



# HEART TO HEART

News from our home to yours!

Summer 2009

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## A Letter from Laura ...

It is always amazing just how quickly the summer passes. Before long, hayrides, pumpkins, and even holiday shopping will be upon us. I hope you and yours can take some time to enjoy the last fleeting days of summer.

In this newsletter, I have included an article about a topic near and dear to my heart - pets. I own 2 wonderful dogs, Daisy and Angel, which were adopted from a local shelter and rescue organization, respectively. In recent years, as a member of an animal rescue group, I was a foster mom for dogs in transition and in need of a new home. I was especially fond of fostering senior dogs. Like many of the seniors I work with in my business, my senior canines suffered from a variety of chronic and acute ailments and a great deal of time (and money) was spent in the doctor's office. But the time and energy I invested in these very special dogs, paled in comparison to the unconditional love I received.

Over the years, in the time I have spent with elderly family members and with my clients, I have laughed and cried, acquired valuable life lessons and certainly learned about loss. I have been reminded that just because someone appears old and a bit weary on the outside, doesn't mean that their inner spirit can't be alive with vitality. I have learned similar lessons from the time spent with my senior furry friends.

In recent years, you may have read articles saying that people who are married and/or have close relationships with family/friends tend to live longer. Now evidence suggests that the same holds true for those who have pets. I can only hope that I will be fortunate enough to indulge my love of pets for many years to come. Happy reading!

## Pets Help the Elderly Live Longer, Healthier and Happier Lives

There's no disputing that animals have always had a positive impact on their owners' lives. Now, evidence suggests four-legged friends are a real health benefit for elderly people, helping them live longer, healthier and happier lives.

### Pets Encourage Seniors to Stay Active

The general care associated with a pet can help seniors live more energetic lives. As any pet owner knows, animals need attention and keep us active – whether we want to be or not. Pets help seniors establish routines and get them to do things they might not normally do, such as getting outside and walking their dog or changing their cat's litter box, feeding, grooming or playing with their pet.

### Pets Make Great Companions for Seniors

Pets can give an elderly person a great sense of self and help increase self-esteem since pets need and rely on their owners for virtually every aspect of their care. Seniors also benefit from the unconditional love and affection their pets give them. Just the very presence of a pet provides camaraderie to seniors, helping them realize they are not alone. Additionally, having a pet – especially a dog – can give seniors a great sense of safety just by the barking which can keep unwanted visitors away.

### Pets Help Our Hearts

Studies show that older pet-owning citizens have lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels than non-owners, helping to reduce their risk for heart disease and decrease their number of visits to the doctor. Additionally, a number of other studies suggest that pet owners have a better chance for long-term survival after surviving a coronary event than non-pet owners.

### Pets Help the Elderly Overcome Depression and Loneliness

According to a study in the Journal of the (- article continues in next column)

the American Geriatrics Society, caring for a cat or dog helps elderly people overcome depression or loneliness. Whether that be from the loss of a loved one, not having family or friends nearby to interact with, or not being able to get out much, having a fluffy friend gives older citizens a sense of purpose since they have to take care of their pet and think about things other than their own problems.

Even for elderly patients in nursing homes, animal-assisted therapy has shown to help patients decrease their anxiety levels and give them something to look forward to.

Christina Miller, a former convalescent home activities director in Southport, N.C., says she witnessed the positive impact animals had on elderly patients when a local animal shelter made weekly visits to her facility. "Residents who normally weren't active were suddenly getting up, petting and talking to the cats and dogs, smiling and interacting," she says. "Patients would ask me, 'Are the dogs here? Did they come yet?'" Half the patients had better reactions to the dogs and cats than they did to people."

The positive impact animals have on people – especially the elderly – is tremendous. So much so that there are organizations such as the Pets for the Elderly Foundation, a non-profit organization, that specifically places dogs and cats into the homes of senior citizens, helping them overcome loneliness.

Overall, pets have a positive effect on their senior companions, and benefit health-wise from their very presence.

*Excerpted from: [www.petsfortheelderly.org/articles.html](http://www.petsfortheelderly.org/articles.html)*

Laura Mansfield is the Founder & President of Heart & Home Senior Care. Since 2002, Heart & Home has been providing professional, compassionate, in-home care and assistance to seniors who wish to remain safely and independently at home for as long as possible.