



SOUL PET

Most pet lovers I know have had that one special pet. The one that stole that special place in their heart, meant more to them than any other pet before or since. I had one, most of my friends have had one....I call this pet your “soul pet”. It doesn’t mean you don’t love the other pets in your life with all your heart; it just is not the same with any other pet and unless you have experienced it, it is hard to understand.

My soul dog was a Cocker Spaniel named Buddy – he is the one holding the duckie. Buddy went everywhere with me, in fact, I wasn’t near as welcome at my friends and family’s homes if Buddy wasn’t with me. Yes, he was smart, cute, funny, well behaved and a joy to be around, but there was something more to our relationship, he was special in a way that I can’t really describe.

He had an impact on our entire family. My Grandma was very ill and when she came home from the hospital, she just lay in bed - it was like she had lost the will to live. About that time an orphaned 4lb ball of fur happened into my life. That evening, I took Buddy to visit my Grandma and her eyes lit up. There was a visible shift in her demeanor as she started to pet him. The next day I came over and told her Buddy was in the living room and did she want to come watch him play with the ball – she got such a kick out of watching him play! I started bringing Buddy over as often as I could and she fell in love with him; as we all did. My Grandma got better and better and I started leaving him with her during the day to care for while I was at work.

Over the years, Buddy had a special bond with my Grandma; one of her favorite things was when he would lie on her feet to keep them warm. Buddy died too early at the age of 7; three days later my Grandma passed away sitting in the chair where Buddy always warmed her feet. Skeptics may say this is just coincidence but I believe differently. I was there; I lived it and I saw the incredible difference this dog made in the lives and health of our family.

I have felt some guilt over the years that my other dogs haven’t been as special to me as Buddy, but I have come to realize that having the gift of a “soul pet” is just that – it is a gift to be cherished and remembered. I have bonded with my other dogs, I love them very much and have and will grieve when they pass; it is just not quite the same.

As a trainer, I have clients from time to time that have lost their soul pet and have gotten a new puppy or kitten. The first meeting is filled with stories about the old dog or cat and why it was better or smarter than the one they have now and can’t understand why this

one isn't like the last one. They have a need to talk about the one they lost and I let them; then I gently try to explain to them that they will never replace their soul pet and it is not fair to the new pet or to themselves to compare the lost one and the new one. I have noticed that it is especially hard when the new pet is the same breed as the one they lost.

At first, there is generally a big disconnect between the owners and the pet in this situation. There is a lot of frustration – what was easy with the other dog is now very difficult with the new one. The soul pet loved to play with balls, this one doesn't, the soul pet was housetrained in 1 day, the new one keeps having accidents; the soul dog learned how to get the paper on its own. Funny how humans tend to have “euphoric recall” – we remember only the good things and forget the bad. Chances are, the soul pet was not housetrained in 1 day and it took quite a while for him/her to learn to get the paper.

Once the client understands what a soul pet is and starts to really think clearly about how much time, effort and even frustration it really took in the beginning with their soul pet and they start to look at the new pet as a unique being, the new relationship starts to smooth out and eventually blossom. We tend to feel guilty for loving another pet after losing our soul pet, but until we let go of that guilt, the new relationship doesn't have a chance to develop.

So, to all those who have or had soul pets, acknowledge it, cherish it, remember it and be thankful to have known a love so strong, unique and unconditional. I like to think of my soul pet sitting at the end of the rainbow bridge with a tennis ball in his mouth welcoming all newcomers crossing the bridge with a friendly sniff, play bow and an energetic game of chase.

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