

Beloved Dog Changes Mind of Cat Lover

A cat person ends up with a dog and learns a thing or two about love

By [Robin Eileen Bernstein](#)

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Trevor, age 12

Credit: Robin Eileen Bernstein

Years ago, when my daughter was seven, she told me her life would be ruined if we didn't get a dog. If you've ever been the parent of a seven-year-old, you know there is no rational response to this. You can say "no" and when your child whines "But whyyy??" you can say, "Because I said so."

Or you can get a dog.

For me, this was problematic because — ok, I'll admit it — I didn't like dogs. For the record, this may or may not be due to an incident circa 1967 involving me, my pink banana-seat

bicycle and a dozen mangy stray mongrels, teeth bared in hot pursuit.

A Member of Team Meow

Put me in a room with a lovable Lab or gentle German shepherd, and I was the one recoiling when they came loping my way. I knew they just wanted a scratch behind the ears, which I'd oblige if they would stop drooling on my lap. Instead, my back would stiffen as I tried to convince the unsuspecting canine to find friendlier territory. And by convince, I mean a rather ungraceful arm motion that was a cross between a head pat and a shove. I have friends who, upon witnessing this pitiful interaction, would quietly call Rambo or Attila away from me. Whether they did this for my sake or the dog's, I don't know. But I was grateful.

If the world can be split into dog people and cat people, I'm solidly on Team Meow. Cats don't drool on you. Cats don't chase you. In fact, cats don't do much of anything, which is why I love them. But when I was a kid, my dad said "no cat" and when I whined "But whyyy?" he said, "Because I said so." When I married a man with a cat allergy, my fate was sealed.

The Moment of Reckoning

At the start, appeasing my daughter was easy. Using simple first grade math, I convinced her that two gerbils are 10 times better than one puppy. She named them Honey and Bunny, who were followed in short order by Jeter and Giambi, named by my baseball fan son. I am indebted to these four rodents for providing me with several blissfully dog-free years.

When the gerbils died, I resorted to Plan B: I brought my now 10-year-old daughter to the local pet shop for an hour or two every weekend. My thinking — if you can call it that — was that a revolving cast of adorable puppies would satisfy her craving.

It did, until one Sunday, when one frisky puppy wouldn't leave our side. He did his enthusiastic and bumbling best to climb on our laps and nibble our fingers while furiously wagging his stubby round tail. He had big brown eyes, floppy cocker spaniel ears and curly poodle fur. That's because he was half of each — a cockapoo — which I later learned means "expensive mutt."



Credit: Marlee Shnitkin

Within minutes, our puppy play date began to unravel.

It started with “Mom, he’s so cute!” and escalated to “Mom, can we get him? Please, can we get him? Please, please, please?”

And like in a bad film *noir* where the protagonist is about to have a flashback — which you know is coming because the picture gets all blurry and everything in the scene spins counter-clockwise — next thing I know I’m 10, and I’m begging my dad for a cat. “Please, can I have a cat? Please, please, please?” But my dad keeps saying no way, no how, no cat.

I couldn’t do that to her. I didn’t want a dog, but neither did I want to pass this arbitrary “no pets” policy to another generation. Parents forever weigh where to draw that line in the sand; my dislike of dogs just didn’t seem like a deep enough line.

“Do you promise to walk him and feed him every day?” I asked.

“Yes! Yes!” she said.

While I realize in retrospect we should have adopted from a shelter, at that moment —when she hugged her brand new puppy, now sporting a big blue “somebody-wants-me” bow— I knew it was the right call.

“Mom, this is the happiest day of my life!” she said.

For the Love of Trevor

Trevor (my daughter named him, not me), whom I was told would be “no bigger than 15 pounds,” grew into a 25-pound cautionary tale for what happens when you let a cat person have a dog.

Leave your meal unattended and Trevor would happily grab it off your plate. He’d eagerly hump the legs of every visitor to our home, repairmen included. His motto was “the world is my toilet” and I had the stained rugs to prove it.

Age eventually caught up with him and, in his final year, glaucoma stole his sight. Gone was his youthful ability to jump several feet in the air as if on a trampoline — a feat that earned him the nickname Trevor the Bouncing Dog.

Yet he still loved his walks, his treats and cuddling on the sofa with us, his family. Near the end, it was like having an old furry roommate who napped a lot. He succumbed last year at age 12 to a baseball-sized tumor on his hip.

Sometimes I think, “How did I, of all people, end up with a dog?” But Trevor showed me that you can teach an old cat person new tricks.

Where there was once fear or indifference to dogs, something unexpected had taken root, as if my heart expanded. One look at Trevor and I had an uncontrollable urge to rub his belly, scratch his chin and hold him close. My back no longer stiffened; it softened. I never thought I could love a dog, but my sweet, high-spirited Trevor proved me wrong.

I’m still a cat person. But dogs, like kids, want more, so you give more, even if it means sometimes sacrificing your own needs. It becomes a lovely *pas de deux*, forever raising the bar of affection and love.

My daughter is now 23 and lives on her own. Occasionally, she asks if I’ll get another dog. “No,” I tell her, “but *you* can.”

If she someday has a son or daughter who begs, “Please can I have a dog? Please, please, please?” I hope she’ll have a flashback to an adorable brown-eyed puppy sporting a big blue “somebody-wants-me” bow, and that she’ll once again say, “Yes! Yes!”



By [Robin Eileen Bernstein](#)

Robin Eileen Bernstein is an essayist and feature writer whose byline appears in The Washington Post, The Boston Globe, Newsday, Salon (an Open Salon Editors' Pick), Narratively, Purple Clover, Salute, CBS HealthWatch, and in university alumni magazines and other publications.