

## PETS BRING HEALING TO BABY BOOMERS

It is common knowledge that laughter is healing, that beauty uplifts us and that nature elevates our spirit and brings us a sense of calmness, comfort and well-being. Did you also know that our animal companions are natural born healers who, with their playful antics, spontaneity, purity of spirit, vulnerability and unconditional love and forgiveness offer us a link to the natural world from which we have all evolved and reconnect us to a world beyond technology and full of spirituality and grace?

In a world that is often impersonal and technologically oriented in which we too infrequently have gratifying and fulfilling relationships with other human beings, an animal companion offers us true friendship, companionship, loyalty, devotion and an opportunity to be ourselves – to be genuinely who we are without pretense, affectation or façade. They offer us a “safe haven” as it were, where we can let down our guards, breathe a sigh of relief, let go of anger and stress and get down on our knees and “play” with them with childlike abandon and without fear or worry of being judged or misunderstood. It seems our pets understand us better than almost anyone else – for they know us as few, if any others, do, accepting us just as we are...

There have been many scientific studies conducted which indicate that having a pet improves the quality of our lives and increases our longevity. There are many physiological as well as psychological and spiritual, health benefits associated with pet ownership including improved heart rate, lower blood pressure, heightened resistance to illness and disease. In addition, pet owners have lower triglyceride and cholesterol levels than non-owners. The companionship of pets (dogs in particular) affords pet owners a higher one-year survival rates following coronary heart disease. Pet help decrease anger, sadness, frustration, loneliness and depression. Several studies indicate that people over 65 who have pets pay fewer visits to the doctor and spend less time in hospitals than their non pet-owning peers. In addition, pet owners have fewer minor health problems and better overall psychological well-being. Dogs and cats are preventive and therapeutic measures against everyday stress.

As we grow older, losses of loved ones; friends, colleagues and companions become more frequent and common. Loss is an inevitable part of life. We may face illness and infirmities that accompany age. Animal companions help us to cope with and recover from grief. They seem to empathize with our feelings and comfort and support us. They teach us so many profound lessons as well –including “living in the moment”(not dwelling on the past or the future but living in the here and now. ) They teach us grace, dignity, stoicism, and offer their own unique brand of wisdom. They teach us to “Keep On Keeping On.” Those of us who have observed our pets age learn so much about life and death and the circle of life...

The unconditional love and nonjudgmentalism of a pet can be of great comfort when we are grieving and struggling with a roller coaster of emotions. Animals fulfill our basic need to nurture and care for others. They are dependent upon us for adequate food and shelter, exercise and playtime and interaction. This interaction with our pets diminishes our pain, worries and loneliness, provides us with a sense of purpose and a reason to wake up in the morning. A pet also helps us from feeling alone and isolated.

If you haven't given thought to adopting a pet, you may wish to reconsider. Sharing life with a pet is one of life's most joyful, rewarding and enriching experiences.

\*\*\*Dr. Diane Pomerance is an internationally regarded pet expert who is the author of 6 books and numerous articles. She has been interviewed as a guest on hundreds of TV and radio programs. Her most recent book is called PET PARENTHOOD: Adopting the Right Animal Companions for You!