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# When Harry Met Harry: How Finding a Friend Changed My Dog

*Through Harry's friendship with our neighbor dog, I knew we were going to be okay.*

BY: [RACHEL SCHINDERMAN \(/AUTHOR/RACHEL-SCHINDERMAN/\)](#)



Before we even got married, my husband (then my boyfriend) and I would talk about getting a dog. A dog would complete us, elevate us, we discussed. It's what couples with hopes of becoming a family do. We were going to name this dog Indiana but call him Indy.

"We named the dog Indiana!" we would say often and, without prompting, quoting the last line of "Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade."

We had other names. Naming our yet-to-have dog took up a lot of our time.

Neither of us had grown up with dogs. I had two black Poodles, Shecky and Scruffy, until the age of 4 but my mom gave them away after my father died, heightening my belief that dogs equaled family. Just as mine fell apart, the dogs disappeared.

If only our landlady would allow us a pet. Darn her, we bemoaned from the safety of our non-pet lives, not knowing all that it would entail. We blamed her for this area of our lives that was lacking. I even suffered through weekly allergy shots so I could be prepared when the day came.

Then we had two children and bought our own house and there was no one to blame for our lack of a dog. My allergies were under control and I could handle certain breeds. I would scour the internet. Our dog name list got longer and longer: Linus, Mosely, Snoopy. We visited the animal rescue adoption event near the farmer's market we went to weekly.

And yet we still had no dog. Our children were now 7 and 3. We were dragging our feet. Did we even want a dog? Did we know what it would mean? How would it change our lives? What if it wasn't everything we had hoped it would be?

Then one day, I looked online and a scraggly Poodle mix popped up on my screen.

"That's the dog," I said to my husband.

"Really? Him?"

"Yes, him," I said slightly hurt that he could even question this new member of our family.



And so we drove out to Downey, about 30 minutes away from our home in Los Angeles, and visited the local shelter.

The dog was dirty and matted and there were several other dogs there that were cuter and cleaner, but I had decided he was ours before we even got there and, once we got there, my husband agreed.

He was just so dirty, like "Harry the Dirty Dog," a children's book that was in heavy rotation in our house at the moment. We named him Harry.

When we brought him home a few days later, our kids were ecstatic. Harry rested quietly on the floor, and barely made a peep. What a sweet and calm dog, we thought. We really lucked out.

As it turned out, Harry had pneumonia, among a slew of other ailments. Once I nursed him back to health, he turned out to be wild.

He barked madly and uncontrollably at any and all dogs we passed on walks. He jumped on the kids. He peed on the rug. He ate toys and Legos and made holes in the rug. He nipped. Suddenly, our house was full of mayhem.

I was completely aware that I was new to all of this. Wanting a dog is a lot different than having a dog. My good friend who had a dog told me, "With a rescue, give it a year." I kept her words in my head, but I wondered what had we done. Was I putting my kids' safety at risk? Should we rehome him? Had we made a terrible mistake? We were fine and happy, and now there was screaming and barking and chasing, but I was determined to make it work.

I took Harry to doggy classes. I worked with a trainer. I gave him treats each and every time we passed other dogs so he would learn that other dogs were friends, not enemies, but it was tough to understand what he'd been through before he came to us.

I tried to educate my children about how to be with him, but mostly I was just so tired. And just like parenting, my grand idea of having a dog turned out to be a lot different than reality.

Then one day, on a walk around the cul de sac near us, Harry made a friend. Also named Harry.

We called him Big Harry. A Dalmatian/Husky mix, he was black and white, shaggy and big. He towered over our Harry, soon to be known as Little Harry. They were instant best friends.

Big Harry would come barreling out of his house and hug our Harry. Little Harry would not bark or be aggressive. He would embrace him. Up on their hind legs they would wrap themselves together. Neither barked, neither nipped.



Each and every day I would walk Harry around the cul de sac. As we approached Big Harry's house, my Harry would sit and wait. Usually, Big Harry would be waiting in the window and would whimper until his owner brought him out.

Through this friendship with our neighbor dog, I knew we were going to be okay with Harry, just as I knew he was our dog when I saw his picture flash across my screen.

Slowly, I started to take Harry to the dog park (I had been afraid to have him around other dogs). I took him to doggy daycare. He began to socialize. I could see through Big Harry that my Harry was a good dog, just a lost dog who had struggled on the streets. He was capable of love and kindness and friendship. He just needed a little time and a little friendship. Big Harry gave him that.

We invited Big Harry along with some other neighborhood dogs to Harry's birthday party. We had made it a year. We served peanut butter flavored cake to the dogs and the two Harrys frolicked in our yard.

Soon after Harry's birthday party, Big Harry died from cancer. There was no way for me to explain this to my dog. He plopped down in front of his house, waiting. But Big Harry never came out.

I walk him to the other cul de sac now. He passes other dogs and doesn't bark, just sniffs and tries to make friends.

“Don’t worry, he’s friendly,” I say and mean it.

Harry’s not perfect. But he is perfect for our family, chewed Legos, ruined rugs and all. He helps my son get to sleep each night. He snuggles with my other son as he watches “Teen Titans Go.”

We walked by Big Harry’s house recently. It’s been over a year. I thought it would be okay. Harry stopped and waited and then even cried a little. I thought I couldn’t explain to him about Big Harry, but I think he knows. He’s showed me that he understands what loss and pain feels like, but now that he has a family to help him through it, we pick up and keep on walking.



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