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For the Love of Dog

Since my earliest memories I have always been an animal lover, especially dogs. From what I hear based on the stories my mom tells, I loved animals before I could remember. Unfortunately, my mother did not share this passion. Thus, my mission to have my own dog began.

Apparently, when I was about 6 or so years old, I was already fairly determined to get what I wanted. My parents gave us three girls our first piggy banks, and I began to save. Shortly thereafter, my mom asked me what I was saving my money for. I explained that I was saving my money to buy a dog. To that she replied, “Just because you want a dog and you are saving up your money for one, doesn’t mean that you can get one.” She went on to describe how much work they are, and how they end up costing *more* money because they are expensive to take care of. For the next several nights when I was being tucked in, I would ask for a dog and my mom would repeat the same spiel. Finally, one night her reply was, “Someday when you have your own house, you can get a dog.” With this she was hoping to put an end to my constant begging. Several days later as she was tucking me in, she again asked me what I had decided to save my money for. Sounding disappointed I earnestly replied, “My own house...so I can have a dog.” This was not the answer she was expecting, and it made her feel somewhat sad. Her little

girl was already thinking about moving out so she could have a dog. Little did she know, she would someday be the one to buy me a dog to live in our house.

My mom grew up in a strict household where my grandma wouldn't allow them to keep pets. Her mom viewed cats and dogs as farm animals, not house pets. My mom's grandparents had a farm with kittens which she really liked playing with. She begged and begged for her mother to allow her to have one particular kitten. She did not know it until she was an adult, but her parents were considering letting her take it home because it was unlikely to survive the winter on the farm. Sadly, the kitten passed away before they had made a final decision of whether to give in or not. She had another unfortunate animal encounter as a child where she was viciously bitten by her cousin's beloved pet dog. She felt bad about it because the dog had to be put down, but it also made her wary of them. She was also allergic to animals. By the time she met my dad, she was to the point where she almost had it added to the vows that they would NEVER have pets.

I, like my mother, grew up in a strict household. The only pets that were allowed were fish in a fish bowl (fish tanks were too much maintenance for her). As it turned out, I was allergic to pet dander, too. Nonetheless, one of my favorite things to do as a child was to play with people's dogs, whether it was one of the neighbor's, a family friend's, or my cousin's farm dogs. Tucker was one of my best friends in the neighborhood. His house was only about 150 feet from our back deck. I would go over to his house almost every day in the summer to play with him in the yard. My friend Tucker was a Beagle puppy. Even though he is too old to play outside anymore, and his owners have kids of their own, I only just recently transitioned from calling it "Tucker's house" to "Brian and Tanya's house." Even though I loved having a dog to play with, I wanted one to have for my very own.

For every holiday when asked by my family for a Christmas list, somewhere in the list I would include “a real dog.” I offered that I would be fine with not having another birthday or Christmas present if I could just have a dog. I knew I probably wouldn’t get one if my mom had her way (she always did), but it didn’t hurt to ask, right? One thing I *could* count on was getting stuffed animal dogs, dog calendars, dog stickers, and once even the interactive dog robot Poo-Chi. One day, while my sisters and I were shopping with my mom, I asked if I could use the money she was going to spend on clothes for me so I could buy a \$25 dog breed encyclopedia. Pretty soon I had a collection of dog encyclopedias. At night before I went to bed, I would read through one and bookmark the pages with pieces of tissue. If someone was walking a dog down our street, more often than not, I could tell you the breed, its origin, and the amount of exercise and grooming it required. I would have been the perfect dog owner at the age of 10, if only I could convince my mom to let me have a dog.

Since I couldn’t have my own dog, I looked for ways to be involved with dogs. I wanted to volunteer at the local animal shelter, but I wasn’t old enough. One year for my birthday party, I asked my friends to bring things to donate to the animal shelter instead of bringing gifts. My thought was, “Why get gifts when I could help animals who really needed a home and someone to love?” Around this time, some good family friends, who also thought they would never have dogs, decided to start breeding American Cocker Spaniels. I got to help take care of the puppies from the time shortly after they were born until they were sold. The fact that their family ended up getting dogs gave me hope I might be able to eventually talk my mom into it.

I still had a long way to go from having fish that swim around in their bowls to having a dog that could roam the house. After much research, I decided I would try to convince my mom to get a rabbit that could live in our garage. It would beat a fish for sure because you can

actually pet them and “walk” them, but it wouldn’t be in the house to make a mess. Around this time, there was a nice elderly lady who was looking to find a new home for her brown and white spotted lop-eared rabbit. My mom agreed that we could take him which was practically a miracle. I was so excited to have a *real* pet. Flufferdoodle, as he was already named, was previously spoiled by growing up hopping around the old lady’s house dropping little round turds wherever he went. He was not a big fan of his new home, a cage in our garage. Flufferdoodle became evil, frequently biting when I tried to pick him up. Luckily, shortly after, we joined 4-H and my mom agreed it would be a good experience for me to raise a rabbit to show at the county fair. My two sisters each got a rabbit and I got two. My sisters were not near as invested in the whole pet ownership deal and lost interest after awhile. The little guys became my responsibility, and I took care of them as if they were my own. It was fun having pet rabbits, but four rabbits does not equal one dog.

I had not given up. I had not gotten this far to settle for anything less than “woman’s best friend.” I had done my research, and there were several dog breeds that would be a perfect match for our family because they did not shed (or only very little) and were considered hypoallergenic. I showed her the bookmarked pages of my encyclopedia. She noticed all of the hard work and research I had done to get what I wanted. Over the years my mom had been softening to the idea, though I did not know it. It helped that some of our friends and family who were also *never* going to get dogs changed their minds. She saw I had proven myself responsible with taking care of our rabbits and our friends’ puppies. My dream of owning a dog was closer than I realized.

The last of our friends’ Cocker Spaniel puppies were being sold at this blue brick building called “The Pet Stop.” When we drove by, my mom would let us stop there to see how

they were doing. One day when we went, I saw they had two puppies that fit the “criteria.” They had all puppies in a big pen so people could pet them, play with them, and hold them. I sat down in the pen surrounded by puppies and showed my mom the two puppies we should get. The Bichon Frisé was the cutest little white ball of fluff I had ever seen. He was so sweet as he crawled into my lap and fell asleep. It was so adorable even my mom couldn’t resist. It was as if it was meant to be. That day we gave him a new home and a new name, Beauregard. It was one of the most anticipated and exciting days of my life.

By sitting down and writing this I am reminded of how fortunate I am to have my dog Beau and how I never want to take him for granted. I have so many great memories with my dog, dressing him up in doll clothes as a puppy, training him and teaching him tricks, taking him for walks and runs, sleeping beside him, and just playing with him. I have to admit, he is a lot of work sometimes and not cheap to take care of, but he is everything I was hoping for in a dog. More than that, I am reminded of the determination I had as a child. I hope to rekindle that childlike stubbornness and determination to achieve my goals going forward. I believe that you have to work hard for what you want even if you think there is little chance you can get it. Looking back I am kind of glad that I had to work hard to earn a dog to love.