



The Rainbow Bridge, Aging, and Learning to Live With Grief

Tom Duane is grieving loyal poodle Daisy, while navigating aging, survival, and the strange ache of loving deeply enough to hurt.

May 21, 2026 By [Tom Duane](#)

May is “Older Americans Month.” There’s nothing about that title that sounds fun to me. It used to be called “Senior Citizen’s Month,” but President Jimmy Carter changed the name. I’m not sure it was an improvement. Perhaps “Older and Wiser Month?” Well, hopefully wiser, at least!

I certainly qualify as an Older American, with all the aches, pains, and indignities that come with getting older. As a long term HIV survivor, I am enormously grateful to be alive, although, at times it feels like this body of mine is out to get me!

In the last few weeks or so, I’ve been suffering a particularly sharp pain in my back, so bad that it’s had me almost completely immobile. The cause could be any number of things. Just watch the news for 5 minutes and you’ll find reasons galore for anyone to be laid up in bed from despair.

But this pain has a particular source: earlier this month, my beloved poodle Daisy had to be put down. She was 17. I think I’ve used up all my emotions in bearing the wall of craziness that has come with the Trump presidency, so when Daisy died, the sadness and grief about her had no where to go, so it attacked my lumbago.

Like me, Daisy had arthritis, especially in her back. Daisy was a very smart and cheeky little poodle, and I believe she sent back pain my way all the way from the other side to reassure me that I’d done the right thing by putting her to sleep. Although the arthritis pain she suffered was becoming more and more acute, she also had sudden onslaughts of other serious health issues. This helped me make the difficult-heart wrenching, really-decision to put her to sleep and ease her transition from this world.

As many of you have experienced, the loss of a pet can be devastating. A study published earlier this year by [PLOS One](#) found that 21% of the study participants experienced the death of a pet to be as serious or more serious than the death of a family member or close friend (that percentage sounds a little low to me, but I’m no scientist). Of those, 7% had symptoms so severe that they would qualify as having Prolonged Grief Disorder, a condition usually diagnosed solely for the death of a human.

I'm enormously sad about Daisy, but one of the gifts of being in the recovery community for so long, is that I'm continually reminded that "this, too, shall pass." I have lost other pets, for whom I had enormous love and who brought me great joy. Just because my grief is heavy today, doesn't mean it'll be this way forever. This pain is hard, but I've gotten through hard things before and I know how to do it. The grief doesn't go away, but the feelings do change.

For today, though, I'm going to remember my sweet girl, Daisy. Daisy was incredibly smart, affectionate, loyal, difficult, sometimes spiteful (!), but always adorable and a joy to have in my life. I know for sure she's crossed over the Rainbow Bridge, and is running around the heavenly meadow, digging up the grass, and endlessly demanding to play fetch.

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<http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/rainbow-bridge-aging-learning-live-grief>