

Maquoketa
Artist's
'Love Ashes'
Pendants Make
for Beautiful
Memories of
Beloved Pets

Heart Strings

BY LYNNE VOELLIGER PHOTOS BY TRENT FOLTZ

Think back to all of the “best friends” you’ve had in your life. Chances are, at some time or another, a four-legged critter has been at the very top of your list.

It may have been a stray cat who wandered into your life - and your heart – and stayed forever. Or maybe it was a dog who was a member of your family before you were even born.

No matter what the circumstance, if you’ve experienced the unconditional love of a pet, you know firsthand the meaning of “man’s best friend.”

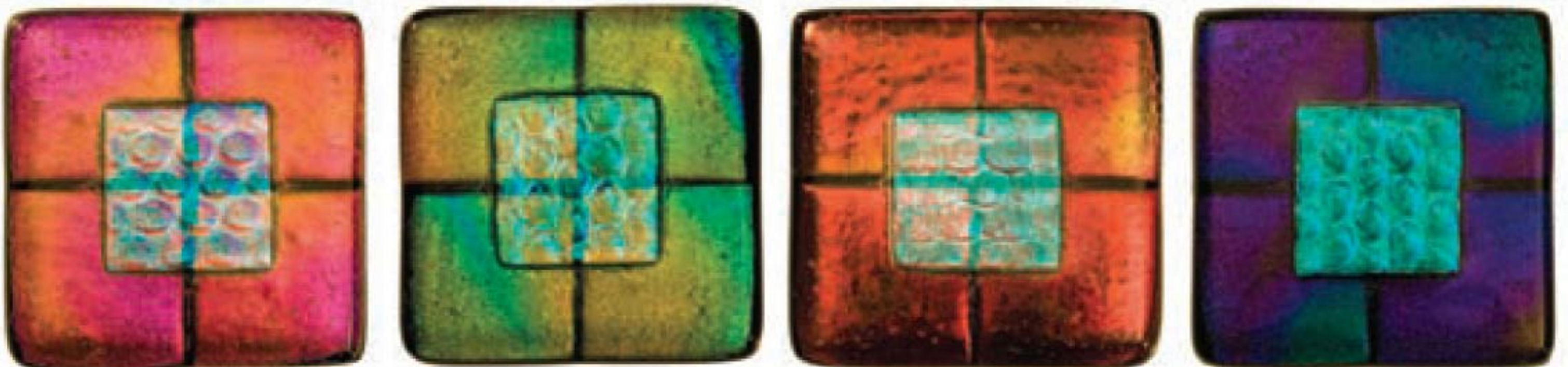
And although you’ve reminded yourself over and over that he’s “just a pet,” the attachment has grown over the years until he has become a treasured member of your family. So when the time comes to say goodbye to your pet, the grief you face is very real and very painful.

Now there’s a way to keep the memory of your pet alive and close to your heart, thanks to artist, Silvia Engel, owner of Love Ashes in Maquoketa.

Engel, a 38-year-old native of Mexico, has been in the jewelry business for several years. As the owner of Mi Tierra Designs, Engel began by importing silver jewelry from her native country. More recently, she has immersed herself in the design and creation of wearable art, specializing in dichroic glass.

When she became interested in creating cremation jewelry, Engel looked to the internet for an existing technique to fuse cremains between layers of colorful glass. Finding none, she experimented in her Maquoketa art studio until she perfected the technique.

With the launch of her new company, Love Ashes, Engel now designs



and creates cremation jewelry and memorials in two forms – a 1.5-inch by 1.5-inch pendant for \$65, which comes with a 36" black hand-dyed silk cord and is worn as a necklace; or a 2-inch square tile mounted in a 7-inch by 8-inch engraved frame for \$135. An iron easel stand to display the plaque is optional for \$22.

To create the pendants, Engel cuts the glass by hand and assembles the cremains before firing it in the kiln for up to 12 hours. "It must pass my inspection for quality."

Engel says that customers love the fact that each pendant and memorial is a one-of-a-kind creation.

"Because of the complex and variable nature of dichroic glass, no two pieces are ever identical," she said.

When placing an order, customers first decide which type of memorial they want, as well as their color preference, choosing from a variety of two-toned color combinations, hand-selected by Engel for their vibrancy. They also get to choose whether the cremains are visible from the back of the pendant or not.

"A keepsake needs to be as vibrant as the life it represents," Engel said. "For many people, being able to see the cremains is very comforting and reassuring," Engel added.

Engel loves the positive feedback she receives from customers, like Michelle Prull of Maquoketa. When Prull's cat Spike died, she asked Silvia to design a pendant for her.

"Spike was my buddy for 18 years. Now I wear a part of him close to my heart and that's a good thing," Prull said.

Prull receives many compliments when she wears the pendant, and when she explains its symbolism, the response has been positive. Engel notes that people are first drawn to the beauty of the jewelry and then to its significance.

Steve Johnson, owner of Pet Memories Funeral Home and Cremation Services in Tipton, Iowa, says that the market is ripe for anything to do with pets.

"The pet industry has virtually exploded over the past few years," said Johnson, whose business recently expanded into Iowa City. "Pet accessories are huge and Silvia's products have been very popular."

Love Ashes is currently marketed primarily in veterinary clinics and pet cemeteries throughout the Midwest, but is also available online at www.loveashes.com or by calling Engel at 1-888-GLASART.

Mi Tierra Designs Studio, located at 210 W Platt, Suite #1 in Maquoketa, is open to the public on Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. or by appointment. ☎