

## “Gifts”

by Ginger-lyn Summer

They come to us,  
from shelters or friends or in any number of ways,  
these beings of fur or feather or other outer shells.

They come to us wanting only  
to be fed, sheltered, and loved.  
And we take them into our homes and our hearts.

They may have prized pedigrees,  
or they may be abandoned or abused  
and rough around the edges.

But there is something about them,  
some sort of light in their eyes  
that tells us they are meant for us.

And a sweet dance of love  
begins with our new friends.

We watch them delightedly discover their new home,  
laugh at the antics of kitten or puppy,  
smile as the former lost soul  
settles comfortably into our arms.

They become a beloved member of our family,  
a reminder of the uninhibited joy  
that we have often forgotten how to feel.

The dog that excitedly runs  
to greet his human friend returning home,  
or the contented cat curled up on a lap  
remind us of how large  
unfettered love can be.

They come to teach us that our hearts,  
so often battered by this world that we struggle through,  
are still open enough to feel wonder and mystery  
and a precious connection to another being.

And we love them, and care for them,  
and experience the joy  
we thought was lost from our lives.

But life is fragile.

One day, perhaps unexpectedly,  
or perhaps after a long struggle with illness,  
our precious friends are gone.

And we mourn them deeply.  
We feel lost and alone  
and that the joy is once again gone from our lives.

We feel anger, and pain, and fear.  
We question our Deity, and wonder "why"?

Life is fragile.

Their lives are more fragile than ours.  
We cannot escape death,  
and for it to take our most precious friends,  
who ask so little,  
seems unfair and too much for us to bear.

But they leave us always with a gift!  
They leave us with that love they gave, that joy they sparked.  
Our hearts are larger for having loved them.  
We are enriched by having these special souls in our lives-  
even if it was for too brief a time.

Love never dies.

And the love that was created  
by our special friends who came into our lives  
is a living thing,  
always a part of our being.  
We may think our hearts are closing again,  
but we cannot erase the fact  
that they have been opened.  
They teach us love for a reason:  
so that we will have it in our hearts always.  
Each day, each act of kindness or love,  
is a tribute to our pets who have moved on.  
Honor your special friend with kindness and love.  
Each day, reach out to your living companions  
and let them know how precious they are.  
Reach out to others in your life  
and let the love your friend brought you live on.  
Reach out to others in need, whether human or animal.  
I can think of no better gift than the love they teach us.  
And I can think of no better way to honor their memories  
than by extending that love.

In this way, they will truly live forever.