

Coping With Loss

Coping with the loss of your horse: 15 ways to honor the bond you shared.

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The grief experienced over the loss of a horse can be deep and profound. Even if you made the decision to euthanize your horse to release him from pain, it does not make your loss any easier to bear.

While we all will grieve and heal in different ways, rest assured that grieving over the loss of your horse is completely acceptable—and honorable. After all, your horse was likely a member of the family and you spent many wonderful hours together. So, let yourself feel the pain and grieve the loss. When you are ready, you'll be able to move on and cherish the gifts that your horse gave you while you were together.

Along with the memories you'll have forever, here are some ways to keep your horse close to your heart. Make photo frames from the last set of shoes. Sand and paint the shoes, then glue a photo to the back of the shoe and weave a ribbon hanger through the nail holes.

Plant a variety of flowering bulbs that come up in the spring. Every year, when the flowers poke through the earth with their fresh and vibrant colors, you'll be reminded of your horse.

Hold a ceremony to celebrate your horse's life. There are no rules here. Do whatever you deem appropriate, and invite those you know were important in your horse's life—or celebrate all by yourself. It's up to you.

Plant a deciduous tree or flowering shrub in a location where you can watch it during the year. The progression through the seasons can be a metaphor for the shared experiences you had with your horse and the growth you both experienced.

If you've saved some of your horse's mane or tail hair, braid a bookmark, a window ornament, a wristband or whatever item would be most meaningful to you.

Buy or make a special piece of jewelry—with a horse motif or not or engraved with your horse's name—that you wear all the time. Whenever you notice the jewelry, you'll be reminded of your horse.

Create a keepsake memory book of photos, written stories and recollections.

Horses change our lives and teach us exactly what we need to learn ... if we listen. Jot down the lessons you think your horse taught you. The good, the bad and the not so pretty.

Do something good to honor your horse. You might volunteer at your local equine rescue organization or therapeutic riding center. Choose a cause that speaks to you, and think of your horse as you participate in whatever activity you choose.

Commission a drawing or painting of your horse from photographs you have, or create one yourself.

Donate your favorite horse book to your local library, with an inscription dedicated to your horse. Or donate a year's subscription to your favorite horse magazine or breed journal.

Start a new 4-H club or Pony Club chapter to introduce kids to horses, or become a leader of an existing club.

Donate time, money or a needed item to your local vet clinic in memory of your horse.

If your vet euthanized your horse, send them a card expressing your thanks for their support through this trying time. Vets are people, too, and they find it just as hard to say goodbye to a beloved animal as we do.

Finally, as you're grieving, it may help to read the story titled "Rainbow Bridge." There are several links to it on the Internet with a search for "Rainbow Bridge." You likely will cry more tears as you read it, but they will be good, healing tears.

The Web site www.hoofbeats-in-heaven.com offers support, resources and links to other worthwhile sites for those grieving the loss of a horse.

Remember, as you're grieving, you may feel like you'll never get over the loss of your horse. It will take time, but eventually the thought of your horse will bring good memories to mind and a smile to your face rather than tears to your eyes.

Until that time comes, nurture yourself in healthy ways and spend time honoring your horse in whatever manner best suits you.

"No heaven can heaven be, if my horse isn't there to welcome me."

Author Unknown

The author dedicates this article to her childhood equine partner, Surino, a true friend who passed away in 1985.