

Discovering Love

by Barbara Ann Simone



Somewhere in my mid-twenties, I made the conscious decision to live my life in service to Spirit. I embarked on the spiritual path and have never looked back. My main focus has revolved around empowering children, then extending outward to spiritually empowering parents and teachers. Recently, my focus has taken a new direction. My husband and I have started a nonprofit which focuses on Compassion – dedicated to helping children and their caregivers move through the grieving process as they connect to their own powerful spirit. I believe the seeds of this new ministry started with a shocking experience I had, that has changed and inspired me forever.

What was the experience that changed me forever? My dog died.

At first it sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? My dog died. In my arms. Me crying hysterically. A depth of pain I did not recognize and did not understand... Uggg.....

I had experienced other deaths in my family – my dad, an aunt, my grandmother...I thought I had this “grief” thing figured out. Not!

I guess I believed that someone like me, with a strong dedicated purpose to living a spiritual life, would be able to handle such a thing as my dog dying, with grace and dignity – didn't happen.

Now – I must admit that my little 18 pound mini-schnauzer, named Emrys, was my perfect companion for 10 years. I was single at the time, quite busy, and he filled my life with a unique companionship that, I believe, many pet owners come to understand and cherish. I surely cherished Emrys.

For the following three months after he died, I walked around with that deep sinking feeling that I would never be happy again. I carried his picture with me all the time, and cried more than I would really like to admit.

My friends kept reassuring me that my little bundle of fur was fine in spirit – and I knew for sure he was. Yet for anyone who grieves deeply, the idea of your loved one – being a pet or a person – being happy and healthy in heaven or spirit somewhere else – just doesn't bring relief. It feels like a horrible separation.

As the months passed, I struggled with my grief. I acted as if everything was “fine” – but it wasn't.

Then came the holiday season. I knew my relatives were a bit worried about me since the holidays are usually a challenging time for someone who is grieving, and I have to admit I was worried about me too...until the great a-ha moment of self-discovery that is the foundational experience of what I do now.

I was quietly sitting in my holiday decorated living room as my older sister came in the front door with her two dogs, and another dog who she was watching for a neighbor who had gone away.

“Happy” was the name of the dog that she was watching. Happy didn't look like Emrys, but he was about the same size. Everyone in the living room watched my reaction to this different dog I had never met before. Would I break down and cry because he reminded me of Emrys? Would I shun this dog away because I was in so much pain? What would I do?

Before I knew it, I had him in my lap, holding him the way I used to hold Emrys. I figured he could use a friend in this strange house he was destined to spend the holidays at. So there I sat with Happy on my lap, my relatives practically holding their breath as to my reaction...

And I started to pet him, I was really wondering how I could feel good with a dog I just met...with a dog that wasn't my beloved Emrys.

And that's when this thunderbolt of wisdom moved through me: (Or perhaps it was Happy's message to me?)

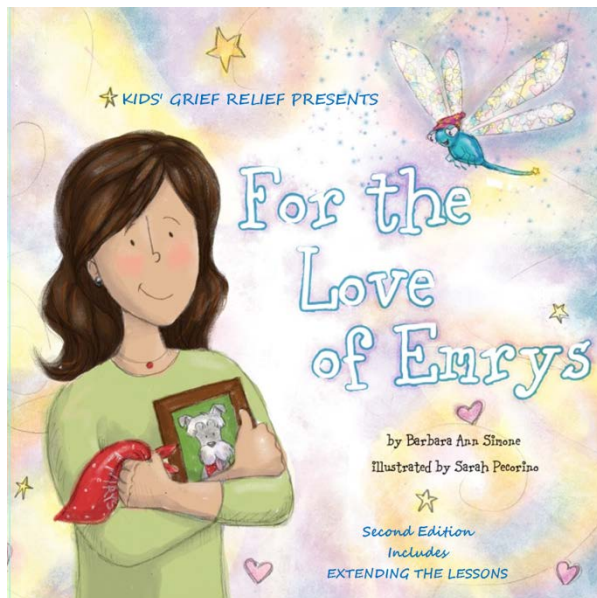
“Happy” who was happy to sit on my lap reminded me that Emrys was not the **source** of my happiness. No dog or person can have that power over me. The **source** of my happiness came from **within me**. As long as I believed my dog was the cause of my happiness – I couldn't be happy. But the moment I realized I could **choose** to be happy, I started to heal.

From studying various spiritual principles, I “knew” that believing things outside of us – whether people, places, things or situations could cause us to be happy – creates co-dependency which leads to an unbalanced life. I think most of us mentally know that happiness starts from within. The experience with Emrys gave me the chance to “practice what I believed”.

Years later, my mother, who blessed my life in infinite ways, died in my home. So I had another chance to really take a look at this thing called grief. I believe what I learned from my experience with my dog, gave me the strength to move through the grieving process feeling more at peace. Again, remembering that I was the cause of my happiness, (not my mom or the situation of her living in my home).

When someone very close to us dies, there is an ending to a specific relationship. It feels like something within us has truly died. Yet, the truth is nothing has died – if you believe in the immortality of your own loving spirit. The more we believe that anyone – whether “dead or alive” is the cause of our happiness, we set ourselves up for tremendous negative experiences.

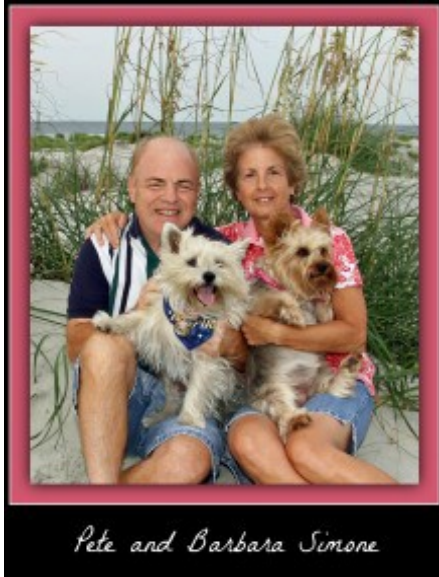
Now when I counsel children or adults regarding grief, I gently remind them that even though life has changed in the outer circumstance – what was the source of the love they shared with someone else CAN NEVER DIE.



I wrote [*For the Love of Emrys*](#) to inspire any one – specifically children – to realize the strength and power of the love that comes from within. Mystie, the mystical, magical dragonfly, is the character who reminds all of us that death and loss are experiences of change. Love is something that is changeless, and it's ours, forever!

About the Author: *Barbara Ann is a volunteer member of the Friends of Caroline Hospice Child Bereavement Team in Beaufort, South Carolina. As a team member she works with school-aged children using bereavement curriculum based on the character “Mystie” to support children of all ages as they go through the grieving process.*

Barbara Ann holds a BS in Early Childhood Education. She is a certified elementary school teacher who has successfully taught children from pre-school through Junior High. She has written a variety of academic as well as spiritual curriculum which she authored, implemented, and taught in elementary schools, homes schools (grades 2-6) and Adult Institutes.



Barbara Ann is an ordained Focus Minister with Centers for Spiritual Living. She and her husband have created Kids' Grief Relief, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing inspiring and effective child bereavement materials based on universal scientific and spiritual principles to individuals, organizations, and communities.

She lives with her husband Pete, their two dogs Merlin and Mystie, and their two cats Halo and Henrietta, on a beautiful, tropical island which is a nature preserve on the coast of South Carolina. You may contact Barbara Ann through her website [Kids Grief Relief](#).