comes in from one of my favorite families, the Fetters. We've helped them four times over the past four years. Today it's another one of the equally unusual family members that they love. It's Hook, the ball python. The four children are all devastated. Mr. Fetters has decided that a memorial service is probably what the kids need – and he'd like to do that at around 11:30 a.m. Of course we agree that's what should happen – and we prepare the family viewing room for our small gathering. A pretty blue blanket is laid out and waiting for Hook's arrival.

Thank God the team is here! We now have families showing up to pick up their little pets and to review their many memorialization options. Yummy's family is here – and they've brought their other dog Stinky, to look at their choices. Stinky is more into the dog treats that we have on hand – and finding where all of the tennis balls are hidden. They choose a beautiful solid bronze urn with Yummy's photo on it – as well as a portrait that they will have done. More than likely – mom will also be doing some urn jewelry – but she's made all of the decisions that her grieving mind can make for the day. We get Yummy in a temporary urn while his permanent urn is being ordered. She will be in later with the photo.

I see one of the team members loading up a casket and ready to head out the back door. A couple has euthanized two elderly pets at one time. The dogs were always together in life and the death of one of them would have been too much for the surviving dog to handle, a true measure of love. Tonight will be a very difficult night for this couple.

It's now 11:30 am – and time for Hook's service. The family shows up – and the children take their time in the room with Hook. What a loved little snake he was! The little snake that as a "baby snake" had a crooked tail and would "hook" into everyone's winter sweaters! How appropriate! The children all take turns doing an assigned reading – and then I open up the floor for Hook stories! And, darling stories they were! After choosing an urn – the family says their final good-bye.

We must swiftly clear out the family/viewing room as a family has showed up with their cat. The room is cleaned and transformed quickly as we prepare Kit Kat for viewing. A fresh, hot cup of coffee and a new box of Kleenex – and we lead the family into the room –another beautiful little furry

friend. I don't care how many little pets I've seen – they are all such awesome creatures.

The afternoon continues on with normal business events. Office managers of vet clinics call for more brochures, veterinarians call for grief guidance on a scheduled euthanasia later this afternoon, paw prints are done, fur clippings are clipped – and a few sales; folks stop by, always asking the same question “what is this business?” Families are proactively followed up with as well as phone calls from families that have a range of questions. “Did I do the right thing by euthanizing right now,” “My friends think that I'm silly for grieving this much over a cat, do you?” and “I don't know if I want to bury or cremate, can you guide me?” These are just a few of the typical questions.

The highlight of the afternoon is when Vickie stops by. We've recently helped her with her big black lab, Thunder, and they have now adopted! Oh dear me! A small little bundle of black fur comes charging into the center – and is so ready to play! Abby is going to be a rotten little girl – I can already tell! As we're trying to get her settled down for a photo (Mom wants adoption notice cards) – it's just too much excitement for a little pup! Thank God we can handle potty accidents! A quick wipe of the floor – and a beautiful snap of a photo – and mom and baby are out the door!

Oh my stars, its approaching 4:00 p.m. and the arrival of Bernadette's family for their visitation. We've done a beautiful job of getting her ready for her family. She's been cleaned, groomed and looks very peaceful. Her family arrives a few minutes prior to four o'clock with flowers and toys in hand. The small child clutches her letter and is very anxious to read it to me. I lead them back to the family room, walk them into the room and to Bernadette. I touch her first so they know

it's okay to pet her – and then I leave them alone.

A bit later, I'm back in the room, poised to hear the letter. In her small, little voice, she begins... “Dear Bernadette, I love you and will miss you. I remember when...” Yes, it's always at this point that the tears start for me. The letter is beautiful. They spend more time with her and then let me know that they are ready for us to go to cremation. Mother and daughter grip each other's hands and walk out the door with heads hung low.

When I go back into the room I find the letter tucked between Bernadette's front legs. It also appears to me that they both put lipstick on – and gave her a kiss. Two kisses – right on her little nose. She is so peaceful.

More families have come in – more phone calls have happened – and the day is now wrapping up. It's after 7:00 p.m. As with the end of every day, I do go home exhausted, but exhilarated, to know that we helped someone through a very difficult time. And, I also know

that with any funeral service business, I only get one shot to make this experience with a family be a peaceful one. We are here, helping them with some very precious beings – which they have entrusted to us. We can't take any part of that for granted.

The only way to do it is with dignity and respect.

It's been a long day and I'm starting to make my way to bed. The phone rings. It's Kathleen. Tonight is her first night without Mr. B and she just needs to talk, and we'll do just that. **FBA**

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