Honoring Our Animals

AUTHORITY MAGAZINE

Women In Wellness: Beth Bigler Of Honoring Our Animals On The Five Lifestyle Tweaks That Will Help Support People's Journey Towards Better Wellbeing

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You will carry your clients' grief with you — and that's okay. I didn't realize how much I would hold the stories, sorrow, and love of every person I counsel. Their beloveds linger with me in quiet moments in how I move through the world. At first, I wondered if I was carrying too much. Now, I see it differently. Bearing witness is an honor. Their beloveds are remembered, their love acknowledged, their pain held. That's not a burden — it's sacred work. And I love knowing my clients' special companions as deeply as I do.

Today, more than ever, wellness is at the forefront of societal discussions. From mental health to physical well-being, women are making significant strides in bringing about change, introducing innovative solutions, and setting new standards. Despite facing unique challenges, they break barriers, inspire communities, and are reshaping the very definition of health and wellness. In this series called women in wellness we are talking to women doctors, nurses, nutritionists, therapists,

fitness trainers, researchers, health experts, coaches, and other wellness professionals to share their stories and insights. As a part of this series, we had the pleasure of interviewing Beth Bigler.

Beth Bigler is a double-certified Pet Loss Grief Counselor, certified end-of-life animal companion doula, and pet chaplain. As the founder of Honoring Our Animals, she is one of the country's most sought-after pet loss grief counselors, working with individuals and families before, during, and after the loss of their beloved animal companions. Beth has become one of the foremost leading and empowering voices for normalizing companion animal grief. Her book, Honoring Our Animals (Quarto), will be available in the US and Australia in June 2025 on Amazon and major book retailers.

Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series! Our readers would love to "get to know you" better. Can you share your "backstory" with us?

When my soulmate cat, Arnie, was diagnosed with terminal cancer, I couldn't imagine life without him. He was my rock, my best friend, my whole heart. The thought of losing him felt unbearable, and I wasn't sure that I could survive his death.

The shock of his diagnosis led me to seek pet loss grief counseling, where I deepened my understanding of our bond and the immense sorrow I was experiencing. In the midst of that, an experimental chemotreatment gave him remission, and I felt overwhelming relief. But less than a year later, I was blindsided by his sudden death due to an entirely different, aggressive cancer. I couldn't believe his earthside life had ended so abruptly.

At the time, I had spent more than 20 years in the film and television industry, a career that had shaped my identity. But nothing had changed me as profoundly as my relationship with Arnie — and the realization that so many people were navigating pet loss without the support they needed. Through anticipatory and post-loss grief counseling, I found ways to carry my bond with Arnie forward — not just as a memory but as an ongoing connection that still guides me today. That experience changed everything, and I knew I couldn't keep living the same life.

I became a pet loss grief counselor, end-of-life animal companion doula, and pet chaplain so that Arnie and I could help others move with their grief — not by suppressing it, but by honoring it. In my private practice, I support individuals, couples, and families through the tangled emotions of loss — the guilt over what they "could have done," the anger at the unfairness of it all, the fear of an unrecognizable future, and the aching longing that feels impossible to soothe. And then there's the last day — the moment everything changes. So many grieving hearts remain stuck there, replaying every detail, questioning every choice. But for many, the hardest part isn't just the pain — it's the total loss of identity. Who am I without my soulmate pet? How do I function in a world that no longer feels like home?

These are the spaces where I hold my clients. Because pet grief isn't just about loss — it's about the rupture in identity, purpose, and daily life. My role isn't to push them toward "feeling better" but to help them find ways to exist in this new reality, carrying love forward in a meaningful and true way. Most importantly, I help my clients create meaningful ongoing connections with their beloved pets so they can feel their beloved is included in their lives and their relationship can keep evolving and expanding.

Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you started your career? What were the main lessons or takeaways from that story?

Every day, I am privileged to hear stories of remarkable signs — moments that defy explanation, reminding grieving guardians that their beloved pets are still present. These signs take many forms: butterflies landing at the right moment, inexplicable flickers of electricity, a meaningful song playing when least expected, a lost tag or collar suddenly appearing. I've had clients tell me about vivid visitation dreams, cloud formations resembling their beloved's faces, mysterious feathers, and even surviving animals behaving in unmistakably familiar ways.

These moments may seem small, but to those grieving, they are everything. They are love stretching beyond physical form, a reminder that their connection hasn't ended.

The biggest thing I've learned from witnessing these stories is to remain open — whether or not you're sure what you believe about the afterlife. Signs often come in ways we don't expect, and if we're too busy questioning or doubting, we might miss them. I encourage my clients to receive them without over analyzing and trust that their beloved finds ways to communicate in a language of love only they would understand. And always say "thank you, come again" when signs occur.

Grief can make the world feel cold and empty, but these moments remind us that love is never truly lost. It changes form, but it never disappears.

It has been said that our mistakes can be our greatest teachers. Can you share a story about a mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lesson you learned from that?

I'm known for — and deeply proud of — the creative tools, exercises, and strategies I develop for my clients. Grief deserves more than passive support; it needs active tools to help people process their pain, honor their beloveds, and move with grief in meaningful ways. But early on, I made the mistake of believing I always needed the right words — something profound or reassuring to make grief less unbearable.

In one early session, I sat with a grieving guardian who had just lost their soulmate animal. They were sobbing, struggling to breathe, saying they didn't know how they would survive. And I realized there were no words that could fix this. Instead, I sat with them silently, nodded when they needed to feel understood, and simply said, "I hear you. This is so hard. I'm here."

I knew that feeling intimately — I had been there with my soulmate cat, Arnie. The fear, the helplessness, the unbearable weight of "why?" Later, the client told me that moment meant everything — because, for once, someone wasn't trying to push them forward. Someone was simply witnessing their grief.

Grief work isn't about the perfect words — it's about presence and letting grief breathe.

Let's jump to our main focus. When it comes to health and wellness, how is the work you are doing helping to make a bigger impact in the world?

Pet loss grief is disenfranchised grief — one that isn't openly acknowledged, socially mourned, or publicly supported. Despite the deep love we share with our animal companions, their deaths are still not culturally recognized as a significant loss. There are no standard bereavement policies, no automatic sympathy cards, and no casseroles arriving at the door. Instead, grieving guardians hear, "It's just a dog," "Only a cat," or "You can always get another one," leaving them isolated, ashamed, and questioning whether their pain is valid.

This is why my work matters. I am on a mission to change how pet loss is perceived, supported, and spoken about in our culture. Losing an animal companion is a profound loss, and it deserves to be recognized as such. I want to see workplaces offer bereavement leave for pet loss, families and communities instinctively support grieving guardians, and society fully acknowledge the life-shaping impact of the human-animal bond.

My vision for the future is simple: One day, we won't need to qualify it as "pet loss grief" — just as we don't say "widow grief" or "child loss grief." We instinctively understand the weight of those losses, and I want pet loss to be recognized with the same depth and legitimacy.

The shift is already happening. Every day, I hear from people who, for the first time, feel seen in their grief. More communities are forming around pet loss support, more companies are recognizing pet bereavement, and conversations that were once avoided are now being spoken about openly. And this is just the beginning.

Can you share your top five "lifestyle tweaks" that you believe will help support people's journey towards better wellbeing? Please give an example or story for each.

Grieving a beloved animal companion is a profound emotional experience, yet society offers little guidance on how to navigate it. As a pet loss grief counselor, I help people move with their grief in ways that honor their beloveds and support their well-being. Here are five meaningful shifts to help you care for yourself during this time.

1. **Let grief move with you — without judgment.**
   Grief carries weight, and suppressing it only makes it heavier. Give yourself permission to cry, scream, sit in silence, or simply feel. Your feelings are valid and profound, and you deserve to feel them.

2. **Say yes to help — even if it feels uncomfortable.**
   Grief is exhausting, and even simple tasks can feel overwhelming. If someone offers support, accept it. One client hesitated when a friend offered to walk her surviving dog, but when she finally said yes, she realized how much relief it gave her. People want to help. Let them.

3. **Guilt does not mean you did something wrong.**
   Guilt in pet loss is common, but feeling guilty doesn't mean you are guilty. You were doing your best with the information you had at the time. You didn't have a crystal ball, and you could not have predicted everything that happened. We often wish things had gone differently, but it doesn't mean we did anything wrong. Your choices were made with love and deep consideration.

4. **Create space to honor and celebrate your beloved.**
   Memorializing isn't about "holding on too much" but continuing your bond. Some write letters, create altars, or celebrate birthdays with rituals that bring comfort. Use their name at the coffee shop when you order, wear jewelry or their "signature color" to feel close. Include and celebrate them at every opportunity.

5. **Find people who understand — and seek support.**
   Grief can feel isolating, but you don't have to go through it alone. Every client who works with me has access to a private community for grieving guardians — a space to connect, share, and receive support. My Instagram community has thousands of people ready to connect with other grieving guardians. Finding people who "get it" can make all the difference. Your grief is real, and you are not alone.

Five Ways to Support Someone Grieving a Beloved Pet

Pet loss grief is profound yet often unrecognized. If you want to support someone truly, here's how to show up with care, validation, and action.

1. Acknowledge their grief — without minimizing it.
Treat their loss as you would any deep loss. Say their beloved's name, share memories, and recognize their pain. You don't need magic words — just listen.

❌"At least they had a good life."
✅"I know how much you loved [Pet's Name], and I can only imagine how much you miss them."

2. Show up — again and again.
Grief doesn't disappear in a few weeks. Keep checking in — months later, on anniversaries, on milestone days. A simple message like "I'm thinking of you and [Pet's Name] today" can mean everything.

3. Take action instead of asking.
Grief is exhausting, and many won't ask for help. Instead of saying, "Let me know if you need anything," just do something.

Drop off a meal.
Help with errands.
Send a small, meaningful gift.

A client told me a friend left groceries on their doorstep. "It wasn't about the food — it was about knowing someone saw my pain."

4. Gift them tokens to honor their beloved.
Memorializing isn't "holding on too much" — it's honoring love that still exists.

Thoughtful gestures that can help:
A framed photo or memory book.
A tree planted in their beloved's honor.
A grief journal with their beloved's picture.

5. Keep their beloved's memory alive.
One of the hardest parts of grief is feeling like the world has forgotten. Be the person who remembers.

Share photos or stories.
Acknowledge important dates.
Send a message: "I was thinking of [Pet's Name] today and wanted to check in."

Their loss is real. Their beloved may have been their closest companion. Honoring that is one of the greatest gifts you can give.

If you could start a movement that would bring the most amount of wellness to the most amount of people, what would that be?

If I could start a movement to bring the most wellness to the most people, it would be to give every griever the gift of self-compassion. Grief is already unbearably heavy — yet so often, people add layers of guilt, shame, and self-judgment, questioning whether they are grieving "too much," "too long," or "the wrong way."

I'd want every grieving person to offer themselves the same love, patience, and gentleness that their beloved gave them. To nurture their grief instead of fighting it. Rest without guilt, honor their needs without justification, and allow their sorrow to exist without apology.

My work is critical to helping clients develop self-compassion, offering themselves the same patience and tenderness as their soulmate pet teacher. The way their beloved looked at them with unconditional love, the way they offered comfort without hesitation — that love was never one-sided. It still exists, and they deserve to receive it from themselves now.

In my work as a pet loss grief counselor, I witness daily how profoundly self-compassion transforms grief. Something shifts when people stop punishing themselves for their emotions and instead offer themselves the same unwavering care their beloved once did. Grief doesn't vanish — but it becomes softer, less isolating, and more survivable.

What are your "5 Things I Wish Someone Told Me Before I Started" and why?

1. You will carry your clients' grief with you — and that's okay.

I didn't realize how much I would hold the stories, sorrow, and love of every person I counsel. Their beloveds linger with me in quiet moments in how I move through the world. At first, I wondered if I was carrying too much. Now, I see it differently. Bearing witness is an honor. Their beloveds are remembered, their love acknowledged, their pain held. That's not a burden — it's sacred work. And I love knowing my clients' special companions as deeply as I do.

2. The world still doesn't take pet loss grief seriously — but we are changing that.

I knew pet loss was disenfranchised, but I didn't realize how often grieving guardians feel erased. Workplaces don't offer bereavement leave, friends minimize their pain, and many wonder if they're "overreacting." I wish I had known how much resistance I would face in advocating for this grief — and how necessary this work is. But the shift is happening, and for that, I am grateful. When someone tells me, "I thought I was grieving alone, and then I found you," I am reminded why this work matters.

3. Self-compassion is just as important for me as it is for my clients.

Holding space for grief means also holding space for myself and my own grief — resting when I need to, allowing emotions to surface, and offering myself the same kindness I encourage in others. Growing up, I wish I'd learned that taking care of myself isn't selfish — it's essential.

4. Your Clients Will Be Incredible Teachers

When I first started, I thought my role as a pet loss grief counselor would be primarily about walking the road with others through their pain. But I didn't anticipate just how much my clients would teach me in return. Their resilience in the face of profound loss, their unwavering commitment to honoring their beloveds, and their creativity in finding ways to maintain connection have profoundly shaped my understanding of grief.

I've seen guardians turn grief into art, ritual, and advocacy. I've witnessed the depth of love they continue to share with their soulmate animals, proving that love doesn't disappear — it transforms. Every session reminds me that grief is not just sorrow; it's an expression of devotion. My clients have shown me that even in loss, there is an enduring bond that can be nurtured in deeply personal and meaningful ways and that we can evolve ourselves as we allow grief to transform us. These are lessons I carry with me every day.

5. That Other People Can Enjoy the Same Continuing Relationship with Their Beloved as I Have with Arnie.

When I started this work, I wasn't sure if others would experience their beloveds the way I do. My connection with Arnie hasn't faded — it's deepened. I feel closer to him today than I did on the day of his transition because we are still collaborating. He remains an honored ancestor in my life, a presence woven into everything I do. The "we" mentality I share with Arnie — seeing us as a continuing partnership rather than a past relationship — has been one of my greatest sources of strength.

At first, I wasn't sure if this was something others could access, but working with my clients has shown me that they, too, can shift into this way of being. Teaching them how to embrace an ongoing bond and see their beloveds not as lost but as present in new ways has been one of the most fulfilling parts of my work. Watching them step into that realization — that love doesn't end, that their beloveds are still with them — has been nothing short of thrilling. It's an honor to help others discover what I once thought might only be possible for me.

Sustainability, veganism, mental health, and environmental changes are big topics at the moment. Which one of these causes is dearest to you, and why?

Mental health, particularly grief literacy and death literacy, is the cause closest to my heart. We live in a culture obsessed with gaining — more success, achievement, and happiness. We don't like to talk about loss — unless it's weight. Grief is universal, yet we are told to "move on," "stay strong," and keep our pain private so it doesn't make others uncomfortable. The result? A society where people grieve in silence, wondering if their emotions are "normal."

This is why I do my work. Pet loss grief is especially dismissed, leaving grieving guardians isolated and questioning whether their pain is valid. Through my Instagram and private practice, I work to change that — to ensure no one feels like they are "overreacting" for mourning their beloved animals. I want to replace shame and silence with recognition, validation, and connection.

Social media has made these conversations global. Every day, people say, "I thought I was the only one who felt this way." That's the problem — grief should be a shared, supported experience, not something endured alone.

True mental health advocacy must include grief. Loss changes us, and that's okay. We must create a world where grief isn't hidden but honored, carried, and integrated into our lives. And we are getting there — one conversation at a time.

What is the best way for our readers to further follow your work online?

The best way to connect with me is through Instagram (@honoringouranimals), where I share twice-daily content on pet loss grief, offering validation, support, and tools for grieving guardians. It's more than a page — it's a community with live monthly memorials and gatherings where we honor our beloveds together.

You can also visit my website www.honoringouranimals.com/resources for resources, grief support options, and free downloadable grief guides. For daily guidance, my book, *Honoring Our Animals: 365 Meditations For Healing After Pet Loss*, is available on Amazon and everywhere you buy books. It offers 365 daily meditations to meet you wherever you are in your grief — whether facing anticipatory loss, deep sorrow, or learning to carry love forward. No matter how you connect with my work, I hope that you find the support, validation, and connection you deserve. Grief isn't something to be fixed but to be honored.

Thank you for these fantastic insights! We wish you continued success and good health.

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