



Many animals, from stray cats to street dogs, have come through the Diedrich household but the memory of our first puppy love, Snickers, still lingers in our minds. The 6-year-old got her title from the biscuit and caramel-colored streaks in her fur, but the sweetness of her personality better reflected the name choice. In the 15 years that have passed since I experienced my first loss of a pet, the Chihuahua-sized hole in my heart never seemed to heal, regardless of the abundant kisses and tail wags from our current pups.

Years after her death, you could still see the worn-down patch on our rug where she would sunbathe.

Arabella Diedrich: What made you decide to get a dog in 2001?

Dale Diedrich: We had been trying to have a baby for a long time. Someone suggested, “Why don’t you get a dog. They usually help.” So we decided to go to Operation Kindness [in Carrollton, Texas] find a dog and that’s where we found Snickers.

Karen Diedrich: Actually, the real reason we got Snickers [Dad rolls eyes] was I had been sick. I suffered a nervous breakdown, and I spent five days in a psychiatric hospital. When I came home, I didn’t work because the medication I was on for anxiety and depression pretty much knocked me out every afternoon.

After a while being at home alone, my husband suggested that we get a dog, because we hadn’t had a pet since we’d moved over to the states in 1994. He thought maybe it would help.

AD: How did Snickers help with your anxiety and depression?

KD: When we first got her, because she was so timid and scared, she would lay with me on the couch every afternoon, and we would take naps together. She was like an emotional support dog.

I think it helped me to have some company and the love of a pet. Just stroking her was soothing.

AD: Of all the animals at the shelter, what drew you to this little, black Chihuahua?

KD: Snickers was probably the third dog that we looked at. Just the way that she was sitting in the kennel, and she had a paw upon the side of the cage. The way she was looking at us, we took an instant like to her.

We continued looking around, just in case another one caught our attention, but we just went back to her because we felt that she was the one.

DD: Snickers was the one. They brought her out to us, she sat with us and we bonded. We felt that she was the one for us and when we took her home, she sat between us in the car.

I used to take her out in the car, she'd sit on my lap and we'd have the windows down. As we'd turn a corner I'd say, "Hold on, hold on," and she brace herself for the curve.

KD: She wasn't very aware of her size. She thought she was bigger than what she was. She was a bit of a yapper, and had that typical Chihuahua yap.

She loved sleeping in our bed. She loved to be there right with us.

AD: You never let any of our other dogs sleep in your bed!

DD: She was very special.

KD: He thinks dogs should sleep with their owners. I'm like, "Well if you can clean up the dog hair."

DD: I'll just get another bed.

AD: Before Snickers, it had just been Aunt Michele and you both living together. Michele, what did adding a dog to the mix mean to you?

Michele Garcia: Oh, I fell in love with her. She was basically my first puppy love. I used to come home from work, and she'd come running up to me, and she did this little tap dance with her paws.

Your mom and I would take Snickers to the park. On one occasion, the same year that we got her, Arnold pulled up and he popped out with two little yorkies and basically followed us around the park. We became friends and we'd take Snickers down to the park most nights after dinner.

Arnold would be there with his two dogs, we would wait for each other and we'd walk around the park together. That went on for about three months before we started dating. So if it wasn't for Snickers, we wouldn't have met.

Arnold Garcia: I remember our girls playing with Snickers, and she didn't quite know what to do. They'd want to play with her a little bit, and she was like, "I don't know what they're doing. What are they trying?"

MG: She hadn't been around many other dogs since you had taken her in. So that was the first time she really socialized with other dogs, and they were trying to play with her, nipping at her legs. Then she got used to it and they'd all play together.

AD: You had her for about two years before you had me. Since she'd sort of been filling in as a child, how did her role change once you were able to have a kid?

DD: She was always there. She used to snuggle up with you on the couch as a baby.

KD: I don't think the role changed. We still showed her a lot of love, even though we found out I was pregnant. We still would refer to as our baby, and I'd still pick her up and rock her like a baby.

As my stomach got bigger, I'd end up with Snickers on one side sitting by me, Buttons [one of the Garcia's terriers] on the other side and Tiny [the other terrier], who only weighed about three pounds, would be sitting on top of my belly. It felt like they were protecting the baby.

You were the second child.

AG: Now, Tiny would be on your mom's belly, you would kick and Tiny would bolt.

[All laugh.]

KD: Before I had you, I was walking Snickers in the morning and evening. We'd go on long walks in the morning, like a four-mile walk. And then when I had you, you were probably a couple of months old, I started taking you on the same walks in the heat.

When we'd go out in the summertime, Snickers would get a little bit worn out. I'd put her in the little basket underneath the stroller, and she would sit in there. If she wanted to get out anytime, I'd take her out and then she'd get tired again.

She was only a little dog. She had little legs.

But Snickers loved it when you were in the highchair and you started eating regular food. Oh my gosh! She'd end up with spaghetti on her back, on her head.

MG: You thought it was hilarious. You'd drop spaghetti on her head and start giggling.

KD: Her little face was so small that I used to give her dredges of my tea in a tea cup. She'd have her face in there, licking up tea and coffee.

AG: Yeah, I'd forgotten about that!

KD: And she loved being by you, all the dogs loved being by you, too. They felt very safe around you. Most kids would pop the dogs on their head, or be mean to dogs.

When I had you and put you down on the couch, I was worried that Snickers would be up there licking your face. She never once did that.

MG: Your granddad loved Snickers too because he'd had a Chihuahua mix, which was actually your dad's that he started taking care of after these two moved over here. I'm sure he snook her lots of people food from the table too. What was her favorite people food?

KD: Lamb bones

DD: Chocolate toffee. Tootsie rolls [imitates her chewing on the hard candy].

AD: We got Ula, another Chihuahua, when I was in kindergarten. Why did you feel you needed a second dog and how did Snickers react to another child being added to the dynamic?

AG: We already had our two, and so with Snickers and then Ula, it was just like having four kids all playing together. It was like a couple of nieces.

KD: Well, the reason we got Ula was because Snickers became ill. We found out that she had kidney failure, and they weren't very optimistic about her lifespan at that time. They told us we needed to prepare for the worst, but we were advised to give a treatment at home, so we would do fluid injections at home.

She survived 18 months. We were afraid that you'd be upset by the death of Snickers. We got another dog kind of like as a buffer for you for when we'd lose Snickers.

AD: Did it feel like a buffer for you guys? I know Dad, you get a little bit more attached to our dogs, so how did Snickers' death impact you?

DD: [Takes a long pause] Very emotional. She was the first dog we had since we came here. I was very close to her.

I could take her for a walk without a leash. [Starts tearing up] I'd tell her when to cross the road, tell her when not to. She was just so smart.

KD: Well we remember the day that she passed away quite clearly. Her health started to decline quite rapidly after 18 months, and the treatment stopped working. She was struggling to breathe.

Dad was sleeping in the guest bedroom with Snickers because you were a restless sleeper. So throughout the night, it would be kind of like musical beds. You'd go from one bedroom to another bedroom because you had a hard time sleeping by yourself.

Snickers was sleeping with him on this occasion, and he woke up early hours of the morning, and realized that Snickers had lost all of her bodily functions in the bed. So he got up, trying to take care of the mess in the bed, and came and woke me up. We took her downstairs, and she was laying on the side, and she didn't look very good at all.

I took one look at her and said, "Oh she's only got a few hours I think." Dad slept downstairs on the couch so he could watch her. The next morning, Dad came up, woke me up and said she'd gone.

AD: Pets often come into our lives per our choice. If the loss is so difficult, why do we keep choosing to bring them into the family?

AG: [Who recently experienced the loss of the three dogs Michele and him had together]. I'll take this one. As painful as their passing is, the years that we have with them more than make up for the loss. Seeing how Snickers affected all of us [points around to all of us who are crying at this point], you can see how powerful a small animal can be.

You don't think about it, "Oh it's just a dog," but it touches all of us. In your case, where Snickers would sleep with you as an infant, that may have influenced your love of animals. That will carry with you the rest of your life.

KD: It's what they bring to the table. What they bring to your life while they're around outweighs the grief.

DD: It's not what they can bring to you, it's what you can bring to them as a caring family for them. It's you loving them and what you can bring for them.

MG: Providing a loving home for them because they're all rescues. Brie and Abby are rescues, Thelma and Louise [the Garcia's current dogs] are rescues, Shelby and April were rescues. That's why they'll always rescue because they need people like us.

Snickers had the best life possible.

AG: It's like I told our girls the night we rescued them. I said, "You girls just won the lottery. I have no idea what your life was like previous to this, but I promise you, from this day forward, you're gonna have an awesome one."

[This was the first time I've ever seen my uncle cry.]

AD: In what ways do our current dogs, Abby, a scruffy white mutt, and Brie, a Cretan hound, remind you of Snickers?

KD: Abby reminds me a little bit of Snickers sometimes because of how she wants to be picked up to be put on the chair or the couch. I guess because she's a little bit more needy. Snickers loved being picked up and carried like a baby and Abby's a bit of a baby.

DD: But she was one of a kind.