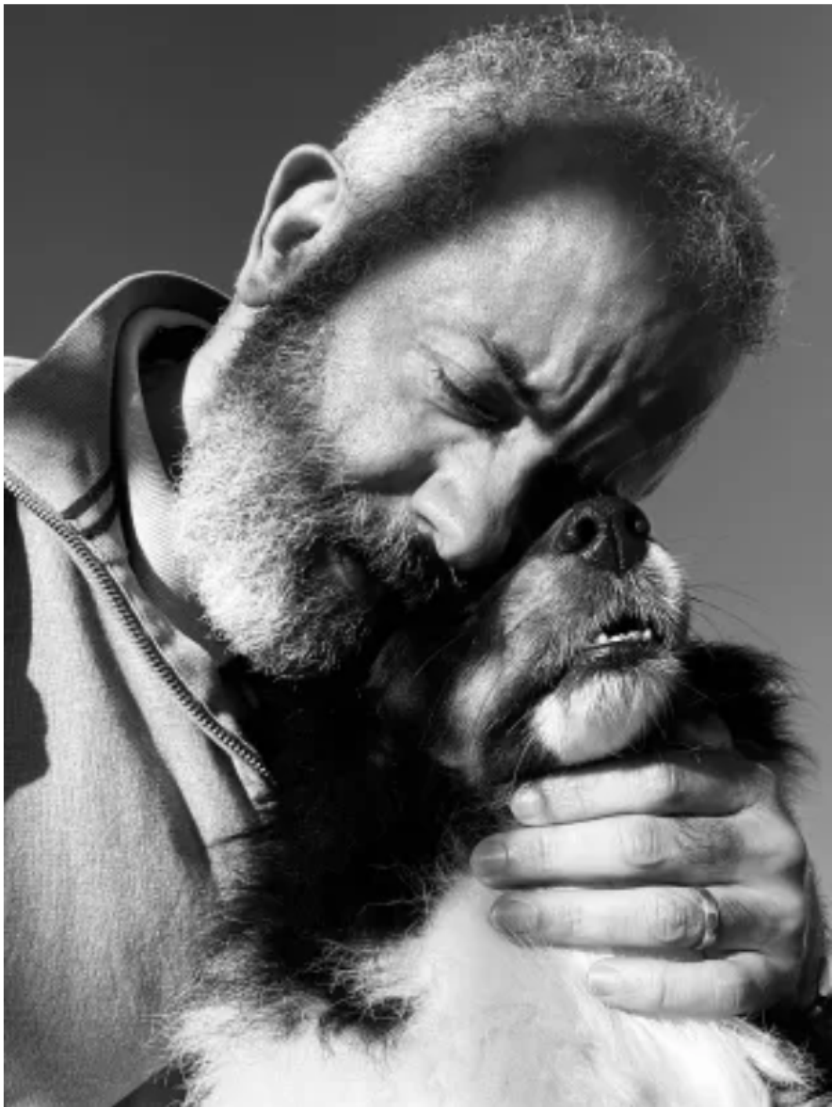
Honoring Our Animals

Psychology Today

Healing After Pet Loss

A new book offers a daily source of solace and strength after the loss of a pet.

Marc Bekoff Ph.D. | June 5, 2025



Source: CARLOSCRUZ ARTEGRAFIA/Pexels.

Numerous people who live a wide variety of companion animals (aka “pets”) have been, or will be faced, with losing their nonhuman animal (animal) companion. It’s a trying time for these caring humans and it’s essential to honor the animals’ lives when they transition on to unknown terrain.

Having gone through these tough times on many occasions, I found grief counselor Beth Bigler’s new book *Honoring Our Animals: 365 Meditations for Healing after Pet Loss* to be a gem. One unique aspects of Beth’s work is her belief that grief is not an end but part of an ongoing relationship. Her

approach helps clients understand that the bond they share with their pets evolves even in their absence and that true healing comes from honoring that lasting connection.

Marc Bekoff: Why did you write *Honoring Our Animals*?

Beth Bigler: Pet loss grief is a deeply disenfranchised grief—profound and life-altering, yet often ignored, minimized, or misunderstood. Guardians are often surprised by its intensity and left feeling isolated when the world doesn't acknowledge their pain.

In my work as a pet loss grief counselor, I've supported hundreds of grieving guardians. Most aren't sure how to carry their grief or live with it compassionately. They're trying to make sense of guilt, anger, spiritual questioning, shifting identity, and the quiet fear of forgetting the one they love or feeling the connection slip away. These emotions rarely get named or validated.

This book gives language and space to pet loss grief. It offers a daily way to feel seen, to feel less alone, and to remember your relationship can continue.

MB: How does your book relate to your background and general areas of interest?

BB: Before I became a pet loss grief counselor, I spent over two decades in film, television, and education. Story has always helped me make sense of the world, especially the stories that name what's hard to say and honor what still needs space.

That background shapes how I support grief. I don't see it as something to overcome, but as something sacred. Something we move with. Something that asks to be witnessed, tended to, and spoken aloud, yet is often met with silence or discomfort.

My book offers a vocabulary and a place to nurture a guardian's sacred story. It helps them feel seen, stay in relationship with their beloved, and live with grief as love continues.

MB: Who do you hope to reach?

BB: This book is for anyone who has loved a pet. I want to reach those living with grief, whether quietly or openly, and still searching for ways to honor their connection. Whether their beloved transitioned yesterday or 10 years ago, suddenly or after a long anticipatory period, and whether they're remembering a dog, cat, rabbit, horse, rat, guinea pig, bird, reptile, or any beloved they want to honor.

MB: What are some of the topics you consider and what are some of your major messages?

BB: Each entry begins with a meditation and ends with an invitation. The meditation helps explore or validate what's being experienced—anniversaries, unhelpful feedback, self-criticism, questioning, or something quieter. The invitation offers a way to engage that moment—not to fix it, but to tend to it. These are not tasks. They're moments of relationship. Openings for connection. Ways to remain in conversation with your beloved and with grief.

Throughout the book, I speak to feelings that often go unnamed: shock, guilt, spiritual doubt, anger, numbness, jealousy, and the comparisons that come when others do not understand your experience.

I also focus on the deep identity shifts that come with loss. Grief touches a guardian's sense of purpose, meaning, relationships, and how they see themself in the world. I wrote this book to help people cultivate kindness toward themselves in that unraveling and to offer curiosity, not judgment, as they adjust to a new sense of self and evolve in their grief.

MB: How does your work differ from others concerned with similar topics?

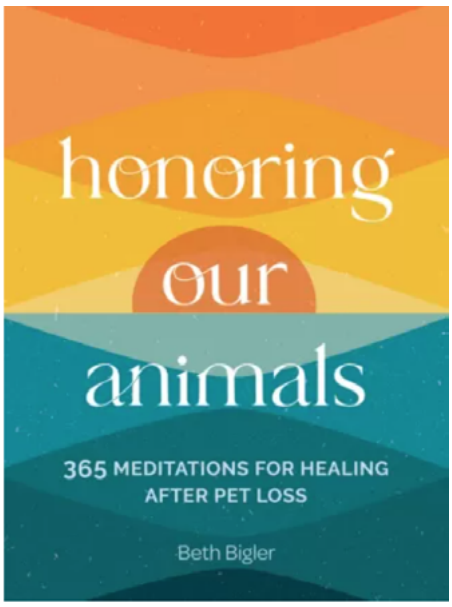
BB: My work begins with the understanding that love doesn't stop when physical presence ends. I don't ask people to detach or "move on." I help them find ways to keep their relationship with their beloved active and alive after their earthside time has ended. I focus on how grief reshapes roles, rhythms, and identity.

I also use practices that invite connection and presence, like sensory rituals, breathwork, creative expression, and intentional reflection. Some are quiet and grounding, others invite movement, memory, or symbolic gesture. Each is offered flexibly, so the grieving guardian can choose what feels supportive.

The language I use is intentionally different. I don't refer to owners or pets. I say *guardian* and *beloved*. I don't speak of closure or recovery. I talk about adjustment, integration, and ongoing relationship. I often use the present tense when referring to beloveds, because the connection hasn't ended. For many of us, it's still very much alive.

Our beloved is not only someone to remember, but a guide to listen to. Many guardians describe their animals as soulmates—the one being who truly saw them, accepted them, and loved them without condition. We work with that. Their trust, nurturing, and steadiness become a beacon. The relationship doesn't stop offering wisdom. It continues to teach.

I help people draw on the qualities their beloved reflected back: sensitivity, strength, humor, kindness, joy. When we pay attention to what our beloved gave us, we recognize what still lives in



Source: Wellfleet Press/with permission.

us. There is grief, yes, but also an invitation to treat ourselves with the same care and devotion we offered and received. We invite this love to keep nurturing who we are becoming.

BB: Yes. And more than that, I'm hopeful we shift the way our culture understands the human-animal bond. I want a world where the grief that follows the death of a companion animal is supported, not minimized. Right now, grieving guardians are often left wondering if their reactions are "too much," or "overly sensitive" for needing time, care, or acknowledgment. I want to change that. I want a world where the moment someone's beloved receives a terminal diagnosis or dies, they are immediately surrounded by obvious and expected support, not something guardians have to ask for or explain.

I believe we're already moving toward something better and I'm committed to helping us get there.

https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/animal-emotions/202505/healing-after-pet-loss