

Salinger - a friendship to last a lifetime
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Not a lot is perfect. The world is messy and unpredictable. But, if you're lucky, at some point you'll look back at a period of your life and know it was just as it needed to be. And, you'll feel grateful knowing you were there for it. And, it will make you smile.

I bought my home in Cedarburg, Wisconsin, in 2011, and after living alone for a year, I was ready to fill my quiet home with something other than music, furniture and pictures on the walls. I wanted to fill it with love. Having grown up with a dog, I knew there was no love like that of a dog. Off to the animal shelter I went.

I knew there was a special pup out there who needed a home, and I had a home to share. When I first saw this sweet-faced dog with matted white hair and tender, eager eyes, I knew he was the one. It was love at first sniff.

Honestly, I was nervous and overwhelmed on the drive home, wondering how he would fit into my life. Would he bark at everyone who walked by? Would he keep me up at night? Would he like his new toys? The answer was "yes" to all of the above. But, after our first day together, I stopped worrying and knew we would figure it all out together.

We came into each other's lives when we needed each other. I brought my new friend to his new house, and it instantly changed from a house to a home. I named him Salinger (named after his favorite author), and what was mine became his. We were companions, buddies, and best friends. Salinger's life went from living alone on the street to walks together exploring new trails, daily treats, snuggles and constant compliments about what a good boy he was.

Along the way, Salinger taught me unconditional love. He loved me no matter what I did, even if we had to miss a walk some days. And, I loved him naturally and unconditionally. He could do no wrong. I didn't know I was capable of love like that.

I'd come home to find my old shoes chewed up. "Well Sal, I needed new shoes anyway," I'd say.

He'd chew up a pair of brand new leather boots. "Well Sal, those boots weren't actually that comfortable anyway. You're still the best boy."

Our family eventually grew. Down the road he got a mom and then a baby brother and a baby sister and even a dog sister named Huey. This old house knew love like never before. After my son was born, I brought home the baby's hat to let Salinger smell his new brother so he might remember it when we brought the baby home a couple days later. I put the hat on the couch in front of him, and he immediately sniffed it and lay on it as if to protect it. I knew at that moment, our new son would be loved by more than his mother and me.

Years went on, and children took more of my time and energy, but I still made time every night for just him. He didn't mind sharing me with his brother and sister too much, but when the house was quiet and everyone else was asleep, he and I hung out like old times; just the two of us. He was never well trained at walking on a leash, so I just let him lead the way. He never liked being left at home, so he often went along for the ride, or I'd just stay home as much as I could to keep him happy. I tried to be the best friend he could have.

I never knew how old he was or when his birthday was, but we celebrated each year on the date I brought him home. April 14 will always be a special day.

A decade or so later when Salinger got too tired for this world, he knew I would be okay without him. I would be heartbroken of course, but I had children now filling the house and memories and love to last a lifetime. He knew I wouldn't be alone. I could barely bring myself to let him go but knew that our time together was about to end.

On a warm spring day, he lay outside on the fresh grass and held his face in the breeze, letting it wash over him. He had been sick for days and restless, but in that moment with my hand on him while I told him what a perfect friend he had been, I felt his body relax and find peace for the first time in a long time. Our time together ended that afternoon. And, it was sad and beautiful and full of love and loss.

We shared the best 11 years of both of our lives, and he came and stayed when I needed him most, and he left when he was ready. If ever there was a perfect love, I experienced it with Salinger. It's a love that will stay with me forever.