



Preview

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Preface

The trigger for writing this book was the death certificate of my deceased dog, Kosmo. In Germany, a vet issues these certificates in order to release the owner from the obligation to pay taxes for the pet and as proof for potential liability insurance cancellations.

TIERÄRZTLICHE BESCHEINIGUNG			
Das nachstehend beschriebene Tier ^{ist} wurde am <u>06.07.12</u> eingeschläfert ^{verstarben} schmerzlos (entsprechend § 4 Abs. 1 Tierschutzgesetz)			
HUND	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	KATZE	andere Tierart
Rasse		<u>Satter</u>	
Tiername <u>Kosmo</u>		Geschlecht	männlich <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> weiblich <input type="checkbox"/>
Alter ca. <u>13</u> Jahre	Steuer-Nummer		
Besitzer <u>Wesley Vortoscha</u>		<u>Waldenstr. 38</u> <u>90801 München</u>	
Datum der Ausstellung <u>05.07.12</u>		Stempel und Unterschrift des Tierarztes	

In astonishment I noticed that the vet had to cross out “euthanized” and write “deceased”. That the pet can die a natural death isn't even taken into account on the original form! This fact touched me deeply and honestly shocked me as well.

Our vet and other veterinarians known to me were very moved by Kosmo's natural death. Therefore I assumed the standardised terminology of "euthanization" on the death certificate reflected a common reality amongst the profession.

Can it be that this type of euthanasia has increased so significantly?

Even if this practice is one of the worst prospects for pet owners?

Do I have another choice?

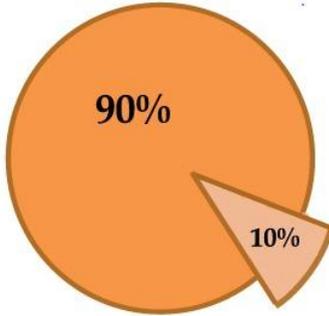
Can my pet die a natural death?

And if so, how can I help?

My curiosity was sparked and to back up my suspicions with numbers, I started my research. After scouring various governmental and veterinary databases, as well as databases of Munich and Hanover universities and those of several animal rights organisations, I had still not found what I was looking for. A statistic on the ratio of natural deaths to euthanasia of pets did not exist. However, people I encountered during this research period were all very open and moved by the topic. This motivated me to keep digging.

After conducting a questionnaire with one hundred randomly chosen dog and cat owners, I was able to assemble the following statistic.

Cats & Dogs



90% of animals were put down or were supposed to be euthanized. 10% of these pets died the night before, or on the day of the planned euthanization. An explanation to these 10% can be found in the chapter "Personal Preparation".

10% of animals died of natural causes.

First of all, I would like to underline that I am not fundamentally against putting down animals in a humane way. The fact that this option of euthanasia exists beyond emergency situations can be helpful when dealing with pets who suffer from on-going, severe illnesses.

Take for example a cat, who is suffering from immense pain due to cancer, or a dog who is no longer able to control his bowel movements. When treatment no longer works or shows no significant improvement to the animal's health, then it is better to relieve the animal of its suffering. But would it not be nicer if our companions were able to go in peace before they begin to suffer? If the duration of agony for both the pet and the owner could be reduced?

I have experienced both forms of farewell and am thoroughly convinced that we do have a choice as a pet owner. In this book I want to allow other owners to draw on my knowledge and experiences and learn from resulting conclusions.

On the following pages, I will explain in depth what can be done to prevent having to put down your animal. A severe disease does not always have to play a role. My book can also provide support for dealing with the passing of a senile pet, whose time has come.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to create such a win-win-win situation for owner, pet and vet?

Surely vets themselves would prefer to abstain from the most unpleasant part of their profession. Personally, I believe the reason for a significantly higher suicide rate of veterinarians compared to doctors and society in general can be found here. This relation is applicable to the whole of Europe, hence I suspect the before-mentioned topics have international relevance.

So what can we do?

How can we counteract this "lifestyle disease"?

It is surely not an alternative to abstain from keeping our four-legged companions. Heinz Rühmann, a famous German actor, once said "One can live without dogs, but it is not worthwhile!"

As my insights are based on the experience of living together with dogs, this book is focused on them. However, my tips and recommendations can be applied to every type of pet and can even provide support and information when dealing with our own passing.



Two Personal Accounts



(Polka)

Polka was a black boxer hound that I grew up with. She was raised to be a guard dog but at the same time she was a loving member of our family. Assigned with two important tasks and kept in an adequate way, she reached the grand age of 12 years.

In the last year of her life she became very ill and we agreed that we did not want to prolong her suffering. Even back then, I was fortunate to have a fantastic vet. She offered to put down our dog at home, where Polka could be amongst family, a practice that was still very uncommon in the 80s.

Even today, 25 years later, I can still see Polka and myself side by side, on what was to be our last walk together. The reality of this hit me hard at the time. Guided by an invisible power I walked back home and informed my family that it was time to call the vet. Visibly relieved that I had made this important and seemingly correct decision, no one disagreed. Two hours later, our vet arrived. I was overcome by the feeling of no longer being able to deal with my decision and left the room, only to return a few moments later. It became evident to me that I had to disregard my sensitivities in order to pay my respects to my loyal friend. Therefore I sat next to her basket and stroked her until her breathing ceased and for a long time after that. Yet the words of the veterinarian and the consequential feelings of guilt were to haunt me for the next 20 years.

According to her Polka was already so weak that she died from the anaesthetic injection. I merely gave her the additional injection to follow proper procedure. She probably would not have survived the night anyway!"

I questioned myself over and over again if I had acted prematurely or actually far too late. I will explain how I was able to let these doubts go later on in this book.

Of course I had hoped until the last day that Polka could die a natural death. However I understand with the knowledge I have gained in the past years that there were many reasons why this wish could not be fulfilled.

One of the main factors was the fear that our family had in terms of several big, upcoming changes. A short while before Polka's passing, we had decided that our family was to split and move to different places. Polka was, as so many dogs are, our binding element, so we projected all our fears and sadness about the dawning good-bye onto her. The death of a pet can and often will mark a new phase in one's life, yet it is rarely the actual cause. Once we recognise and accept this as part of our lives we have formed a base, enabling our pet to die a natural, peaceful death. Animals are our companions for a wonderful part of our journey, and when they go, they do it at a time which is right. A few weeks earlier or later rarely plays a role. Polka could not have chosen a better point in time and in the grand scheme of things I believe she spared our family a lot of additional pain and sadness.

However, having her put down was one of the most difficult decisions and experiences in my life and I swore to myself that I would never find myself in the same position again. For years after Polka's death I resisted the temptation of owning a new dog.

But then Kosmo came into my life and accompanied us for 13 wonderful years. Everyone who has had several dogs and was close to them knows that there is that "one" special dog. For me, that is Kosmo. Despite all the joy, my fear of another farewell and having to break my vow grew stronger. I was aware that the way we would experience the passing of our friend was predominantly defined by my ability to let go. I seemed to have been successful in working on myself and my surroundings and so we were able to receive an incredibly special mark of trust. (...)

Epilogue

Can my pet die a “natural death”?

If so, how can I personally help to ensure this happens?

These were the initial questions I asked myself at the beginning of this guide book. I can understand if some readers may react with great scepticism to these statements. However I became increasingly convinced with every chapter I wrote, that as owners we have a great influence on how our pets leave us. The incident of my dog's death certificate sparked my decision to write this book but my motivation came from the belief that most pet owners regard this topic as a matter of the heart. Therefore I hope my contents and arguments are convincing and help many owners to bid farewell to their pets in a peaceful, natural way.

I hope this book will help many readers and serve as a guiding light or a map on the personal journey of bidding farewell to a friend. Depending on individual attitudes and character, this book will provoke varied thoughts and reactions. Some might take it as an inspiration to dig deeper and take their own route, change direction or pause and look back on their journey so far. Yet a less intensive engagement with aspects covered will also assist in dealing with future steps.

My book will not prevent loss or sadness but maybe it will be able to reduce the fear associated with the passing of our companion. Ideally, the alternative outlooks laid out on the pages of this book can provide additional solace and hope, similar to the consolation I received.

Until this moment arises, it is important to dedicate yourself completely to life and allow yourself to be carried away by the infectious joy of our pets.





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