

## Pet funerals popular these days

By **Pat Hill**

Published: 03.25.10

Americans spent \$40.9 billion on their pets last year, expenses that included funerals. A relatively recent phenomenon, pet funerals reflect the times, says the Rev. Patricia Boone, who conducts ceremonies for dogs, cats and horses in the Pikes Peak Region.

"Whenever there's any kind of loss, it doesn't matter if it's a pet, person, job or relationship, there has to be some closure," Boone said. "Closure allows you to have those happy memories and not feel guilty because you've already honored the pet."

Boone's services include prayer, a reading from Revelations in the Bible, tributes from the family and the eulogy. She charges \$50 for pets and nothing for working dogs such as those that help the disabled.

Psychologist as well as ordained minister, Boone studies the relationship between people and their pets in the 21st century.

"When I was growing up people bought a dog, put it in the back yard and that was the end of it," she said, only half-joking. "Why have things changed so radically? "

In turbulent times such as these, when 50 percent of America's parents are single, pets are the constant. "Pets are the one thing a child can count on," she said.

In Boone's book, pets teach humans how to love and are an example of God's unconditional love.

They're also considered members of the family that, in some cases, are included in vacation plans.

In the old days, families asked the neighbors to come in and feed the dog; not so nowadays, when the dog usually goes to a kennel, she said, adding, "And, you know, now we have doggie day care," she said.

Granted, not everybody gets it. Some poke fun at people who spend money on their pets, particularly, at the end.

"I think you have to have a pet to understand the relationship," she said.

And where else can you find a true close-mouthed friend? "A pet is our confidante, because we can talk about really serious things and pets will lift their ears, look at you sideways, meow at the right time, or lick your face," she said. "It's like writing a letter and tearing it up."

Pets fill gaps in loneliness when one spouse dies before the other. "In many cases, the pet begins to function as a husband, a wife or a caregiver," Boone said.

In today's world, where many feel anonymous, particularly in a city, pets can ease the pain of loneliness. "If we have to move, because of a job, for instance, we can take our pet and then it feels more like home, instead of just being an anonymous person in a new place," she said. "As well, I think people often feel lonely in a crowd."

For children, caring for a pet has the auxiliary benefit of developing responsibility.

Doctorate in biblical counseling, with an honorary doctorate of divinity, Boone is a former hospice chaplain.

"My main business is officiating at weddings, but I just saw the need for pet funerals," she said.

Boone, known throughout the area, received national recognition when she was featured in an article on pet funerals in USA Today last month. She is a member of the Greater Woodland Park and Tri-Lakes chambers of commerce.

For more information, call Boone at 719-884-0084.



The Rev. Pat Boone wears a black robe and shawl for her pet funerals. Photo by Pat Hill

