

Good Bye Gwen
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I remember going to get Gwen from a farm in St. Michael Minnesota on a September day in 1992. She was the last of the litter and cute as a button. I remember when she was too small to jump on or off of the couch; she didn't do stairs till she was 5 months old. I remember when she ate \$17 cash off the coffee table. I remember the first time we tried to leave her out of her crate. She was 6 months old and we were only gone for an hour. You would have thought a tornado hit the kitchen, and she ate just the lapel off the suit Jay had bought 2 weeks before. I remember the countless hours of throwing the tennis ball. I remember the time she touched an electric fence at a friend's farm. Mostly I remember her sweetness and the endless love she gave.

Sadly, last month my husband and I decided to put Gwen to sleep. She was 14 years old, she had a great life, and it was time. We knew it was coming for a while. She had a bad back and she had some trouble getting around. She was also getting a little forgetful. We agonized over the decision. Everyone, myself included, always hopes their animals will die peacefully in their sleep after a long happy life. Unfortunately that does not often happen, and it didn't for us. We were thankful, however, that we did not have to watch her suffer.

Being a veterinarian is a great career, but because dog and cat life spans are relatively short, death is, unfortunately, something I deal with on a regular basis. My personal experience has given me an even more empathetic view to the tough decisions my clients face every day. There are many things that come into play when making this decision. From the quality of life of the pet, to the people at home, to the diagnosis and prognosis of the illness, to financial considerations.

Quality of life can be difficult to assess. Some clinical signs that your pet is nearing the end are not eating, not drinking, not greeting you when you come home, not sleeping, whining, panting, having trouble getting into a comfortable position, not moving much, or anything that stops your pet from doing the things s/he loves. One of the things I tell many clients is if you wake up every day hoping you pet has died in the night, it may be time to let them go. If your pet has had a slow, gradual decline it becomes difficult to actually set a time (i.e. what makes today different then yesterday?) Sometimes it's helpful to think back to a time when your pet was at his/her happiest; what things did they love to do? Can they still do those things, or do they even want to? Are they happier for more hours than sad in their daily life?

The other side of the coin is that you cannot go back or change your mind. The decision is final; therefore it is important that everyone in the house is in agreement. Some clients ask me to make the decision for them. While I can help with information, the actual decision is much too personal. Every situation is unique and has to be addressed individually.

In the end, the decision to put your pet to sleep is often the last nice thing you can do for him/her.

Good Bye Gwen, you will be missed.