

A woman's best friend

Husbands come and go, but dogs are forever

By Lynn Armitage

I finally caved in and told my kids we could get a cat. What a pushover, I know. But I did hold my “no pets” ground for a while. My reasons were quite clear.

Or so I thought:

First off . . . cats stink. I don't want that litter-box-fishy-food smell in my home that hangs in the air 24/7, like some kitty forgot to flush the toilet. We've all been in houses like that.

“We'll change the litter box every day! Swear!” my kids countered.

Secondly, there's enough meowing (as you can see) and mouths to feed over here already.

“You can use our allowance to buy one, mom!” Very tempting, I must admit.

I dug deeper into my bag of lame excuses. OK, well . . . what about that cliché of becoming an old, lonely woman with 20 zillion cats? I could picture myself sitting in a corner, dazed, with cats crawling all over me, a milk stain on my upper lip. (Or maybe that was Catwoman in “Batman.”)

“PLEEEASE!”

The more demanding their pleas, the more ridiculous my reasoning. “No! Cats carry bubonic plague.” Well, it HAS been going around. Something to do with fleas and rats, and every storybook involving rats always has cats in it. Surely they understood the connection.

Then I had to face the truth. The REAL reason I didn't want a cat was Higgins – my beloved Cocker Spaniel who died last year. Higgins had been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. The ex and I got him when we were dating. I was smitten from Day One. (With Higgins, that is.) He crawled out from the bottom of a puppy pile, this tiny fur ball with red, floppy ears, and stood in the middle of a milk bowl for a quick lap with his tiny tongue.

SOLD!

The ex said our relationship changed after Higgins came along. Of course it did – I liked him better. Higgins was always there for me, during life's biggest moments: my wedding, childbirth, the unraveling of my marriage, the divorce and my rebirth as a single mom. No matter how up and down my moods, his loyalty was unwavering. Whenever I was sad, he'd jump into my lap and console me with those compassionate brown eyes. Like that SEIKO watch commercial from long ago said: "My husband isn't around anymore, but my doggy is."

I took Higgins everywhere with me because he'd go crazy when I wasn't around. The pet version of separation anxiety, I guess. He was so spoiled, my sisters called him "Hollywood Higgins." Yes, he was a pampered pooch.

His favorite game was playing hide-and-seek in the house. I'd throw a ball down the hall, and while he chased it, I hid. He'd run from room to room, howling, trying desperately to find me. It was hysterical.

One night, the old man's back legs gave out. When he tried to crawl with his front legs to his food bowl, I knew his days were up. I always swore I'd never drive my dog to his death. But the next day, I had to play executioner. And it killed me.

As I handed him over to the veterinarian, I looked into his tired, 16-year-old eyes – still so full of love – for the last time, kissed

him on the nose and said: “Good-bye, Higgins. I’ll see you in Heaven.

I’ll never be able to replace my sweet doggy, who I now realize was the best friend I ever had. That’s why we’re getting a cat.

Freelance Writer Lynn Armitage is an enrolled member of the Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin. She has added air freshener to her grocery list.