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ENC 1145-04

25 September 2012

Shortly after learning that he was a wizard, Harry Potter visited Diagon Alley for the first time with Hagrid. While the pair were perusing shops in the alley, Hagrid bought Harry his very first pet, a white snow owl, as an 11th birthday present. Harry decided to name his owl Hedwig, a name that he had found in the book *A History of Magic*,which means battle or war. However, even after receiving his owl and being introduced to the magic of Diagon Alley, Harry still had to return back to the Muggle world of the Dursley’s for the remainder of the summer. During that waiting period, Hedwig was Harry’s only companion. At the beginning of the second book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets,* Harry did not think he had received any letters from his friends over the course of the summer; during that time, Hedwig was his only true friend. 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 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 sit down and hold the puppies in our laps and run around the yard and let them chase us, 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 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 screaming, “Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! She is perfect! We love her!” The whole day was absolutely perfect—even the hour and a half long trip back home. I was still in a booster seat, but my mom let me hold Fergie in the car. She snuggled close to me and kissed me and I told her, “I love you already Fergie!” After our interaction she started whining so I gave her to my mom. She started climbing up my mom’s chest onto her neck underneath her hair where it was nice and warm and slept there for the remainder of the car ride. Once we got home, Fergie ran around the house looking at everything and then finally she found herself a blanket and nestled on it and fell asleep. By the time we got Fergie, our newest addition, settled in at our home I was already absolutely in love.

I was blessed to have 13 years with Fergie, and I truly loved ever minute of it. When I was little she was someone who I shared my secrets with and as I got older she was someone who would let me hold her when I was crying or feeling bad. 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. I started reading them around February when school was coming to a close and I loved getting emerged into the familiar story once more. But as I was reading it, all the scenes involving Harry and Hedwig took on a greater meaning.

Fergie got sick very fast which was shocking to my family. She had never been sick or had any surgeries; she was a perfectly healthy dog. Fergie, my sweet childhood companion, 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. Throughout the years Fergie and I had become very close and my family would joke around and say I was her “safe zone”. After the hurricanes in 2005, she would shake whenever she heard thunder, but when I would hold her she would relax and immediately stop shaking. Fergie slept with me every night for eight years and when she was ready for me to wake up she would lick my face and snuggle close. 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, just as Hedwig taught Harry. If I were to accidentally step on Fergie’s foot when she was too close to me she would always act like it was her fault and come to me licking my face. Hedwig was funny in the way that when Harry treated her unfairly, she would let Harry know by ignoring him. Fergie would patiently wait to go outside if we were busy, and she would let us know if she was hungry. She was perfectly content with lazy afternoons, and was happy just because she was with her family. Just like Fergie, Hedwig was a happy owl that loved being with Harry and truly thrived off of his love for her. Fergie taught me how to love unconditionally 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. When I was rereading the scene of Hedwig’s death, I felt the pain from the death of my own pet. 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. Harry muttered her name and did not want to accept the fact that she had just died. He had a “dreadful, gut-wrenching pang” for Hedwig as she exploded in the sidecar. 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. 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. I remember standing there once she went to sleep forever, thinking it was not true and that she would come running in to greet me. I too felt the “dreadful, gut-wrenching pang” that Harry felt when I had to realize she was gone. I had never been so numb and so lifeless as I was that day. As time went on I could not stand to be alone in my house. I could not see pictures of Fergie without crying. I could not talk about her. I did not know how to continue on without her when she had been such a constant presence in my life.

The deaths of pets might seem unimportant to people who have never had a pet, 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. When Hedwig’s death occurred it marked a change in the Harry Potter series because Lord Voldemort’s power reached a whole new level. The reader knew that the series tone had changed and that the book would be very different. The reader would have to grow up with Harry if we wanted to continue reading because it was not fun and games anymore, it was crunch time and Harry had a job to do. Harry knew that he was entering into a big battle. Hedwig’s death was essential to the plot because it symbolized the death of innocence. 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. Without the death of probably the most innocent character, there could be no emotional growth for Harry or for the reader.

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. The death of ones childhood might end in some dramatic form because no one wishes this upon himself or herself. Anything that ends ones childhood will be seen as dramatic because it will hurt. 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 because in the end you will die too.

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. Hedwig taught Harry to consider other people’s feeling because for the most part he thought of himself. She taught him to care for others because she depended on him throughout her whole life. 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. People who do not understand animals or who do not own animals, say that they 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. When Fergie was sad she would like to snuggle up to me and follow me around the house for the day. When Hedwig was mad she would ignore whatever Harry tried to do to please her, like turning her head away from her food or pretending she was sleeping.

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. Harry realized that innocent people and animals were dying for him and it made him take his “job” more seriously. When something so precious that you are so close to dies, you learn from that experience and you grow up a better person because you want to be all the good that the precious animal saw in you.