

# Dealing With Euthanasia

## SAYING GOODBYE TO PEPPE

By Ellana Strickbine, AFR Journalist



ELLANA STRICKLAND

Recently, my husband and I chose to end Peppe's (aka Pep) battle with lymphoma. It was a difficult decision to reach, and it was even more difficult to take the necessary steps. We didn't want Pep to suffer, but we also didn't want to end his life prematurely. During his final months, Pep's health would frequently nose-dive. But, then, just when it seemed all hope was lost, he would rally and begin eating and playing with renewed zest and energy.

We made the appointment to have Pep euthanized three different times over four months. The staff at the veterinarian's office was very understanding and supportive, and I had a strong feeling that Pep, in his own way, would let us know when it was time to let go. We continued to monitor his health and did our best to gauge the quality of life he was enjoying.

To my mind, Pep finally gave us the sign we had been watching for when he stopped trying to reach the litter box. He started to go potty wherever he was, and began to dribble between actual eliminations. Also, he stopped being the Pep we had known and loved. One morning, we just knew it was time to make

and keep his final vet appointment. About four days later, we loaded all the ferrets into their carrier and set off for the vet's office. Jake and I decided to take everyone, because we wanted Pep to be in the company of his beloved Cinny, Boo and PeeWee until his last moments.

When we reached the vet's office, we didn't have to wait long before we were ushered into an exam room. A couple minutes later, a nurse came in and explained our options. One option was an individual cremation, which would allow us to get Pep's remains back. If we chose a mass cremation, we wouldn't have this privilege. We could elect to do a home burial, and the vet would provide a container free of charge. We were also offered the complimentary option of having a clay paw print made as a remembrance.

From an earlier phone conversation, I understood that the price of the euthanasia would be approximately \$25, so we elected to have the vet clinic add Pep's remains to the mass cremation and to receive the clay paw print. The nurse then had us sign a release form before she left the exam room. That authorized the vet clinic to euthanize our beloved.

A few minutes later, the nurse returned with the vet. We removed Pep from the carrier and the vet gave him a short exam. She said that Pep was in the final stages of lymphoma; then she looked at us and said, "You're doing the right thing." I felt a huge wave of relief at these words. I hadn't realized how much I needed to hear them until someone actually said them.

The nurse and vet then left the exam room to prep the surgical table and gave us a few minutes to say goodbye to Pep. When we entered the surgery room, we decided that I would stay with Pep until the very end, and Jake left with the carrier to wait in the front office. The nurse wrapped Pep securely in a towel, and the vet placed a small gas mask over his nose and mouth to sedate him. She explained that the gas tastes odd and that sometimes the animal will resist, but added that this is generally not a problem, as the sedative becomes effective very quickly. The procedure is called "mask sedation," and we waited a few minutes for the sedative to take full effect.

Once the vet confirmed that Pep was thoroughly sedated, she explained that she was going to give him the euthanizing injection in the heart/chest cavity, since ferrets have such small veins. The syringe contained a pink fluid. The vet confirmed that this was the right fluid, then proceeded to give Pep the shot. The vet held a stethoscope to his chest and said that he was gone. I said a final goodbye before going to the front office to settle our account.

The next couple days passed in a haze as we adjusted to Pep's absence. The vet clinic was thoughtful enough to send us a condolence card, and we were also very pleased to receive the clay paw print a couple weeks later. It is never easy to say goodbye, but I am grateful that our decision to end Pep's life was carried out with respect and compassion.

