


The Sydneysiders hoping death won’t part them from their pets



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The three urns in Carmen Terceiro’s Beecroft home tell a story of love and loss. Around each is a tag with a name: Rex, Annie and Oscar.

The retired lawyer said she had been unsure what to do with her treasured rescue dogs’ ashes until recently.

NSW has now [passed changes to the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act](#) to clarify that the remains of deceased companion animals – often much-loved family members – may be buried or placed with their late humans’ remains.

“When I saw it announced, I was quite delighted,” said Terceiro, a former Animal Justice Party candidate for the NSW seat of Epping.

She said she had discussed with her mother whether she might one day put the dogs’ ashes in her parents’ burial plot. Her father died six years ago.

“It would kind of be a nice place to [visit and] honour the family because they were very much members of the family. I’ve got a burial plot as well next to theirs.”

Terceiro speaks with warmth and humour about her three faithful companions, rescued from the RSPCA and the Animal Welfare League. All lived well into their teens.

The handsome “jock”, Rex, “looked like a white dingo”. Her first dog as an adult, Rex was likely a border collie, perhaps mixed with an Australian cattle dog.

Her father was “totally devoted” to Rex and the duo became “local identities”, thanks to their long walks together, she said.

Rex’s death in 2010 was devastating and marked the first time she had the courage to sit with a pet as they were put to sleep.

Annie the beagle loved to snuggle on the sofa watching “endless amounts of BBC crime shows” with Terceiro’s mother. Oscar, the Jack Russell fox terrier cross, became Annie’s best friend.

Oscar had a “big ego” and was known to “attack the lawn mower front on”, but was also a sweetheart.

“I’d get that oxytocin upload in the morning just gazing into each other’s eyes,” Teceiro said.

Terceiro’s latest adoptee, Milo, 8, is from Jack Russell Rescue.

“Some people may think, ‘they’re just animals, why is there all this fuss?’ But I think that ... dogs and cats, [and] all pets, have a very important role and place in many Australians’ minds and lives,” she said.

“There’s an evolving awareness that animals and pets are much more than property.”

Under the changes, a person who already has their late pet’s ashes can be interred with them when they die. Where a companion animal outlives human family members, their remains can also be placed or buried with their family when they die.

Animal Justice Party MP Emma Hurst, a member of the NSW upper house, spearheaded the amendments, passed on June 4.

She said her Victorian counterpart Georgie Purcell brought the lacuna in the law to her attention.

“It became clear to us that this was a problem in Victoria because the law was silent on the issue. A lot of cemeteries [believed] ... they would be breaking the law to allow people to be buried with their beloved companion animals.”

NSW law was also silent on the issue, Hurst said. “We wanted to make sure it was absolutely clear.”

Veterinarian Dr Sam Kovac, founder of Southern Cross Veterinary Clinic, said that “for decades we’ve known about people resorting to secretive measures”, such as sneaking pets’ ashes into caskets.



Dr Sam Kovac with his three corgis, (left to right) Bonnie, Maddie and Clara-Belle. JANIE BARRETT

“We do a lot of work in the homeless [community] ... with [Project HoPe](#), our charity, and that’s something that comes up with those clients all the time. Their pet really is like a soulmate,” Kovac said.

Elderly clients who lost a spouse might also turn their mind to their pets’ last resting place.

Kovac said two of his vets had put a request in their will to have their ashes mixed with their pets’ ashes so that their remains could be scattered together. One vet had a clause requesting that if one of her pets outlived her, a portion of her ashes should not be scattered until their ashes could be mixed.

Kovac himself has three corgis: his 15-year-old “soul dog” Clara-Belle, with whom he says he has a “special connection”, Bonnie, 13, and Maddie, 7. He’s had many animals over the years and had not contemplated being buried with his furry companions, but he welcomed the change to the law.

“I encourage other state parliaments to debate this topic and follow suit. I really think this law will help people to have that idea of a continuing bond with their pet,” he said.

“Even though their best friend has passed away, one day when they also pass away, they can be together forever. I think that’s just a really beautiful thought.”

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