

SHERI KETCHUM **Detailed Background**



Sheri, a Bay Area native, had an affinity with animals since childhood. Her delight throughout her youth was her pets: be it turtles, rabbits, fish, rooster, birds, horses—she had a special fondness for newts—and of course there was always the multitude of dogs and cats. Her dearly loved cat, Brandy, was her best friend and a steadying force in her young life, all the way through to his death in her early 20s. It's no wonder she was certain she wanted to work in a vet's office when she grew up.

Sheri eventually completed a two-year, Veterinary Assistant, regional occupations program that included volunteer work at a local shelter, and culminated in an internship at a San Francisco vet's office. She had no apprehension with the simple procedures of the office. However, the day a dog came in with a terribly neglected, dirtily bandaged wound festering with gangrene, which led to the loss of the dog's leg, was the day she realized she wasn't quite keen on certain aspects of the veterinary profession.

Not knowing of other animal-oriented options at the time, she switched her life's goal and ultimately earned a degree in Public Relations. She worked for both non-profit and large corporations, including the California Academy of Sciences in S.F.'s Golden Gate Park, Birkenstock USA in Novato, and Foster's Wine Estates in Napa County, etc. Although it was proving a successful career by societal measures, as the years went on she felt there was something missing. In time, several successive events proved what her new life's path would be.

First, was her mother-in-law's diagnosis of Alzheimer's and her eventual care in Sheri and her husband's home through to her death, with the help of Hospice. Over the ensuing short years the nursing care continued as three elderly dogs died one after the other. The process began with, Casey, the first dog Sheri and her husband had together as a couple; then their second, Lobo, which was Sheri's beloved "heart" dog; and the last included her mother-in-law's dog, Rascal, who had a host of illnesses and eventually was paralyzed for several years prior to his death. The undertaking of the intensive caregiving of these four "teachers" had guided her through to a new realization of her life's meaning (which for Sheri definitely needed to include animals), and what death and dying could signify when approached with an open heart.

This experience, coupled with the sometimes very distressing difficulties of finding someone capable, and more importantly, willing to help with the type of end-of-life care her animals needed—and on the opposite extreme having had such a supportive process for her mother-in-law with the help of Hospice—she realized there must be another alternative. There had to be others like her that needed help with the specialized care of their animals... Thus, in early 2007, she decided to forsake her previous career and start up Transitions Pet Care, specializing in the in-home care of senior and special needs animals, including end-of-life hospice care.

Whatever was lacking in those years working in the business world is gone today. For Sheri, it was the difference of working to make a living, or doing something from the heart in order to truly live. Nowadays there's a feeling of completion, inasmuch as she is able to give a satisfactory measure of assistance and support to those in need. She accomplishes this through helping these most cherished beings maintain health with essential procedures that their people cannot or are simply not comfortable administering, and by helping their guardians navigate the physical and emotional issues of their animal's old age and death... In the end, it was the joy of having things come full circle.



Sheri and her husband of 20+ years, along with her 90-year-old Grandfather, two dogs (Niko, an Anatolian Shepherd mix, and Rio a Labrador/Newfoundland mix) and a cat (Gus, an orange and white Tabby), reside in Novato. She and her husband enjoy tending their fruit trees, vegetable garden, birdfeeders, and composting. She enjoys spending time with her girlfriends, hiking, reading, camping, yoga; and her interests include health and nutrition (for both animals and humans), vegan cooking, holistic care, and environmental causes. She is a volunteer at Hospice by the Bay, visiting weekly with dying patients of the human persuasion, and enjoys attending the teachings on compassion and loving kindness held at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. Sheri takes advantage of attending animal caretaking and hospice seminars, as well as complementary coursework in animal Reiki and T-touch, etc. She is involved with the hospice outreach program at BrightHaven (a sanctuary and educational facility for dying and special needs animals, www.brighthaven.org), and is a founding member of the International Association of Animal Hospice and Palliative Care (www.iaahpc.org).

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Transitions Pet Care – What's in a Name?

Sheri chose the name “Transitions” Pet Care, not only because it well described the ever-changing aspect of one's life journey—whether transitioning from youth to old age, health to wellness, or from illness to death—but also as a way to honor her first “teacher,” her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law, Helen Ketchum, was the host and producer of a local-access cable TV program in the East Bay called Transitions, which examined senior life and elderly issues for more than 15 years. It was her mother-in-law's hospice care that first opened Sheri's mind and heart to what was most important in life, so it only seemed fitting that she start a business called Transitions Pet Care.

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