

# NALAG News

National Association for Loss & Grief (NSW) Incorporated December 2015

## Pet Loss

For some the loss of a pet can be as painful as the loss of a family member. However, this loss is often described as a hidden grief as people feel as though they are not entitled to grieve as they would for a human being.

### In this Issue:

- **Pet Loss - Undoing the damage of disenfranchised grief**
- **The death of a pet can hurt as much as the loss of a relative**
- **Room to Care - a special place for pets at the end of life**



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## NALAG (NSW) Inc

NALAG (NSW) Inc President  
Julie Dunsmore AM MAPS

NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Dubbo  
MANAGER Trudy Hanson OAM

Head Office  
Welchman Street, Dubbo NSW 2830

All Mail  
PO Box 379, Dubbo NSW 2830

Phone: 02 6882 9222  
Fax: 02 6884 9100  
Email: [info@nalag.org.au](mailto:info@nalag.org.au)  
Website: [www.nalag.org.au](http://www.nalag.org.au)

Editorial Team:  
Paula Hanson, Trudy Hanson and Jen Cowley  
Design: Paula Hanson

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## From Our Guest Editor

# Jen Cowley

Jen Cowley, author of *Grandpa's Hat* - a children's book about loss and grief - is our Guest Editor for this edition of the NALAG News. *Grandpa's Hat* tells the story about Jennywren - a little girl who finds resilience through farm animals following the death of her beloved grandfather.



This book was a therapeutic tool for Jen to find healing after her own personal losses. She is an avid supporter of NALAG and all proceeds of *Grandpa's Hat* go towards supporting the work of NALAG.

### “A heartbeat at my feet”

As I write, my best mate is curled up and snoozing in his favourite spot beneath my desk, his furry little head resting on my feet. Whenever I shift in my chair, he reaches out a tentative little paw – just to let me know he's still there waiting for the final click of the keyboard and the walk, the pat, the cuddle that might follow. So it's with delight – and a lump in my throat – that I read the words from Edith Wharton, quoted in one of the articles in this edition of NALAG News:

“My little dog – a heartbeat at my feet.”

I grew up on a farm, where a pragmatic approach to the death of animals was a necessary emotional defence against the inevitable daily manifestations of the circle of life. These days, I'm far less matter-of-fact about the impact the death of a beloved pet can have. The thought of having to again go through that grief fills me with dread – as does knowing that pet-less friends will inevitably remind me, however gently, that in the overall scheme of things he was “just a dog”.

With so much human suffering being played out around the world, I understand that a certain amount of perspective might be expected when grieving the loss of a pet. But that perspective is hard to come by when the loss you grieve is for a living being that was so much a part of your life – a comfort, a companion, a reliable bright spot in otherwise dark days.

The “disenfranchised” grief of which many of this edition's contributors speak is seldom more keenly felt

than with the loss of a pet. Fortunately, as the value of pets as therapy is increasingly acknowledged, this tendency to dismiss the depth of emotion that comes with the loss of a pet – through whatever circumstance – has eased somewhat.

Featured in this edition is

a man who has a deeper understanding than most of the emotional toll the death of a pet can take. Vet Duncan McGinness often has the grim, but in many ways privileged, task of helping families to give what he says is the greatest of gifts for a pet – a “good death”. It’s a shame, in so many ways, that families don’t have the same resource to give that precious gift of release for human suffering, but that’s a debate for another forum and another time.

In the meantime, I’ve been honoured and delighted to sit in the chair as guest editor for this newsletter for NALAG – an organisation to which I’m both deeply indebted and constantly in awe; an organisation that serves to remind me that loss and grief takes many forms and manifests in myriad ways – none of which should ever be dismissed by a society that’s still coming to terms with its own squeamishness about death, dying and the importance of giving those who are suffering permission to grieve.

And if that grief is for the loss of a furry, finned or feathered friend, it’s just as valid as the loss of any other family member.

NALAG’s own Trudy Hanson once told me that grief is the price we pay for love. As anyone whose life has ever been enriched by the devotion, unqualified loyalty and love of a pet will understand, it’s a cost I’m willing to bear.



## Grandpa's Hat



Written by Jen Cowley Illustrations by Mark Horton

### *About the Book*

Grandpa's Hat is a children's book written by Jen Cowley and illustrated by Mark Horton – developed as a resource for the NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief (National Association for loss and Grief (NSW) Inc.) with the support of the combined Rotary Clubs of Dubbo and Coonabarabran.

The book's central character, Jennywren, finds resilience through talking to her farm animals following the death of her beloved grandfather.

Proceeds from the sale of the book and from the launch went to support the work of NALAG in helping those who are grieving.

### *Purchase the Book or Donate*

To purchase your copy of Grandpa's Hat or to make a donation please visit our website [www.nalag.org.au](http://www.nalag.org.au)

### *Purchase Limited Edition Prints*

We are happy to announce that we now have available by order limited edition prints of the beautiful illustrations throughout Grandpa's Hat, signed by the artist Mark Horton.

If you would like to purchase a print, please visit our website [www.nalag.org.au](http://www.nalag.org.au).





# Pet Loss

## Undoing the Damage of Disenfranchised Grief



**Gabrielle Gawne-Kelna**

Gabrielle is a psychotherapist specialising in grief, loss and change. She has particular expertise around living with cancer and terminal illness, coping with being a carer, facing end-of-life-issues, and bereavement. Contact her for more information, or to arrange a phone or Skype session at [www.onelifecounselling.com.au](http://www.onelifecounselling.com.au)

**“Until one has loved an animal,  
a part of one’s soul remains unawakened.”  
- Anatole France**

Our companion animals – our pets – have walked (or flown or trotted) alongside us down the many paths of aeons. They’ve accompanied us through evolutionary leaps across time and cultures; dogs on the plains, cats in the pyramids; helping us hunt, helping us live, helping us love. Some believe we’ve co-evolved, entwining ourselves in a kind of symbiotic harmony of species. Is it any wonder, then, that we feel so connected to our pets, joined in a kinship deeper than spoken language? Bonded in ways our words cannot hold.

When we share our lives with these beings, we often share it wholly, the gates of our hearts wide open and free. In human relationships, we might have learned to hold back a little, stay safe a little. But our animals can teach us another way.

Is it unconditional love? It’s certainly uncomplicated – no eggshells to negotiate, no bickering about the small stuff, no grudges or social niceties with them pretending to be who they’re not. Just pure living in this moment. And this one. Together.

So, of course, when they die, or when we lose them in some other way, it hits hard and deep. It gets us in places other griefs might not. How could we pretend otherwise?

And yet, we do. Or, at least, society usually does. Typically, the general message is that losing a pet (through death or disappearance or divorce) doesn’t matter as much as, say, a human death; that there’s a sort of step-ladder hierarchy of grief and that anything to do with pets is pretty much bottom-rung.

### **Disenfranchised Grief**

There’s a name for all of this: “disenfranchised grief” (Doka, 1989). A hidden heartache which

# For Your Diary

Education and Training, Healing Days and More...

## Education & Training

### Watch this space

In 2016, we will be bringing you new and exciting education and training opportunities. If you have an idea for a workshop that NALAG may be interested in, want to request education in a certain field of loss and grief, or would like to see NALAG come to your area, please contact us.

NALAG also provides customised training to organisations based on need, contact us for more information.

### Bookings & Enquiries

NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Dubbo  
Ph: 02 6882 9222  
E: [education@nalag.org.au](mailto:education@nalag.org.au)  
W: [www.nalag.org.au](http://www.nalag.org.au) for more information.

## Events

### @ the NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Dubbo - Welchman St, Dubbo

#### Mates of NALAG Morning Tea

The Mates of NALAG Morning Teas are held on the 1st Tuesday of each month at 10.00am. A mens group of friends of NALAG, this is an opportunity for anyone with a connection to NALAG or in need of friendship to come to the Centre and catch up over a tea or coffee.

#### Tea and Talk

The Tea and Talk group is a ladies only morning tea, held every 2nd Wednesday at the NALAG Centre in Dubbo.

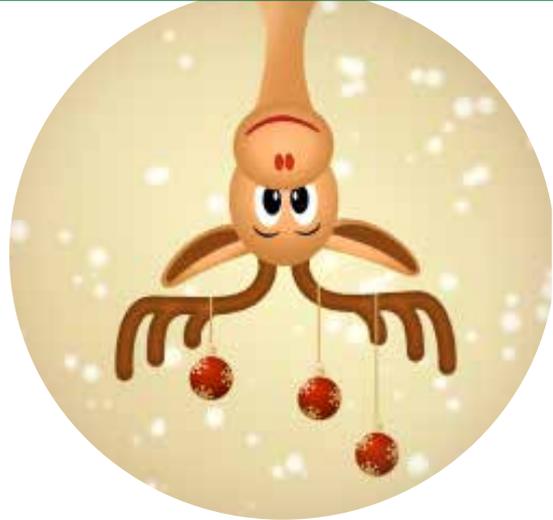
### @ the NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Mudgee - 107 Mortimer Street, Mudgee

#### Yarning Group

The Yarning Group is for people who like to work with yarn (knitting, crochet etc) or for people who like a yarn (chut chat, natter etc) to come together in friendship and companionship.

Held at 10.00am each 3rd Tuesday each month at the NALAG Centre in Mudgee.

For more information on any of these events please call the NALAG Centre in Dubbo on 02 6882 9222 or NALAG Centre in Mudgee on 0488 255 710.



*Merry Christmas  
& Happy New Year*

*The Volunteers, Staff and Board of*

**NALAG (NSW) Inc**

*would like to wish*

*you and your family a*

*Merry Christmas*

*and Happy New Year.*

*We hope you enjoy your holidays.*

*Keep and travel safe.*

*We look forward to seeing you in 2016.*