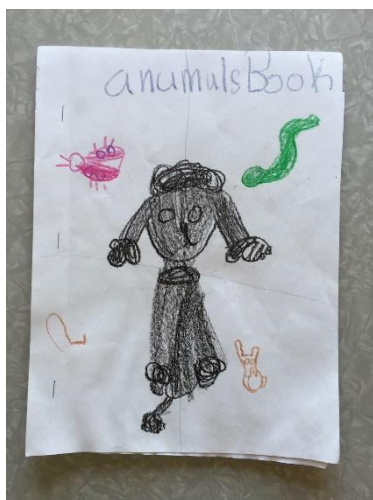


Essay: Love is a 4-legged Friend
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“Please, please, stop Mom!” I would beg whenever we passed an animal on the roadside. My 4-year-old eyes would cloud, my brow would wrinkle, and my young heart would ache to jump out of my car seat and move that poor animal to a safe place. My love of four-legged friends started early, and knew no bounds. One winter we found a bird frozen in the thawing snow in our yard. The neighbor girls were grossed out, but I knew what had to be done, and chipped away at the rocky, hard earth on the north side of the house to lay it to rest. My mom teased me that my future career would be Animal Undertaker.

Some girls have childhoods filled with Barbie’s or baby dolls to feed and change and care for. Not me; for me it has always been animals. My closet shelves were filled with stuffed animals, and my heart had room for creatures of all sizes and shapes. I was that kid who came home on the last day of school with the class pets, to my parents’ surprise. We’d have to research what they needed to survive, and I did my best, but in the end I’d release them back into the wild. When Mom found a spider or wasp in the house, she’d call for me to do a “remove and release” and set it free outside. As a Brownie Scout, I dutifully went door to door selling Girl Scout cookies every spring, but the real joy for me was meeting all the dogs who came to the door with their owners.



When I wasn’t playing with animals, I was drawing them. Every picture had to include a dog by my side. I also grew to love Pokémon (still do, to this day!) because of its fantastic animals and evolutions. One of my favorite things was how Pokémon grew loyal to me during the game, and would battle to their last ounce of energy before fainting. As a high school senior whose graduation dreams are now under threat of COVID-19, the new video game Animal Crossing has helped make quarantine bearable.

For years and years, I dreamed of having a real dog of my own. I begged my parents, promising I would be a good momma and feed her and brush her and walk her... and assuring them that I would take care of everything she could need. I would try to take dogs off the streets home with me. I

fed stray cats squares of cheese (which, looking back now was probably not good for them, but I knew my mom wouldn't notice when it went missing.)

Eventually, we moved to a bigger house with a fenced yard, and I got my German Shepherd Daisy for my 8th birthday. I had dreamed of having a dog for years and years, and finally, we were going to pick up the little black puppy wearing a big blue bow. When I got Daisy, I got my own best friend. Someone to run home to every day and play outside with. Someone to bring inside (even though I wasn't supposed to before she was house trained) to cuddle with. Daisy has always had the best manners and is a very good girl. She's smart, so it didn't take a lot for her to learn how to behave.



Things got tougher in middle school. Through the hardest years of my life, when I felt alone or unwanted, I would go outside and sit on the picnic table with Daisy and cry. I would tell her about all the people I hated and the people who hurt my feelings. She would always lay there and listen. She is the best listener. It was easy to talk to her because I knew she could keep my secrets. Daisy was the first being other than my family that I had pure deep love for. A decade later, losing Daisy is one of my greatest fears. I love this dog with everything in my heart. She has truly grown up with me.



My passion for the animals on this earth will never end. I care about every creature from spiders, worms and poisonous frogs to whales and cheetahs. Every animal life is beautiful and important. I'm really glad that I could share a part of my life with my dog Daisy. She is a wonderful good girl. Every four-legged creature is a friend of mine!