

Sent: Sunday, March 08, 2015 10:43 PM

Subject: Happy Birthday Friends of Nikki

Happy Birthday Friends of Nikki!

Today, March 8th in 2001, Friends of Nikki was born! The concept was birthed while Nikki was still with me. I had the honor, and benefit, of meeting Deborah Antinori, grief counselor and author of "Journey Through Pet Loss", before Nikki was even diagnosed with lymphoma. We talked about the possibilities for a support group to help people, like myself, who were loving ill and/or aging pets. The actual plans were in the making a few months following Nikki's death, but my own grief postponed the start until the following year. I don't know how many of you know the story - I wanted so much to make this dream a reality, to create a place for pet parents to go, that I asked my good friend at the time if she would attend "as a member". I had put up flyers but there was no response, as of the first eve. Friends of Nikki met every other Tuesday evening, when we first began. I also asked a patient of mine, whose dog was elderly, to attend. I was hoping someone I didn't know would show up, and didn't want them to think they were alone. The 3 of us met a few times. I then started getting calls from those who saw my flyer at Pet Smart, etc., those I didn't have to beg to come. I started reading whatever I could on pet loss, and in 2004 took my first official educational class for pet bereavement counseling through The Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement. I followed with on line classes to better understand pet loss, continuing my passion to know as much as I could in order to help others who love animals as much as I do, and grieved as much as I did. The learning process is ongoing. I have learned as much from each of you, who have contacted Friends of Nikki for support, as I could from any book or conference. Today, it is a ministry for me. A legacy to Nicole Kimberly, that will go on for as long as possible. Each animal who has touched my life continues to teach me. I also have met some of the most amazing humans. People who love animals deeply are just different. I thank each of you for your ongoing support and encouragement. I hope Nikki, and all my furry children in Heaven, look down wagging their tails and purring, each time my heart goes out to someone who is losing, or has lost, a beloved pet.

Back in March of 2001 I never imagined that I would still be doing this 14 years later. We have officially "celebrated" each 5 years with a special meeting that always included my mentor, and good friend, Debbi Antinori, as a special guest speaker. Considering that Debbi has addressed audiences of all sizes, in all venues, throughout the US as well as other countries, including TV and radio, Nikki and I am particularly honored to know she will be with us next year, as we look back on 15 years of compassionate, pet loss support in central NJ. Save the date, March 20, 2016, on your calendar. It is a time that we remember and honor the true "friends of Nikki", all of your beloved animal companions, who took a piece of you with them when they left, but who also left you with many gifts to remember them forever.

I will leave you with a quote I saw in the past year or so that touched my heart. I think it can be for any species, and doesn't have to apply only to dogs.

"It came to me that every time I lose a dog, they take a piece of my heart with them, and every new dog that comes into my life gifts me with a piece of their heart. If I live long enough, all the components of my heart will be dog, and I will become as generous and loving as they are." - Anonymous

I should be so blessed!!

Thank you,
Donna