Shortly after learning that he was a wizard, Harry Potter visited Diagon Alley for the first time with Hagrid, a half-giant wizard. Hagrid bought Harry his very first pet, a white snow owl, as an 11th birthday present while the pair were perusing shops in Diagon Alley. Harry decided to name his owl Hedwig, a name that he had found in the book *A History of Magic*. However, even after receiving his owl and being introduced to the magic of Diagon Alley, Harry still had to return back to muggle world of the Dursley’s for the remainder of the summer. During that waiting period, Hedwig was Harry’s only companion. He found her company enjoyable and loved to raise his window and watch her fly around during the nighttime. Harry quickly became attached to his pet owl. Throughout the books, Hedwig would become Harry’s only connection to the magical world during the summers when the two would be locked and barred in Harry’s room.

Like Harry, 13 years ago shortly after my fifth birthday, I had the privilege of going to get my very first pet. My sister and I had no idea that our lives were going to be changed that day. We visited a strange house that smelled of dogs so we were not quite sure what to think. We went into the backyard of this house and saw white puffballs running and flopping around everywhere. Immediately we fell in love with every single West Highland Terrier there. We were able to play with them for quite some time, but then our parents told us it was time to leave. My sister and I sadly told each of the puppies goodbye and starting sulking and walking back to the car when they said we could have one. We ran back to all the little babies and picked the littlest girl we could find. My sister and I walked back to our parents crying and screaming with excitement. The whole day was absolutely perfect—even the hour and a half long trip back home. When we got Fergie, our newest addition, settled in at our home I was already absolutely in love.

As time went on my love for Fergie grew just as Harry’s love for Hedwig grew, but the carefree nature of childhood is only temporary; the majority of our life is spent dealing with trials and responsibilities. Unfortunately, my childhood came to an end earlier than I expected. My dog became extremely ill when I started reading Harry Potter for the second time. Fergie got sick very fast, and it was completely unexpected. Her illness was a huge shock to my family. My beautiful dog, my sweet childhood companion, died right before my high school graduation in the spring. I was blessed to have my dog, Fergie, for almost 13 years. She was the sweetest dog that I have ever known, and she taught me things that humans cannot possibly teach. Fergie taught me how to love unconditionally, how not to judge other people because they are different than you, and how to be happy with the life and the situations you are given.

I can too closely relate to Harry when Hedwig unexpectedly died while they were flying away from the Dursley’s house. Harry did not have time to prepare for Hedwig’s death, and he watched her die right before his very eyes. The shock that he felt was unbearable just as the shock I felt was. Since my dog was so ill, we had to make the horrible decision to put her to sleep, so just as Harry watched his beloved childhood pet die, I had to watch mine die. It was the most pain I have ever felt in my life and the wound is still fresh to this day.

Fergie died a couple of months before my graduation of high school; which symbolized the end of my childhood. I got my dog when I was 5 years old—just as my primary education was starting—and she died just as it was ending. When I was rereading the scene of Hedwig’s death, I felt the pain from the death of my own pet. I knew exactly what Harry was feeling in that moment; it was not the death of some animal, the last remnant of innocence in Harry’s life had just died, his very best childhood friend died. Hedwig’s death was the death of something truly innocent that he truly loved.

The deaths of pets might seem unimportant to some people, but I know what Hedwig’s death truly meant. J.K. Rowling did not just decide that Hedwig had to die just to make readers sad or remove an unnecessary character; even though many fans and readers think that her death was unnecessary. Hedwig’s death was essential to the plot because it symbolized the death of innocence. It was no coincidence that Hedwig died while Harry was leaving the Dursley’s house—his childhood home—the night the enchantment was broken. Harry was leaving not only his aunt and uncle’s house, he was leaving his childhood behind that night as soon as he got into Hagrid’s flying motorcycle. While on the flight away from his “safe house” the Death Eaters were able to find them, and a death curse meant for Harry hit Hedwig. While I was rereading this, I flashed back to my dog’s death and thought about how death is important and necessary to truly mature. As sound as it stands, my childhood had to come to a close at some point and something dramatic had to end it for me. Time is precious and when you are young, it is hard to understand and appreciate that. Death teaches you spend all your time carefully and with purpose.

Fergie and Hedwig’s deaths also taught me that animals are not so different from us. Fergie taught me many things just as Hedwig taught Harry many things. Pets teach you from a young age to care for something other than yourself and to love something that cannot really do anything for you in return. Some people say that animals do not have character, and you cannot actually tell what they are thinking, but I think you can. I could tell how Fergie was feeling, just as Harry could tell when Hedwig was mad at him.

The death of Hedwig showed the reader that it was time for Harry to grow and become the man he was supposed to be without all the ties of childhood. The death of innocence was essential to the plot line; without the death of probably the most innocent character, there could be no emotional growth for Harry and for the reader. When Hedwig’s death occurred it marked a change in the Harry Potter series because Lord Voldemort’s power reached a whole new level. Harry knew that he was entering into a big battle. He was taking on things that would scare him, but he would have to welcome them if he wanted to end the terror that was wreaking havoc on the people he loved.

The death of my own childhood pet taught me the very same things that Harry was taught by the death of his own pet. The loss of innocence can be severe and very sad, but it is extremely necessary in order to grow up and go on with life. Death is something that people need to experience in order to mature and grow up, as horrible as that sounds. I can see the development of Harry’s character after Hedwig dies, just as I can see my own development as a person after Fergie died.