“Losing is the price we pay for living. It is also the source of much of our growth and gain.”—Judith Viorst

Squeaky, the runt of the four-kitten litter, was named after Squeaky Fromme who tried to assassinate former President Gerald Ford. Squeaky’s brother bore the name of three-time world heavyweight champion Cassius Clay before the famous boxer changed it to Muhammed Ali.

Steve’s mother named the babies after taking over their care from her son who found them in an abandoned building. She fed them with a bottle until they were ready to chew food and move in with their rescuer.

That was more than 19 years ago and a couple of months before Steve and I married.

Perhaps that’s part of the hurt.

Two other litter mates died during those years and there were several beloved kitties in between.

But the bottle-fed babies were special as we were caretakers together while forging our relationship.

Last Saturday, the skinny hind legs of Squeaky and Cassius wobbled as I put them in a cat carrier for their last trip to the vet. Their gaunt, black faces peered out at me from behind the cage door.

Steve and I buried them together under a mulberry tree in our backyard, a funeral in snow and sleet.

Favorite pets, loved ones and friends go away.

Some marriages end with the death of a spouse. Others break up along the way.

Weathering the cycles of relationships can be difficult as you experience love, joy, sadness and finally acceptance.

With acceptance, the love and joy return one day.

Writer Anne Wilson Schaef talks of how much easier our lives become when we recognize and accept this process, taking the time to feel and work through grief.

Squeaky and Cassius lasted the length of our marriage until now. But they were not ours to hold onto.

Old cats, like marriage, offer us an opportunity to learn and grow.