

ZOOM



"I have never in my life known how to let go, how to say goodbye. Pets teach you that, too."

Mandy Corliss, whose dog Moose was diagnosed with bladder cancer

Mandy Corliss is making the golden years the best they can be for her 16-year-old dog Moose.

Acupuncture for pets

Watch Glen VanEngelenburg treat Titanic, a 9-year-old collie, with lasers and acupuncture. Go to DesMoinesRegister.com/videos.

ZOOM



MARY CHIND/REGISTER PHOTOS

Mandy Corliss and Moose have been together for 16 years. He has bladder cancer and is being treated with

A dog's last days

Medical intervention and an owner's personal sacrifice soothe a terminally ill pet.

MARY CHALLENGER
REGISTER STAFF WRITER

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Moose was dying.

This much Mandy Corliss knew.

It was a mild spring day in 2005 and her Yorkie poodle, still puppy-cute at 15 even of a cataract covering one eye, had just been diagnosed with an aggressive form of

He likely had only a few months to live.

Standing in an exam room at the Iowa State Veterinary Hospital, Corliss numbly considered options.

Chemotherapy might prolong Moose's life.

Euthanasia might spare him months of pain.

She gathered Moose in her arms and drove home.

Moose was her first pet.

She'd always tried to do what was best for him.

She could accept - almost - that their time together was nearing its end.

But she couldn't bear to decide how he would die.

WE ARE NOT the first people to share a deep bond with our pets.

Archeologists have found graves dating back 14,000 years where dogs were carefully buried for their owners.

What's unusual today are the lengths we are willing to go to in order to extend that

From glucosamine supplements to dog diapers, acupuncture to chemotherapy, the care of geriatric pets has become a booming business.

And walking through the front door with both hope and trepidation are pet owners

The director of physician relations at Iowa Heart Center, Corliss grew up in a New York City neighborhood that didn't allow dogs.

In 1990, out for dinner with friends, she stopped in the pet store at Merle Hay Mall to pick up a timid little ball of fluff.

If you threw a ball to the puppy, he'd cower, Corliss said. To boost his self-esteem she named him Moose.

It didn't take long for the floppy-eared pooch that snorted like a pig, slept at the head of the bed and loved Popsicles to become an important part of Corliss' life.

But it wasn't until later - after Moose was diagnosed with cancer - that she understood the connection, that "fabulous friendship," had become part of who she was.

acupuncture, herbs, anti-inflammatories and a high-protein diet.

A dog's life

The average life span for dogs has increased from seven years in the 1930s to more than 12 years today. Common health problems in senior dogs include advanced periodontal disease, kidney disease, arthritis and cancer.

Vital signs and normal readings for a dog:

- Temperature: 99.5-102.8 degrees Fahrenheit
- Pulse: 60-120 beats per minute
- Breathing: 14-22 breaths per minute

Source: www.srdogs.com



Deb Sulzbach helps Bailey, her arthritic golden retriever, ease down the steps for a bathroom break in the family's backyard. Bailey has passed away since this photo was taken.

How to keep an older dog healthy

1. Establish a relationship with the best veterinarian you can find and make an appointment every six months.
2. Research the conditions common to older dogs and the therapies used for them. Bring symptoms such as weight loss, appetite change, diarrhea or vomiting, shortness of breath or coughing, increased thirst or mobility problems to your vet's attention

"It's something so special to get that," she said. "I love the attention, love being a him, to have another avenue to give my love."

When Moose was diagnosed with bladder cancer, Corliss was devastated.

Left untreated, she was told, the tumor would grow until it blocked Moose's urethra, incontinent and then his kidneys would fail.

Humans with this condition were usually treated with chemotherapy. Today, the same treatments are available for dogs.

It is part of an entire arsenal of emerging treatments for old-age ailments in dogs, from acupuncture and anti-inflammatories to kidney transplants, all modeled on human geriatric care.

"People are very intent on saving their pets," said Dr. Leslie Fox, a specialist in internal medicine and oncology at the Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine.

"They look up the treatment Grandma got for cancer, and that's what they want for their dogs. In many cases, that's what we can provide."

For Corliss, a big factor in her decision about Moose was the expense, approximately \$10,000. She was afraid people would think it horrible that anyone would consider spending that much on a dog.

Corliss was also concerned with how Moose would react to the chemotherapy. How would he go down that road?

"My dad was on dialysis," Corliss said. "I don't want to see my dog on it."

Corliss turned to Moose's regular vet, Gary VanEngelenburg - better known as Dr. Gary.

As the owner of Iowa Veterinary Acupuncture Clinic, VanEngelenburg has a high profile among pet owners. He suggested treating Moose's cancer using acupuncture, anti-inflammatories, and a high-protein diet.

It wouldn't be a cure (nor would it be cheap), but VanEngelenburg was confident he could help improve Moose's quality of life during the time he had left.

Corliss decided to give it a chance, willing herself to accept whatever was ahead.

"I have never in my life known how to let go, how to say goodbye," she said. "Pets are part of our lives, too."

ACCORDING TO THE American Veterinary Medical Association, an estimated 33 percent of the nation's cats and dogs have reached "senior" status.

This means an awful lot of pet owners are facing the same painful decisions as Corliss.

Many walk into VanEngelenburg's clinic on the northwest side of Des Moines, cradling their pet cat, with a single mandate: "Euthanasia is not an option."

It's nearly the polar opposite of what VanEngelenburg encountered 30 years ago, when he was a vet in Sumner, Ia. Then, people usually dropped their sick pets off to be euthanized.

Today, VanEngelenburg offers clients a grieving room with a rocking chair, a love seat, and roses and lace curtains at the window. The owners of pets needing to be euthanized are allowed to stay with their dog or cat as long as they like.

"We hardly ever put clients' pets to sleep with dry eyes," he said.

VanEngelenburg's transformation as a vet began in the spring of 1991 when he attended acupuncture training. Eight years later, he and his wife Vicki opened a small animal hospital that specialized in acupuncture in Des Moines.

He said our society has undergone an equally drastic change in the way it views pet care.

promptly.

3. Feed your older dog the best food you can afford, one with a good proportion of high-quality protein. Tip: For loss of appetite, try serving food at room temperature or add unsalted beef or chicken broth to make it soupy.

4. Don't overfeed your dog. Obesity will create health problems and shorten his life. Tip: Give your dog three or four smaller meals a day rather than one or two big ones to help him burn calories more efficiently.

5. Consider the use of dietary supplements such as glucosamine/chondroitin for arthritis.

6. Continue to give your senior dog adequate exercise, but adjust the intensity. Two shorter walks are less stressful for aging joints than one long one. Tips: Keep the fur on your dog's pads trimmed close for more traction. Install skid-free carpeting in nap areas so your dog can get up easier.

7. Brush your dog's teeth daily and have them checked regularly.

Tip: Hold the dog's mouth closed gently and slide the brush under the lips and along the teeth toward the molars.

8. Tell your vet you wish to have your dog vaccinated only once every three years, as currently advised by the major veterinary colleges.

9. Be diligent in controlling fleas and ticks, and keep your dog and his environment clean. Don't use flea shampoos and dips, which are too harsh for older dogs.

10. Make your senior dog as much a part of your life as possible, and do all you can to keep him interested, active, happy and comfortable.

Source: www.srdogs.com



Mandy Corliss keeps Moose occupied while Gary VanEngelenburg makes notes on a supplement dosage at Iowa Veterinary Acupuncture Clinic. Corliss decided to skip chemotherapy and opted for a more holistic treatment for her pet's bladder cancer.

"When I started my practice, pets were pets, they were companions," he said, soured. "Now to a lot of my patients, their pets are their kids - or their substitutes."

The most obvious sign of that elevated status is the "phenomenal" amount, VanEngelenburg says. Many owners are willing to spend on pet care.

Thirty years ago, he said, a procedure that cost \$100 was considered expensive. Now, many veterinary CAT scans, diagnostic work alone can run more than four figures.

VanEngelenburg hopes pet end-of-life care doesn't imitate human geriatric care, where at-all-costs attitude often prevails.

He's a strong advocate for a more holistic approach. In addition to cancer treatment, he has success treating hip dysplasia patients with acupuncture, gold bead implants, and anti-inflammatory drugs.

Among his prize patients for years has been Bailey, a sweet-natured, 12-year-old golden retriever owned by Deb Sulzbach.

Sulzbach, a librarian at Drake University law school, brought Bailey to VanEngelenburg in 2000. The dog weighed 101 pounds, was on Prednisone and had the most severely arthritic vet had ever seen.

He injected gold bead implants into Bailey's joints to serve as a kind of permanent joint replacement. He also put her on a diet that included lots of vegetables.

On a sunny afternoon in December, Sulzbach carefully helped Bailey off the back of her car at her Urbandale home, then watched as the big retriever, her honey-blond hair gone white, rolled in the snow like a puppy.

Sulzbach, who has Bailey's baby picture displayed on her refrigerator, has a theory about why it became such a pet-centered society.

The nuclear family, she said, has been "spread to the wind." Pets are the replacement for children.

"I'm sure there are a lot of people who look at me and what I've done for these still-living dogs," she says. "I look at Bailey and Zoey, a 9-year-old hyperactive Maltese mix, affectionately - 'a little bit of God.' But these are my babies."

Caring for Bailey in her old age has required some changes in her life, Sulzbach says. She moved home every day for lunch. She purchased a Green Machine to help clean up after her dog.

Friends have suggested she put Bailey to sleep, but she won't do it.

"She's been such a good dog for so long," Sulzbach said. "I'll do whatever it takes to keep her comfortable until it's time for her to move on."

VanEngelenburg thinks there will always be a place for euthanasia in veterinary medicine. When an animal gets to the point where no relief can be found for its suffering, he said he feels obligated to push for it.

But he's watched Bailey's face closely at her acupuncture appointments, and he's proud of her at that point.

"If they're wearing down, getting tired of the fight, they'll tell you," he said.

DOGS GIVE US such unconditional love.

Old dogs teach us how to return it.

It's late January, nearly nine months after Moose's diagnosis, and Corliss is moving on with her after-work routine.

How old is your dog in human years?

Weight-based benchmarks are a much more accurate measure of dog age than the old "one dog year is equal to seven human years" rule. To determine your cat's age, go to www.metzgeranimal.com/sr1.htm

She cradles Moose belly-side up in her arms like a baby and carries him to his favorite street. He sniffs at the ground a little, then does his business.

She carries him back inside her Des Moines condo where she mixes his pills - Moose Corliss bought him one of those dispensers marked AM/PM - with a tiny bit of high-quality kibble. She feeds it to him with a plastic teaspoon.

Then she carefully measures out three cc's of an unappetizing liquid vitamin concoction to boost his immune system, and stirs in a little gravy.

Finally, Corliss mixes a premium canned dog food with a serving of freeze-dried vegetables. She heats this stew in the microwave for a few seconds, then serves it on a paper plate to a dog who, when he's done gobbling it down, she wipes his face with a paper towel.

"I don't know if he's more work now, just different," she said.

In many ways, Corliss said, Moose seems healthier than he has in years. But there were times when she thought she was going to lose him.

He stopped eating and was vomiting and had bloody diarrhea. Corliss sat down on the floor with him, crying and saying goodbye.

It turned out to be a reaction to the anti-inflammatory he was taking. Switching drugs cured the problem.

"You wake up looking at him and you're glad he's still here," Corliss said. "It's kind of weird now."

Recently, Moose became incontinent, so Corliss now diapers him daily in Huggies. One part of caring for him, though, is having to guess his wishes. Using a pet communication device is one way.

"Humans can speak," she said, "they can let you know what they want with end-of-the-world gestures. As a human, trying to do what's right for your pet, you have no clue."

If Moose is unhappy, Corliss said, he certainly hides it well.

"I don't think he knows he has anything wrong with him," she said.

EVERY DOG has its day.

Every owner of an old dog knows he or she someday must face that day.

In February, Bailey came down with a cold that got steadily worse. Late on a Saturday, Corliss took her to the Animal Emergency clinic, where she was diagnosed with pneumonia. She died at 11 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 12.

Bailey's ashes rest on a shelf in Sulzbach's office, next to Maggie's, the black Lab she adopted in 1997.

She says she misses Bailey's sweet temperament. She thinks she will eventually accept his death.

"I realize they're dogs and they're going to die eventually and you move on," she said. "That's the way life is."

Against all odds, Moose, who turned 16 in January, is still going strong.

Nearly a year after he was diagnosed with cancer, Corliss brought him in for his regular checkup.

"You look pretty good for a dead dog," VanEngelenburg said wryly as Moose growled.

Corliss knows she's lucky to still have Moose with her. It hasn't kept her from dreaming of him down the road, though. She snuggled Moose close to her.

"Please go in a way that's easy for me. Just go in your sleep, all right?" she pleaded.

a kiss.

