

the wild kingdom, but we can at least explore the literature of people who have had astonishing encounters with all kinds of creatures. Until we begin to understand the power and purpose of animals, we may not grant them the nobility they innately possess. Only when we lose them do we drop our dominant/superior-species-role and admit we have been deprived of a lot more than just their companionship.

McElroy's book has a long chapter entitled, *"Going Gently: Love, Loss, and Death."* That so much space is given to heartfelt stories of people parting from their pets and *vice versa*, tells us how significant the experience is to life itself. The profound anguish mutually shared is *"a feeling that reconciles the false duality between human and animal and between humanity and nature"* (Michael W. Fox, Vice President, The Humane Society of the United States.)

My own experience is fresh. One year after the sudden loss of Piper, after which I vowed never to ask for this kind of grief again, I began to suffer even worse from Scottie deprivation. You know exactly what I mean. We found a Rescue dog who had lost his first 'dad' some time ago, and he was deliriously happy to get a new one. "Scottie" hardly left his master's side the first two weeks. But my husband soon became catastrophically ill, and was gone just six months later! Scottie clearly had been through this experience before. He knew what was happening and became somber and withdrawn. When my husband died, Scottie went into a deep mourning period which lasted several weeks. I had to work hard to draw him out. His disappointment was palpable,

and he didn't want to bond with another human being.

My concentration on relieving his distress helped me cope with my own grief. Scottie let me cry on his furry shoulder, and he licked my tears. Together, slowly, we worked our way through grief and loneliness a day, a night, at a time. Our mutual sadness was the basis of our initial bonding--a remarkable occurrence since we were virtual strangers to each other. Scotties are, indeed, close to being "fur people," and when our world crumbles around us, our dogs are there for us. Those big brown expressive eyes tell us how much they understand our sorrow.

Basically, we need the unconditional love of companion animals. All other earthly love has strings attached, boundaries, and is often withdrawn because of our imperfections. Our pets accept us the way we are, and that's why they fill such a deep space in our lives. They confirm our sense of self-worth and relieve us of social charades. They root and ground us in honest communication and unpretentious love. Lessons in good and joyful living are freely bestowed simply by being who they are with us. Unconsciously, they inspire us to try to live up to their trust and complimentary character affirmation. Finally, by observing their mourning the loss of one of us, the animals redeem the process of grieving from cultural inhibitions, and show us we need not disguise our feelings or hold them in check. If we allow grief to run its course with respect and understanding for its purpose, healing will likely come in time.

*"If what heals can bless
can what blesses heal?"*

[*Editor's Note: Readers are asked to send stories, poems, or recommendations for book reviews to: LITERARY SCOTTIE, c/o GSM, 1028 Girard NE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. Fax: 505/266-6726. GSM desires to promote creative writing on Scottie themes and welcomes especially quality fiction writing in the form of short stories.]