We’ve had enough warm sunny days that we can finally believe that spring is here. Of course we’ll still have plenty of rainy days, but those few dry days with lots of sun have been very welcome.

Much of this current issue of SPEAKS deals with the death of a dog. I had been planning to group some articles together because I had been thinking more about it, knowing that I would be losing one of my dogs to cancer. As it turned out, I did lose him before we went to press, but I also lost another one, totally unexpected. Pulling the articles together for SPEAKS was helpful in dealing with the grief brought on by the loss of two of my Shelties.

SPDR has been fortunate enough to be able to begin an endowment, which we hope will earn enough interest to be a continued source of funding in the future. Possible uses of this income could be for a special needs fund for those dogs that have unusu-

continued on page 7
Saying Good-Bye to Your Dog...

Continued from page 1

feel it is their responsibility to be there and comfort their dog until its last breath. More owners are discovering how peaceful euthanasia can be when performed in their homes by mobile veterinarians.

Almost everyone goes through the “what-if’s?” Should I have tried alternative treatments, should I have treated him differently, did I do as much as I could, was he in pain, should I have euthanized him sooner? Knowing that your dog had a good life and felt loved goes a long way toward making you feel less guilty when he is gone.

Last year Dr. Hanna Ekstrom gave a talk to our SPDR volunteers at a general meeting. Her talk was very well received and provoked a lot of discussion. Dr. Hanna performs in home vet care and provides euthanasia for pets in their own familiar surroundings. She was kind enough to pass out copies of her talk and has given us permission to reprint it here. Although the article is geared toward veterinarians, there is good information on how you would want your chosen veterinarian to assist with the passing of your dog. Hopefully it will help you make more informed decisions when it’s time to say good-bye to your dog.

For a complete list of veterinarians who provide in home services, both regular care and euthanasia, search for in home veterinary care in Washington on your Internet browser.

Healing the Hurt:

Thoughts about Euthanasia and practical ways to help make saying “Good-Bye” just a little easier.

By Dr. Hanna Ekstrom

We as pet owners are in a unique position of being able to help pets transition gracefully from life to death, either with appropriate hospice care or by choosing humane euthanasia. There are no clear rights or wrongs, but planning for the end-of-life can make all the difference, not only for your pet, but for you and your family.

I am reminded daily how very lucky our pets here in the United States are; they live such rich lives, both giving and receiving love, providing comfort and joy to their families, and themselves enjoying better care than do many people around the globe. Over the past 20 years of practice, I have come to practice by a few tenets, and will try to summarize them here. Some of them seem self-explanatory, others are less intuitive, and many are things I am sure the majority of the group here already does. Still, writing this talk crystallized my thoughts in regards hospice and euthanasia, which is good. In fact, I think it is very helpful to think about these tenets when choosing how your pet is going to exit this world, how and when it will happen and who will assist you. Many practitioners are wonderful, caring people, but simply don’t realize that a single word or action can taint a memory and cause many months or years of grief. Your veterinarian should be aware that how they speak and interact with pets and their owners will affect the owner’s perception of the process of the death of their pet. Veterinarians must be extremely careful to not force our own beliefs about hospice and death, natural or by euthanasia, on our clients. People have different capacities in terms of how much they can bear, and what is hard for them, and we as practitioners must respect those differences.

I would like to talk some more about euthanasia, because it is a part of hospice; indeed, perhaps the most important part for those pets that cannot transition peacefully from life to death either on their own or via hospice care. This talk was originally written for animal health practitioners,
Healing the Hurt...
continued from page 2

but I believe it is applicable for you as members of SPDR. I offer these ideas to you with the realization that these are just my thoughts, and that I have these beliefs due to my experiences; you may take what I say and use it as you best see fit. Also, when lined up like this in point form, some of these recommendations seem mechanical or false, but that is absolutely not my intent. My goal, as is yours, I am sure, is to minimize suffering of both person and pet. Remembering these things can help us do just that.

Philosophies:
• In my opinion, hospice should be offered as an option only after careful consideration of the likelihood of compliance.

The worst case scenario is having a hospice patient suffer due to inadequate attention. Ask yourself “How likely is this person to be compliant? What is the worst case scenario if they are not able to physically or emotionally manage their pet’s hospice care? How am I going to follow up?”

This is a very real issue for our pets, as their families for the most part live very busy lives. A treatment plan that might be totally doable for one person could be totally impossible for another. Encouraging a family who cannot practically manage their pet’s condition sets up a situation where guilt is almost inevitable, as is suffering on their pet’s part. We must always balance the needs of the pets with the needs of their families, and do everything we can to prevent feelings of guilt. It is hard enough to lose a pet; to feel guilty makes it almost unbearable.

• Evaluate also the risk of possible emergency euthanasia.

I am much more comfortable allowing a kitty with chronic kidney disease the option of hospice in the home than I am the cat whose lungs are filled with fluid or the dog with bone cancer. Having to rush a pet to the ER for emergency euthanasia can easily erase all the good accumulated by having a few extra days at home with the pet. I always say “Better a day, week, or month too early than a day, week, or month too late.” Help the owner be brave enough to make the choice to set their pet free when you believe the risk of emergency euthanasia is greater than the gain the family and pet win by continuing hospice.

• Remember that everyone is in a different place depending on what has happened with previous pets, where they are emotionally and in terms of capacity. Listen to them and try to put yourself in their shoes.

Respect their choices, and once these choices are made, help them accept their decision by validating what they have chosen, even if it perhaps is not one you may have made.

continued on page 4

www.spdrdogs.org
Healing the Hurt...  
*continued from page 3*

- Remember that loss of a pet brings other, older grief to the surface.

They may not only be mourning loss of this pet, but of pets and loved ones they have previously lost. Guide them to talk about these losses, if they want to. Let them know that this is normal. For people with children who are afraid of the grief their child will suffer with loss of their pet, I sometimes say that our pets have many “jobs” and that helping us learn to grieve a loss is one of them. Losing a pet, if handled properly, can prepare a child (or even adult) for other losses they will inevitably face in the future.

I sometimes say that I wish I could help it hurt less, I wish I could make their pet young again. If the pet is young, the loss premature, I validate that their feelings that life is not fair; it isn’t. On the other hand, that does not diminish in any way all the good times they have shared with their pet, so I try to help them reminisce, ask them to tell me their favorite stories or memories about their pet.

- If they have chosen euthanasia, I remind them that they are giving their pet a gift; that it is an act of kindness and of courage on their part.

I do all I can to minimize their guilt. I am firm with them if need be; I say that it is okay to be sad, but that they should try to release their guilt. It won’t help them and it won’t help their pet. In fact, their pet would probably not want them to feel so, if I am allowed to anthropomorphize here for a minute. I remind them that life is a circle; that ideally we may all be lucky enough to have both a good life and a good death; that they will survive this, and that time will ease their grief. Also, I let them know that if at any point their grief feels overwhelming or is not diminishing over time, that they can call me, and that there are avenues for help: groups and counselors they can meet with, books they can read, and things they can do to memorialize their pet that can help them process their grief in a healthy way.

- Ask about how they want to handle things with their children.

Children need different things at different ages; please see the handout by Barbara Handelman, M.Ed. on my website www.YourRainbowBridgeVet.com. We also always leave a book entitled When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death, by Marc Brown and his wife, Laurie Krasnie. We have found it immensely useful to children and their parents to use as a starting point for discussions about grief and death. My own children still refer back to the book on occasion; it seems to provide them comfort.

**Practicalities:**

Little things we do can make a big difference in how owners experience the loss of their pet:

- Remember that the client’s experience begins with that
*continued on page 5*
first phone call, and make sure that everyone on your team understands how important this is.

Even if you have already fielded 10 calls today about pets near end of life, remember that how you speak and what you say will stay with the owner forever and they need 100% of our empathy. Express your sympathy first, and acknowledge how hard it is for them to make that call. Use an appropriate tone of voice, speed of speech; be patient, and help the client by guiding the conversation if needed.

• Explain the process completely. Tell them what you are going to do and exactly what they can expect once their animal passes.

It is okay to use a little humor; it can help lighten up a tense situation. Sometimes people say that they have already done this before with another vet so I don’t need to explain, but I say that I always like to tell them what will happen as I don’t know what the other vet has said and what they have not said and that that there are different ways of setting a pet free, so that I feel more comfortable personally letting them know what will happen.

I have seen owners who are truly scarred by previous experiences with pet death and euthanasia. Humane euthanasia and the counseling that occurs before, during and after gives the practitioner the opportunity to re-interpret, to reframe prior losses, to assuage old fears, guilt or sadness the client may never have processed. This, I think, is one of the most helpful things we can do to help people heal after the loss of a loved one.

• Ask their preferences.

Do they want us to notify their regular vet? Do they want a paw-print or a lock of hair? If they are not burying their own pet, would they like to send him or her with anything, a bed or special blanket or toy, a favorite treat? Do they want to help carry their pet? Do they want their other pets to be in the room or come in after the euthanasia? Do they want to set their pet free on the couch, under the table, by the window, in the garden?

• Reassure them with words, touch, and eye contact.

Let them know that they are making the right choice, and that how they are feeling and acting is normal, that they are not alone.

• Be still and quiet.

Evaluate where the owner is and follow their lead. Some people like to talk about their pet, about the funniest things their pet did or their favorite memories; others like to be silent. Some people like to be touched, others need space.

• Let them know that it is okay for them to do whatever they need to do during the process of euthanasia; some people sing, others read a poem or remembrance; crying is okay, it is natural.

Help them breathe by breathing deeply and slowly yourself, and if the owner is becoming overwhelmed and panicky, support them physically through a firm hand on their shoulder or arms and by telling them in a confident tone that they can do this, that they are strong.

• Encourage the family to take some time alone with their pet once he or she has passed.

Some people are afraid to do this, but I almost always find that in the end, they are grateful that they have had that time. However, if an owner expresses that they truly don’t want time alone, respect that choice as well. It has been my experience that people know themselves best, so it is wisest to honor their choice unless it is one which conflicts with my own internal code of ethics.

In summary, I believe that through empathy and education, we can make the process of losing a pet peaceful, gentle, and even celebratory. This is a worthy goal!

© Dr. Hanna Ekstrom
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continued on page 7

Many Helping Hands

A special thanks goes to Bev Wallace for “Phoebe,” Sylvie McGee for her help and Mary Kay for her service.

Jan Vanwyk & Kym Aasen

A Life Saved

Being faced with financial difficulties, we had to give up our beloved “Blu” to you after she needed her second surgery for an intestinal blockage. We miss her terribly, but I have comfort knowing you will find her a good home. This is much better then the alternative of putting her down.

Sheffanie Scriba

Grateful to SPDR

Recently we lost two of our long term rescue Shelties. Both came from shelters and were scheduled to be euthanized if not rescued by SPDR. Lucy was a gentle soul, deemed unadoptable because she was returned to the shelter by previous adopters. She had seizures and other medical issues and stayed on with us for the rest of her life.

Tigger was only 6 months old but had outstayed his time in the shelter after two weeks. He was huge for a Sheltie and none of our waiting adopters wanted him. So he stayed on as well and turned out to be one of those once-in-a-lifetime dogs. Everyone who ever met him loved him and he loved everybody. Sadly his cancer caught up with him at the age of 13. We are truly grateful that these dogs came into our lives via SPDR. Their loss has left a big hole in our hearts and home.

Lynn and Jim Erckmann

The Country Life

I adopted “Sophia Maria” in 1998. She was wonderful, loving, protective, and unbelievably intelligent. She was the runt of the litter and had a few health issues, but lived to be fourteen years old. We now live in Michigan on ten acres and Sophia Maria spent the last years of her life chasing rabbits and squirrels and loving every minute of it. Thank you so much for allowing us to adopt her. She was really special and we miss her terribly.

Barb Cobb

Save the Date! July 22 SPDR Picnic!

In memory of Tigger
Loved by Jim & Lynn Erckmann
From Our President...
Continued from page 1

ally high medical expenses, as well as develop other educational programs or programs to benefit the public such as our past free offer of spays and neuters.

SPDR was featured on King 5 television’s New Day Northwest at the end of February. Doberman breed rep Toshia Maund did an excellent job of explaining what we do as well as field questions. She was joined by several breed reps that brought dogs to showcase. There is a link to the video on our website homepage.

Pencil in July 22 on your calendar for our annual picnic for our volunteers and adopters. It will be at O.O. Denny Park on the shores of Lake Washington in Kirkland.

We’re always looking for SPEAKS writers and I want to thank two volunteers, Karen Kurt Teal and Robert Kinch, for writing articles for this issue.

I want to extend a special thanks to Patty Carey for six years of excellent service on the Board of Directors. Her term is up in April unfortunately. Patty brought good ideas and logical thinking as well as following through with projects. She’ll still be volunteering and continuing to assist with our Yahoo e-mail group lists.

Remember that SPDR has a Facebook page. We’d love to hear from adopters or have reps post stories about available dogs.

Lynn

SPEAKS writers
Karen Kurt Teal
Robert Kinch

From Our President... Continued from page 1

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City of Seattle Employee Giving
When faced with the loss of your pet and euthanasia is the only option, consider the renewed health other pets might gain from tissue transplant. Veterinary Transplant Services is a veterinary tissue bank located in Kent, Washington. VTS has made a difference in the lives of thousands of pets through tissue donation.

Dog owners can donate tissues after their pet has died, and these can be transplanted to other pets to help improve and sometimes save the life of dogs with health problems, such as fractures, cancer, tendon injuries, cornea trauma, etc.

Every day many perfectly healthy dogs are euthanized because of intractable aggression or trauma. In these sad situations, perhaps it would bring some small positive light to know that the animal could become a tissue donor and go on to help many other animals live better, healthier lives. VTS can provide that link between the donors and the patients who need these grafts.

Although there are many human tissue banks in the world providing tissues to help surgeons care for their patients with cancer, trauma and degenerative diseases, there are only a few veterinary tissue banks. VTS was founded 10 years ago and has established a service that now provides transplant grafts to veterinary surgeons around the world. So many veterinarians find that they need our grafts for their patients that it is difficult to keep up with the demand.

It is a challenge to identify dog owners who have had to make the painful choice to euthanize their animal. VTS would like the opportunity to talk with individuals who have already chosen to have a dog euthanized. VTS does not in any way encourage euthanasia; they discourage it, in fact. But they realize that there are a few animals that will be euthanized whether or not there is an opportunity to donate tissues. They want to offer the option of donation to the individuals facing the loss of a dog in their care to see if donation of tissues after their animal is euthanized is something that they would want.

If an owner chooses to participate by donating tissues, VTS obtains an informed consent, covers all the costs, and can provide a private cremation service for the owner if they wish to have the ashes returned.

VTS reaches out to rescue groups such as SPDR because on rare occasions there may be a dog in their care that just cannot be safely placed and must be euthanized. VTS hopes that by offering their services, it may help in some measure to ease the loss by knowing that that animal has been able to help many other dogs live healthier lives.

Please visit their website if you are interested in learning more about who they are and what they do (www.VTSonline.com). There is a section about the Donor Program (http://vtsonline.com/donor/index.shtml), and also a section called Case Studies, (http://vtsonline.com/products/casestudies/index.shtml) that shows some of the cases where bone graft has helped animals recover from some serious orthopedic, corneal, or dental problems.

Edited from a letter to SPDR by Helen Newman, Ph.D., President and CEO, Veterinary Transplant Services
Meet The Breed: Pug

By Karen Kurt Teal SPDR Volunteer

Breed History:
The pug was bred for companionship for Chinese Emperors in the Shang dynasty, before 400 B.C. The breed was then cultivated by Tibetan monks, which seems fitting. The pug is at times quite active, but its moments of long quietness and watchful brooding seem to fit its contemplative past. The pug breed came to Europe with Dutch trading vessels in the sixteenth century. Today, you may see a pug proudly patrolling the streets of Florence or Singapore, plodding the pavement in London or “driving” a truck in America while seated in the lap of a delivery person. Wherever the pug appears, it is confident, cheery, and regal.

What the Pug needs:
Your steady attention and recognition.

The pug is a people-oriented dog, fond of being near his or her owner all day and all night. Pugs live to please humans and to make them laugh. They like to be noticed and praised, and they thrive on personal body-to-body contact. They want to be part of the activity in the house, frequently watching the world from on top of the couch, surveying kitchen procedures, “helping” with chores, and sliding in next to its humans while they watch TV or take naps. They are not outside dogs, but they relish time taking walks and showing off.

Exercise
Because the pug is an enthusiastic eater, it must be exercised every day. Lean dogs live longer and suffer fewer illnesses than overweight dogs (Pug Dog Club of America). Exercise for a pug is a gentle walk for 20 or 30 minutes. Younger pugs need to run off more energy, so it is beneficial to find a safe, open place for them to run hard. Older dogs are content to take slow walks. Walks should take place twice a day.

Grooming
The pug is an easy-care dog. Their short coats need only brushing. Ears need to be cleaned and washed out at least once a week, and the nose “roll” needs to be cleaned once a day. Toenails need to be kept scrupulously short and well-trimmed (Pug Dog Club of America). Many pugs might need to have their anal glands “expressed” from time to time. Teeth need to be brushed frequently. Pugs have irregular teeth and they tend to collect tartar. Unless tended carefully, a pug may lose some teeth.

Food and Veterinary Care
Pugs enjoy their food and will make considerable appeals for human food. High quality dog food should be carefully selected in order to keep the pug healthy and trim. Suitable food for an average pug can cost about $150 or more a year.

Pugs need regular checkups. They are a healthy breed and will live long, rewarding lives (life expectancy 12-14 years or more) if they are kept thin, exercised, and treated by a veterinarian.

Pugs have certain illnesses to which they are prone: eye problems, hip problems, breathing problems, and mast cell tumors. All of these can be treated if found early.

continued on page 10
Meet the Breed...
continued from page 9

Do Not Get a Pug If...
You are going to go away for eight or more hours each day. Pugs grow lonely.

Do not get a pug if you cannot endure puffing and snorting. Some pugs pant and snort more than others. Having said that, many pug owners find the rumbling purring and breathing sounds calming.

Do not get a pug if you are not ready to cope with heavy shedding.

Do Get a Pug If...
You can give the dog love every day and know its needs. If you can handle taking walks twice a day, you are ready to take care of this dog.

As an owner, you will have to be vigilant about watching the thermometer and preparing a cool place for the dog to stay when it is over 70 degrees F. The breed has difficulty cooling off because of its short nose.

Breed Characteristics

The pug’s general appearance:
The AKC calls the pug’s look “symmetrical.” That means from the side, you could draw an imaginary square from shoulders to tail, tail to back foot, back foot to front, and front foot to head. This compactness and symmetry are highly desirable. Muscles should be firm.

The pug’s head will always be round. The expression is alert. When the pug is ready to play, the expression will be full of zest. The pug’s ears are thin. They are also small and should flop over the ear canal. A true pug will have that classic, slightly “undershot” bite that makes him or her look tough. The pug has deep wrinkles that mark the forehead.

The Pug’s tail:
A pug’s tail is ideally curled over the hip.

The Pug’s body:
The neck will be thick. The pug body is short and “wide in chest.” The legs are strong and straight in the front, the back legs are bent and strong, and the buttocks are well-muscled. Toenails are black. The coat is short and smooth.

The Pug’s color:
The AKC only recognizes two colors: fawn with the glossy black mask and ears, and solid black.

The Pug’s markings:
Pugs have very distinctive markings. They have a black muzzle, black ears, and the mole on the cheek. They have a “thumbprint” or “diamond” shape to their forehead wrinkles, and in fawns there is a line of black from the base of the skull to the tail.

continued on page 11
Meet the Breed...
continued from page 10

The Pug gait:
Pugs have a noticeably jaunty style to their gait. The pug struts with pride, toes pointed firmly forward.

The Pug temperament:
Pugs are recognized by the AKC for their easy temperament, “dignity,” “stability,” and “easy, outgoing disposition.”

Energy Level:
Young dogs have boundless energy. Older dogs will be less inclined to leap, climb furniture, and will be pleasantly tired from a 20 minute walk.

Life expectancy:
Twelve to fourteen years is the general guideline.

Abilities:
Pugs are known for their leisurely, sedentary behavior, but they can be trained to be agile athletes and racers.

Compatibility with Children:
Good, as long as the pug is supervised with children younger than 7 years.

Compatibility with Other Animals:
Generally, a pug will mix right in with all animals, assuming itself to be on equal footing with all.

Best with:
People of leisurely habits. Pugs are great apartment or small-house dogs.

Not for:
Someone looking for an independent companion.

Pros:
Pugs are loyal, loving, social, and attractive. The pug owner does not have to worry about a pug nipping an adult or a child. Pugs will work to please the owner, which ensures a happy relationship. The pug is a very good distraction, and its amusing face raises spirits.

Cons:
Pugs shed hair. The pug may need slightly more visits to the vet for eyes and hips, and should not be left alone for long periods of time.

For more information go to the Pug Dug Club of America at http://www.pugs.org

Bristol
Siberian Husky- adopted

Rocky
Border Collie
adopted by Shelley Larkin-Krebs
Lynn Erckmann has been rescuing Shetland Sheepdogs (Shelties) for SPDR since the beginning in 1987. Before then she did a few rescues when asked by shelters through her membership in The Evergreen State Shetland Sheepdog Club. She bought her first Sheltie pup in 1976 and became totally hooked with Shelties. A second, show-quality Sheltie followed a few months later. Both were trained and shown to their CDX obedience titles with the American Kennel Club.

Those were the beginnings of a lifelong love affair with Shelties. She bred three litters over 12 years, keeping pups from each. All of these were shown in conformation, obedience, or tracking. Her Sheltie Panda was one of the first Shelties in Washington State to earn her Tracking Dog Excellent title. The last Sheltie Lynn bred died in 2001, and since all her Shelties have been rescues.

Nowadays there is only an average of 20 Shelties each year in rescue through SPDR. The highest year ever had 85 Shelties. Recent trends have seen more senior dogs needing new homes. Shelties live an average life span of 14 years, so many seniors still have a lot of good years left.

The most memorable rescue came in 1989 when SPDR was really just getting established with shelters. A young Sheltie mother and 6 newly-born pups were captured by animal control officers and were in the shelter. The female had been shot with a tranquilizer dart, and it was said the dart had been recovered. She had a terrible abscess on her side, by her ribs that was draining pus and her temperature was 104. The shelter asked Lynn to take her and the pups and get them into proper care.

And so began the story of Honey and her pups. Honey had to be spayed when the pups were only two weeks old because she had a uterine infection. Following that, she hemorrhaged a couple of days later and almost bled to death before she could be taken to a clinic where she received emergency surgery and blood transfusions. After Honey recovered things went relatively smoothly for her and the pups, who were growing big and healthy. The only remaining

continued on page 13
problem was that the abscess on her side would not clear up.

Four weeks later Honey was X-rayed and the vet phoned to report his total disgust and disbelief. Lodged across Honey’s diaphragm was a 6-inch-long tranquilizer dart. She must have been in terrible pain since the day she was captured. She immediately underwent surgery to remove the dart and finally healed. She and the pups were subsequently adopted. The pups looked like Sheltie/Labrador Retriever crosses. Lynn called them the Shlabs, and today they would probably be considered a designer breed!

The experience with Honey, as well as a 15-year parade of rescue Shelties through his clinic, led Lynn’s veterinarian, Dr. Jerry Gemar, to nominate her for The Humane Animal Welfare Award in 2002. This award is presented by the members of the Washington State Veterinary Medical Association for the advancement of humane animal welfare through extraordinary service. Lynn considers winning this award a high point in her life.

Growing up in Miami, Florida, Lynn never thought of ending up in Seattle, but a 1962 trip to the Seattle World’s Fair left her with fond memories. After graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Miami, she spent several months in Mexico and a year and a half in Costa Rica before moving to Seattle in 1967. She started work as a research technician in the Zoology Department at the University of Washington and spent her entire working career there before retiring in 2005. She worked with wild birds as well as in the laboratory performing immunoassays for hormones. She participated in research projects that led to a six-month trip to Argentina, several months in Arizona, and two summers in Alaska, one of them camped on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. She says that living with Grizzly Bears can be interesting.

In 2002, Lynn received the Humane Animal Welfare Award from the Washington State Veterinary Medical Association.

Her interests are usually with animals, especially bird-watching. A lifelong love of horses has also led to ownership, and now she is able to keep two horses at her home near Bridle Trails State Park. Lynn and her husband Jim have been married for 35 years, and she’s quick to point out that Jim is very supportive of rescuing dogs.

She has been a member of the Evergreen State Shetland Sheepdog Club since 1979, serving in several offices, being on the Board of Directors, and serving as Show Chairman for their specialty shows, obedience and rally trials. Lately, she and Jim have helped foster senior Shelties for Old Dog Haven. Lynn has served on SPDR’s Board of Directors for many years, off and on since the early 90’s. She considers SPDR a passion and a great organization and is proud to be a part of it.
Not every human believes that dogs can think and reason like they do. Well, let me tell you my story and then maybe you will understand us dogs better. My name is Koda and I am a Siberian Husky. But I am what some humans call a “Senior Dog.” That means I’ve been around awhile and have had some experience with a dog’s life. For the first eleven years of my life I lived with one family. But, I guess I wasn’t good enough and tried to dig out or jump the fence in my yard too much, because one day they took me to this place they call a “shelter” and left me there! I didn’t like it much there. After spending most of my life outside, a small wire cage was a little scary.

Then, someone came to get me and took me in a big car with a couple of other dogs for a long ride. There were two humans in the car and when we stopped along the way, they checked on me and made sure I was comfortable, so I tried to stay calm and waited to see where they were taking me.

Well, when we finally got to this place, a lady named Cyndi came out to the car and let me out. She had two or three other dogs with her and they were just like me, Siberian Huskies. The people in the car said goodbye to me and left with the other dogs. I guess they had just made the trip to keep me company.

I heard Cyndi tell the people that she would take good care of me and that I would probably live with her for the rest of my life because not too many people would want to take a “Senior Dog” who had never been house broken and needed medicine all of the time. I was sad to think that people might not want me, but Cyndi and the other Huskies seemed real friendly and I guess I settled in pretty quick. I actually went running with Cyndi and the other dogs a few times.

Then one day Cyndi put me in the car and we went to this park to meet some people that were looking for a new dog for their family. It was Loree Stripling and her boyfriend Danny Levee and Danny’s daughter, Chrystyl. I guess Loree and Chrystyl had been studying dog breeds for some time and decided that a Siberian Husky would be just great as a new member of their family. They had actually looked at three other Huskies, but they were all younger than me and had a lot more energy. They decided that those dogs would not be happy in the apartment where they lived.

I really liked these people and I was hoping that they would choose me. Well, only a couple of days later they came to get me and take me home. Wow, was I excited! They hugged me and told me how happy they were that I was going to be in their family.

You can’t believe how wonderful my life is now! I have a bed in every room in the apartment so I can be with my family members, wherever they are! They take me on nice walks and they always tell me that they love me. I know this family chose me because I have a little less energy than the others, but, to tell the truth, I feel more like a Husky Pup than a “Senior Dog” now! I’m about as happy as I could be, but you know what makes me the happiest? I think I make Loree and Danny and Chrystyl happy, too!

Koda’s Story
By Koda
(with the assistance of Robert Kinch, SPDR volunteer)
Book Nook:

**Going Home: Finding Peace When Pets Die**

*Author: Jon Katz  Publisher: Villard, 2011*

As Reviewed by Lynn Erckmann, President, Sheltie Breed Rep

Jon Katz is a New York Times bestselling author who has a number of books published as well as a widely-read blog on happenings at Bedlam Farm, his farm in upstate New York. This book is a journey through his thoughts and emotions after euthanizing a much-loved Border Collie, Orson, in 2005.

Orson was a very difficult dog and was put down after biting three people. Jon’s grief had no small amount of guilt. “I was embarrassed by my grief” he writes. He was surprised at how much Orson’s death affected him and continues still to affect him.

This book assists those who have lost a pet through their grieving by sharing personal stories, both his own and those of others. One owner wrote about giving his ailing dog a perfect day. He took a day from work and spent it with his dog, doing all of the dog’s favorite activities and giving him a special steak dinner. When he came home to find his dog had passed away a few weeks later, he gained some comfort when thinking back on the perfect day.

There were touching chapters on the passing of Winston the rooster and Elvis, a steer, as well as former dogs in Jon’s life. He has a list of questions pet owners can ask themselves, and if they can answer yes to all of them, then he says they can assure themselves that they gave their pet a good life.

He also has a list of things to say to help others who are grieving, and perhaps more important, what not to say. He emphasizes the importance of planning for a pet’s death so that you know what to expect as well as make choices about how your pet will die. There are excellent suggestions about how to help children through their grieving process when their pet dies, allowing them to participate in the grieving instead of trying to shield them from it.

An afterword by psychiatrist Debra A. Katz, M.D. provides an overview of what pets mean to us, how we respond to having to plan their deaths, why we grieve so hard for them, how to move through the grief, and more suggestions on helping children deal with grief.

I very much enjoyed this book, and it brought laughter and tears. Having just lost one of those once-in-a-lifetime dogs, I could really relate to the stories and emotions expressed. I highly recommend it for anyone who has lost a beloved pet or expects to lose one soon.
Yes, I want to help SPDR!

Name: ___________________________
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In This Issue:

Saying Goodbye to Your Dog............................1,2
From Our President .....................................1,7
Healing the Hurt........................................2-5
Donations, Letters and Photos .......................6
Tissue Transplant Services for Pets ...............8
Meet the Breed: Pug ..................................9-11
Koda’s Story.............................................14
Featured Breed Rep: Lynn Erckmann ..........12-13
Book Nook: Going Home ............................15
SPDR Resource Page ...............................16

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Where secondhand dogs give first-class love.