

What cats give us

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One of our cats died last Saturday.
Or, to be more honest, we had Tiger put to sleep.

Many of you have been through something like this. Within the space of a few days, you experience a range of emotions, including frustration, anger, deep sadness, gratitude and relief. And, I wondered, whether this was in part, God's way of helping our children deal with their parents' death, someday.

Tiger was about 14 years old. We've had him, and his brother, since they were small kittens. They slept and played together. They liked to be in our laps. Tiger, in particular, would purr happily when you rubbed his ears. His name was a joke, because he was so mellow.

Until about 3 weeks ago, Tiger seemed fine. Large and loving. Friendly, and eager to cuddle. But recently he stopped eating, had difficulty jumping up on the bed where he slept, and was very lethargic.

We took him to the vet, who checked him out and tried several things to help. But nothing worked. Tiger continued his decline.

Finally, on Saturday, we decided it was time.

My wife, our younger daughter and I were with him at the end. We wept. And we hugged. Then we took him home, and buried him in our backyard, near his brother.

If you have children, and one or more cats, you might want to get a copy of Judith Viorst's lovely little book, *The Tenth Good Thing about Barney*. It's the story of a youngster whose cat,

Barney, dies. The boy is very upset.

His parents wisely suggest that he write down 10 good things about the cat. He comes up with nine. Then, a few days later, he decides there is a 10th because he is buried in the backyard, Barney will help flowers grow.

Perhaps this strikes you as trite or dumb.

But over the years, as we've had various animals, it's been a very comforting book. We read it again this week.

Pets help us relax. They entertain us. They help youngsters learn to be responsible. They can be wonderful friends.

But last week Tiger helped our family in other ways. He reminded us about the value of life. And he helped us learn to deal with death.

Thanks Tiger. And thanks to all the animals who have given readers amusement, comfort and companionship. If there is a heaven for animals, they are there.