



# TattleTails & Tidbits



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## Autumn's Beauty

The air is starting to fill with the aroma of apples falling from the trees and the smell of bright colored leaves as they gently blanket the ground. Autumn in the North East is spectacular and the farm is full of plants and trees now decked out in stunning colors. The air is starting to get a bit cooler as the days get a bit shorter. Birds start to migrate south (as do many of our human residents), and life on the farm now shifts to preparing the barns and animal quarters for the coming winter. To live in a place that fully experiences four seasons requires us to adapt to change.

Change is not always bad or challenging. But change is always constant and reliable. If we could only see change as an old familiar friend, it would be so much easier. But let's face it, change is change. In this issue we explore some different changes and how seasons come and seasons go as the cycle of life moves on. Autumn is a time for looking inward and processing all that has come through the busy growing season and to harvest all the goodies of what we have learned and experienced. It is a time to give thanks for all that has been growing within us, even when we haven't realized it yet.

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# When Animals Grieve

by Dawn E. Hayman



Grace (left) & Jessie (right)

I have been asked by many people over the years if animals grieve. Many tell me that when one of their animals has died the other animals in the household carried on as if nothing happened. Others share that their surviving animal acts bewildered and the humans wonder if that animal doesn't understand what death is and that their friend won't be back. And still others share that their animals seem to be depressed and the humans don't know what to do to help.

The fact is that all of the above are examples of how animals grieve. It is really not much different than how humans grieve. Grief is a process unique to each individual. There is no "right" or "wrong" or "normal" and "abnormal." Animals understand death. In fact, they are more comfortable with death than most humans. In general, they are not afraid of death and they understand that death is a part of life. They also understand that their heart connections live on past their physical bodies.

This topic came to the forefront for me this month and I thought I'd share a personal story to illustrate one animal's perspective and grief process. That animal is my own yellow lab Jessie. Jessie is 11 years old. When Margot and I got him as a puppy, Jessie joined our family of eight other special needs dogs. He was the last dog we took in and over the years the older dogs have each passed away. Jessie is familiar with the process and understands when one of our other animals dies. For the past year, we were down to three dogs. Jessie, the baby at age 11; Grace, his best friend at age 13; and Calee, the eldest at age 15. Both girls had health issues and we knew they were failing. Jessie understood that too. I'd often catch him watching as we helped the girls, as they developed mobility issues and age related problems, and I could see the sadness and concern in his eyes. He understood that his time with them was nearing an end. My heart hurt for him and for us.



Calee

But none of us were prepared when we lost both Grace and then Calee exactly one week apart. And one week later we lost one of our very special cats who Jessie also adored. Three huge losses in just two weeks. We all were reeling. And suddenly, we were down to one dog. Jessie had never been an only dog in his life. He went right from his litter of nine siblings to our pack where he was number nine. To say he was hit hard by the loss of his friends is an understatement.

Nothing, literally nothing, in our day was normal anymore. The girls were both very vocal barkers at predictable times during the day. Jessie is generally not a barker. The house grew instantly quiet. Margot and I were devastated at the loss and we were also at the same time heartbroken for Jessie. We all tried to create a new "normal." Everything focused around Jessie now but we also knew that his grief was very deep. He and Grace in particular were a team, right up until the end, Jessie never left her side. He grew depressed and more withdrawn.

More than once, we witnessed him suddenly jolt awake from a sound sleep and immediately begin running around the house looking with anticipation for someone he thought for sure was there. I was sure that Grace was visiting him both in dreams and also energetically. Grace gave me messages that she was finding a friend for Jessie. She told us to keep our eyes open but not to get hung up on details. Margot and I knew that we needed to find another dog friend for Jessie but, how soon? There are no shortages of dogs needing homes, but we also knew that we needed to have a dog 45 pounds or under so that we could properly care for their needs as they and we age. For Margot and me,



the question became, when? How much time should we give Jessie? How would we know? In a matter of two weeks, it was like Jessie aged two years. It was difficult to watch. Our hearts broke for him.

We had been searching shelters and rescues for a dog that fit our needs. But we came up with nothing, until one day when we were not even looking, a very shy 6 month old lab mix popped up on our radar. She had come from difficult circumstances and her life was also totally turned upside down for the past month. We took Jessie to meet her. She was painfully shy but Margot and I have had dogs like this before and have done very well with them. She lit up when she met Jessie. He wasn't sure what to do but we could tell that he accepted her. We adopted her and brought her home. We named her Maya.



**Jessie and Maya - The Healing Begins**

Maya has given Jessie the companionship he needs to heal. In turn, Jessie is giving Maya an amazing friend and role model as she decompresses from her first tumultuous months of life. Make no mistake, Maya does not replace Grace or Calee in Jessie's life. She is a new addition. He still is dealing with his grief and we will give him all the space and time he needs. Sometimes Maya is too much for his now old joints. But when she snuggles up for sleeping, she is just what a senior dog with an aching heart needs. This is the start of healing for us all. Grief will take its course. But love will heal the ache and move us forward. Grief calls out to us and says "Don't be afraid to love again. Love is the way out of grief." So we welcome Maya with all that she brings as we all walk together into a new day.



**Maya the first day we met her**



**Maya just 3 weeks later**

# Euthanasia From A Veterinarian's Perspective

by Christine Schneider, DVM cVMA

Euthanasia is a difficult topic to discuss for many people. And often, when people find out I'm a veterinarian, the initial response is to express sympathies because my job must be terribly sad. And this is not an attempt to convince you that euthanasias are not sad, because they are very sad. They are likely the most difficult part of my job, right after telling an owner that their pet has a terminal disease that I cannot fix. But euthanasia is derived from the Greek words "eu" (good) and "thanatos" (death). And it is a privilege to provide a good death for my patients.

Veterinary school does very little to prepare you for euthanasias and all the various situations surrounding them. My first solo euthanasia after graduation was a down donkey, that also coincidentally was extremely overweight and decided that a dark barn without power would be his final resting place. With the owners closely watching and doing their best to illuminate the emotional situation with shaky flashlights, the donkey passed peacefully and without incident. I remember leaving the farm and barely pulling out of the driveway before it hit me that I had purposefully taken a life for the first time.



**Dr. Christine helping Directors Dawn & Margot with Grace (left) on her last day.**

While I know in the rational side of my brain that euthanasia is often the kindest decision in certain situations, it is difficult to explain that to the emotional side of my brain. I preserve my sanity and prevent breakdowns by ensuring that every euthanasia I perform allows the pet to transition comfortably and effortlessly, while also allowing the owner and others present to spend their final moments with their pet honoring its life. My technique for euthanasia has evolved over the years, both through experience and my special training in hospice care, and guarantees the pet feels no pain or distress. I will only perform euthanasias that are warranted and have declined several "convenience euthanasias" in my ten years of practicing. I also allow myself to have space from the veterinary side of my life and spend my free time "refilling" my emotional tank so I am able to continue to practice to the best of my capabilities.

There's an additional component to euthanasias as the on-site veterinarian at Spring Farm. The past few weeks have been difficult at the sanctuary as we've lost several animals – a horse due to colic, a cat to unmanageable congestive heart failure and two dogs with geriatric conditions that were affecting their quality of life. In fact, I had to pause writing this article as I had to go euthanize one of our cats who required intensive, daily care as a hospice patient who was affected by advanced dementia. There's an additional burden euthanizing these animals; I know them personally, I love many of them as if they were my own, and I recognize the connections that our staff and directors have with each of them. I mourn each of them privately but am honored that I was able to provide each one with a good death.

**Editor's Note:** End of life issues are never easy but they are the most important decisions we make with our animals. Dr. Christine shares such an important and delicate part of being a veterinarian in this article. Veterinarians are facing very tough times right now and it is taking an emotional toll on many of them. Suicide rates have risen in the veterinary profession. Please keep this in mind when dealing with your own veterinarians. They are often up against very difficult issues that take a huge emotional toll. They work under enormous pressure on a daily basis. Let's show them our heartfelt appreciation.



# Victoria, Delilah, and Tiny Tim

by Bonnie Reynolds



Victoria

"There's a girl here with three kittens. I think one is already dead. Another's almost dead." It was Dawn's voice on the walkie-talkie. I rushed up to the Hall. Without even looking at the kittens, I ran to the kitchen and prepared a bottle of KMR kitten formula. Then back to the carrier that held the kittens. They were not quite three weeks old. One of them, a tiger calico, was spunky and crying for help. A black-and-white was at least moving. I reached into the back for the one thought already dead. A tortoiseshell calico. She was limp, head flopping, but then her front paws moved in a sort of seizure. I started getting formula into her mouth. The desperate motions of her arms continued, but she began swallowing the liquid. She drank and drank. I put her down then and took up the black-and-white. He, too, latched on, and drank eagerly. Then the spunky little tiger calico, who greedily downed a whole ounce. Then back to the "dead" torti, and so forth.

I sat with them for over two hours, feeding one after the other. In those two hours, between the three of them, they polished off over three bottles of formula, over nine ounces, an enormous amount for kittens that age. Dawn had assumed that they were sick. They weren't sick at all. They were starving! Dying of dehydration. Another hour or so and it would have been curtains for the calico and the black-and-white. I finally put them onto a warm cozy pad to sleep it off for a couple of hours and told Nancy, our office manager, to call the young lady who had brought them in and assure her that they were all going to make it. Someone had left the kittens on her front porch a week before. She had been trying to feed them, but she had a full-time job, and, as she told our office manager "I didn't know what I was doing."



Tiny Tim



Delilah

Successfully feeding newborn/young kittens is very easy while at the same time being very difficult. Newborns to two weeks need to be fed every two hours. Round the clock! Two to three weeks can ease into every three hours, then three to four weeks every four hours. Only after four weeks can you get lazy and sleep the whole night without dragging yourself out of bed to feed (and be ready for very hungry kittens first thing in the morning.) Up to about four weeks they also need to be stimulated to eliminate after each feeding...which is what their Mama does for them. So that your equipment for feeding includes a towel, your bottle of warm formula, a dish of warm water and something like cotton balls or even toilet paper. If you find yourself with orphan kittens, and are not up to a very grueling schedule for a few weeks, it is best

to immediately find someone who is. In the meantime, keeping some canned or powdered kitten formula and a nursing bottle on hand could be the difference between life or death for orphans.

The feisty tortoiseshell became Victoria. The calico became Delilah, because, as she drank her formula and came back to life, the way that she looked at me with such huge eyes reminded me of two other Delilahs, a cat and a miniature pig, who had looked at me that way. The black-and-white kitten, half the size of the two girls, became Tiny Tim.

# Saving Birds From Backyard Hazards

by Matt Perry

**F**or most of us, our nature watching takes place mainly in our own backyards. Indeed, quite a few bird species can be drawn to a suburban or rural yard if food, shelter, and water is offered. It follows that if we are actively attracting animals onto our property, then the onus is on us to make our habitat a healthy and safe place; an oasis where dangers are minimized as much as possible. As it happens, the biggest threats to birds in our yards are domestic cats and picture



Rose Breasted Grosbeak

windows. If you have outdoor cats, you may want to reconsider feeding the birds. Although not all cats specialize in preying on birds, enough do to make it an unacceptable risk for your bird patrons. Indeed, for the sake of wildlife, cats are best kept indoors. As well as being ecologically appropriate, it is better for the cats too. Indoor cats tend to live longer, healthier lives. They aren't exposed to as many diseases, parasites, or the hazards of busy roads. Natural predators like hawks, owls, and foxes, should not be lumped into the same category as domestic cats and they shouldn't be resented for plying their trade. When we make our yard into an oasis for prey species, the native predators have little choice but to include our yard in their hunting circuit. Unlike domestic cats, native predators fill an important ecological niche. Certainly, the environment is a less healthy place without them.



American Goldfinch & Indigo Bunting

Just as serious as cat predation on birds is the problem of window impacts. Birds see reflected sky and trees in glass and are deceived into believing they can simply fly through it. A startled bird is much more likely to make this error as they attempt a quick flight to safety. Bird deaths and injuries caused from impacts with windows and glass doors are something few nature watchers deal with effectively despite the toll it can take. We all want a fantastic view of the birds, and that's why we feed them in the first place, but shouldn't we take care to limit the danger

posed by all that glass? For years, proponents of bird conservation advised us to put decals of hawk profiles on our windows to discourage songbirds from hitting the glass. The bird's natural aversion to the shape of a raptor was meant to frighten them into veering away and not striking the window. Unfortunately, birds soon discover that the decal is incapable of harming them. A better method of mitigating window strikes is to locate feeders well away from windows. Most people loathe to do this since it means sacrificing their close views of the birds. Although rarely employed, a highly effective method of reducing window strikes is to hang a framed screen in front of the window. The screen is not reflective and dissuades birds from attempting to fly through. Startled birds that do strike it, bounce off and are unharmed. We made screens like this for two of our windows and it significantly reduced the number of window strikes in our yard. Putting up screens and keeping our cats inside are two positive steps all of us can take to keep our songbird friends healthy and keep them coming to our yards where we can enjoy them.



# Spring Farm CARES Featured Animal

by Dawn

## Felix and Leo

**D**onkeys Felix and Leo can only be featured together as they are a duo for sure. They arrived just months old in late 2003 from a most horrific animal cruelty case. It is hard in the photo to the right to see just how skinny they were because of how thick their hair was but they had only 1% body fat. They could barely walk. The night they came to us, the temps dipped into the low 20's. The veterinarian told us that they most likely would not have survived that night. We got them just in time.



Felix & Leo the day after they arrived - 2003

Felix, the brown one, is a few months older than Leo. For years, he suffered from extreme PTSD and had horrible nightmares in the middle of the night. We'd hear him screaming and come to the barn to find him running in circles in his stall while screaming at the top of his lungs. We'd comfort him until he calmed down. It took years to heal that fright, but now he understands and truly feels that he is safe.



Leo, the gray one, is smaller than Felix but he is actually the boss. And Felix understands this very well. They are inseparable despite the fact that Leo bosses Felix around. The two can spend hours together playing with a jolly ball and either walking around with it in both of their mouths or passing it from one to the other. Leo has a harder time trusting situations than Felix, but both of them trust us as we have been here with them since the night they came. We have all been through a lot together.

Leo and Felix today

Donkeys are extremely sensitive animals. They form lifetime relationships and bonds. They are often viewed as being stubborn and nasty but that is because they are largely misunderstood. Donkeys are very different than horses. They think differently. They see life differently. A donkey will very carefully make decisions before acting on anything. Horses tend to follow the herd without question. But donkeys need to be sure it is safe and in their best interest before they will try anything. They are loving, gentle creatures. Felix and Leo love what we call donkey hugs. We wrap our arms around them and they lean in and hug us back. It is hard to believe they've been with us for 19 years now.





# Around the Farm

## What's New?



### In Loving Memory of Whisper

In August we lost our beloved horse friend Whisper. Whisper was 30 years old and had many health issues due to poor treatment she received prior to coming to us. But in the end, it was a twist in her small intestine that left us reeling with the realization that we could no longer help her. It was time to let her go.

Whisper was a cantankerous mare with a huge presence. But she was also a gentle soul with a heart of gold. She had been badly mistreated and those scars she carried deep within her. She felt humans had betrayed her and she was slow to let that go. But all of us who cared for her know the truth of the real Whisper. She always had a special nicker for her caretakers as they brought her food to her. And recently, she developed a love for greeting people on tours and workshops. She is deeply missed.



### Meet Our New Arrivals: Timmy & Tommy

We were called to assist with a two-month-old Nigerian Dwarf goat who was thought to be blind and who had been rejected by his mother at birth. Timmy is the gray one in the photo above. But after careful veterinary examination, it has been determined that Timmy indeed is not blind but most likely suffered brain damage at birth from lack of oxygen. And we have a big problem. He did/does very well while being bottle fed. But when he would, should, have begun to show interest in eating solids, it did not happen. He has no natural impulse to eat or to graze. To give him both a companion and to provide a model of the behavior that he needs to learn in order to survive, we asked for and obtained one of his siblings, Tommy. But at this point his prognosis is guarded. Grass and hay remain alien to his senses. We are asking the angels for a miracle. Please join us in keeping him in your thoughts and prayers.