

When I sit back and think of the word, family, it takes me back to my early years as a young child. From early on, my mother told me family alone is a powerful word that can conjure up multiple different meanings and emotions. She said that a family can be anything that involves love; anyone or thing that supports, loves you, and you can confide in and trust. At the young age of 2, I remember taking weekly trips to the local pet stores with my family. I'd spend endless hours going around to each animal and showing as much love as I possibly could. Many would never get the chance to be held or loved. Each time, I went back to the stores and local humane shelters, I would make it a point to love and care for different breeds and those not normally picked out/up.

From there, I got to choose a fish or two as my first pet. My parents wanted to see how I would do with handling a pet. So, I worked hard at feeding and taking care of my fish. I chose two goldfish; Dora and Boots. I remember waking up to feed them to talking to the tank endless times during the day. While I was at preschool, my mother said that I would talk about them endlessly, and draw them pictures. I had Dora and Boots for two whole years. I loved them, but they got so big. I couldn't keep them in the size of tank I had much longer. So, I asked my preschool if it was okay to let Boots and Dora come to the aquarium in the middle of their school. The school allowed them into their own family. In the end, I got to share my joy with all my friends, and I had my family with me all day long during my pre-school years.

Even during my elementary school years, I would still make it back to stores and shelters to love on the animals. During this time, my mother knew it was hard to give up, and never see my fish anymore. So, my grandpa and her decided to surprise me with a young golden retriever, Jazz. She was my whole world, and I treated her as a younger sister. I even got to "camp" out with her in the backyard on the weekends, I didn't want to leave her outside by herself! My grandpa had handmade the doghouse big enough for both of us. After a year of unconditional love and comfort to me and my family, Jazz was tragically killed in a freak accident. It took some time to deal with the loss.

I got to choose the next family pet, and instead of the obvious choices, I went with a young lop-eared rabbit. My family helped learn the special needs and responsibilities on caring for Skyley. Our new family member grew on my heart, my family, and even in size. Enough that I knew that she was lonely and wasn't suited for a cage all her life. At the end of two great years, I gave her to one of my mother's students, who had a farm with other rabbits.

Next came my cat, Thunder. He was a product of the May 2011, Joplin tornado. My family needed love and therapy; hence finding Thunder. He was a part of the family up until a year later, when my parents divorced and my dad got to take him. As a result of their divorce, my mother and I downsized to an apartment. Apartment expenses caused us to look into smaller animals due to the large pet-deposit fees. One thing lead to another, and eventually we had six guinea pigs at one point; two of them being rescues who were later sent off to a loving home together. Those guinea pigs got me through some tough times when I originally thought I wouldn't become attached as they weren't a typical dog or cat.

In the end, I believe that all the pets I've owned are not your typical pets that most people would appreciate. I wanted to be the one to provide love and comfort to each during their shorter than traditional lifespans. Because I owned larger pets for a short period of time compared to their lifespan expectancy, I have a greater appreciation for smaller animals, their advanced care routines, and the way they sneak their way into your heart without notice.