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info@arkandtent.com

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R.I.P. LITTLE BUDDY

After Our Beloved Animal Companions Travel to the 'Great Unknown' - Where Do They Go?

By Jeannine Clark



When Bianca (my beloved Pomeranian) died, I was devastated. She was the most beautiful and loving dog I had ever known: her white and apricot-colored coat was as soft as bunny fur, and her sweet disposition was genteel and ladylike. Because I couldn't bare the thought of living without her, I strongly considered taxidermy. But once I realized that 'Bianca' would no longer be

living in that cute little furry body, I changed my mind.

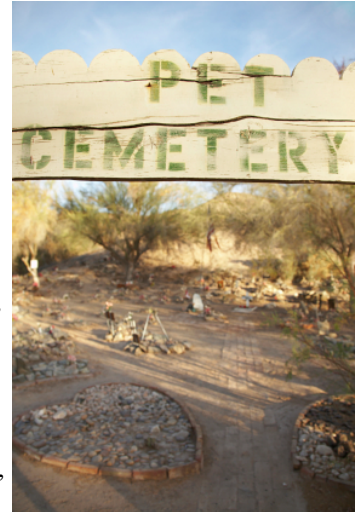
Her loss prompted me to reflect on other animals that have passed through my life - both real, and celluloid; like the film and TV star Lassie. I remembered reading that when Lassie died, he was buried beside a tree with his name carved on it. This idealized memorial got me wondering: where, exactly, is Lassie buried? (As a side note to those of you who are wondering: Lassie, a female in the film and TV series, was actually played by a variety of male collies over the years. Pal, Lassie II, Baby, Spook, Mire, Hey Hey, Boy, the Old Man, Howard and Laddie all starred in the role!) And speaking of famous dogs - where did Benji end up? Or what about Flipper and Mr. Ed? Were these childhood icons laid to rest someplace where the public could visit them?

I started my research by visiting the website for the Hartsdale Pet Cemetery & Crematory, "America's First and Most Prestigious Pet Burial Grounds" - or so says their home page. Founded in 1896 by veterinarian Dr. Samuel Johnson, the site relates the story of a "distressed client" who paid him a call about her dog, who had just died. Wanting to give it a "proper burial," but unable to in the city of New York (where Dr. Johnson had his practice), the good doc offered to let the woman bury her canine companion on the estate he maintained in the town of Greenburgh, located in the hamlet of Hartsdale in Westchester County. Not intending for it to become a business, it turned into one nevertheless; today - over a century later - the "Peaceable Kingdom" (as it's become known) is the final resting place for almost 70,000 dogs, cats, birds, rabbits and other pets. And while there's no mention of famous animals being buried there, pets of the famous are: Diana Ross, Mariah Carey and Kate

Smith all have burial plots in the Hartsdale Pet Cemetery for their deceased loved ones.

Benji, another well-known and widely loved canine film star, was originally found at an animal shelter by Frank Inn, who then became his owner and trainer. Benji starred in four feature films and assorted television shows and, according to Inn, "Each week, for seven years, Benji was called on to do something new - which made that dog about the smartest that ever was, in my book." When Mr. Inn died at the age of 86, he left specific instructions that the ashes of Benji were to be buried in the lining of his coffin. Wow, now that's attachment...

Still, as pet owners will tell you, we do become very attached to our pets and know that they will live in our hearts and memories as a part of our extended family forever. Famous cowboy and TV star Roy Rogers obviously loved his horse, Trigger, because he had him stuffed. Trigger resided in the Roy Rogers' museum until recently when "he" was sold by Christies at auction. A cable company in Omaha, Nebraska purchased the stuffed Trigger for \$266,500. I wonder how that executive decision was determined? My guess is the head of that company must hold many fond childhood memories of that horse.



Some of you might remember another famous horse, the talking Mr. Ed. According to Roadside America, he's supposedly buried approximately 5 miles north of Tahlequah, OK - the capital of the Cherokee nation. However, there's some debate as to whether the Palomino that's buried there is the actual TV star, or if it's "Pumpkin," the horse used for publicity shots after Mr. Ed's death at the alleged ripe old age of 33. (Interestingly enough, Trigger also lived to be 33, or 140 in human years. Hmmm - a coincidence? Those must have been very well taken care of, special horses. Or perhaps, calculating media reps wanted their stars to live long, successful careers.)

Of course, a horse is a horse, but what about animals without four legs? Two hours south of Miami is Grassy Key, a subtropical island in the heart of the Florida Keys. At mile-marker 59 (on the Gulf side) stands a 30-foot concrete statue of a mother



with her baby dolphin. This marks the entrance to the Dolphin Research Center, a facility devoted to education and public awareness. It is also the final resting place of the most famous dolphin ever - Mitzi, better known to the world by her stage name, Flipper. For those of you who grew up watching the fun-loving, frisky dolphin on TV (in the years before it fell under debate as to whether or not it was fair to keep a dolphin in captivity), it's a fitting memorial to the animal companion that kept a single dad and his two boys company.

As for my faithful animal companion - there are no statues of my beloved Bianca, and she is not buried in one of the many pet cemeteries sprinkled throughout the U.S.

I did not cremate her, or stuff her, and she isn't in my backyard beside a tree. Instead, Bianca lives on in photographs and in my heart. Though I wanted to memorialize her in a meaningful way, all of the options I considered didn't seem to fit for me.



I will admit that I did save a tiny bundle of her delicate white fur. It's safely preserved inside a small, plastic bag, tucked inside of a drawer, and whenever I come across it I remember her. Having that little ball of fluff doesn't make me miss her any less, but it does keep a part of her just a little bit closer.

FAST FACTS

Hartsdale Pet Cemetery and Crematory (Hartsdale, NY)

The oldest and most famous pet cemetery in the country

75 N. Central Ave.

Hartsdale, NY 10530

(914) 949-2583

www.petcem.com

Mr. Ed's Grave (Tahlequah, OK)

www.roadsideamerica.com/tip/1828

Flipper Memorial (Grassy Key, FL)

58901 Overseas Hwy.

Marathon, FL

305-289-1121

www.roadsideamerica.com/pet/flipper

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