

The best way to remember a dog is to love another one again



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In addition to this season's holiday celebrations, my family also kicks off "birthday season." Six of seven of us have our special day in the first half of the year.

Last year, we started off on New Year's Day, singing our family's original rendition of "Happy Birthday to You" to our terrier-schnauzer mix, Marty, who turned 13.

A shelter puppy of great intelligence and deep love for our family, our wonder dog died after a brief illness in October. My companion when getting the mail — and my little fluffy sous-chef who stood by me as I cooked dinner every night — was no longer there.

Marty, who watched the Westminster Dog Show with me, will not be by my side on the couch in February when I celebrate my birthday. In past years, I would talk at length to him (and anyone else who cared to listen) about the breeds I liked and who would be a suitable "baby sister" for him in the future.

But always, in the end, I knew my heart belonged to Marty and all shelter dogs. No pure-breed purchase could compare, nor ever would, with the joy of saving the life of a dog so extraordinary. When he died, even his veterinarian specialist (a big, hard-nosed guy) told me, "We're trained to be emotionally immune to this kind of situation, but not this time. ... Marty was a great dog."

I cried even harder and vowed I would never go through this again.

This Christmas, many families will be adding a dog. And, as someone who loves all dogs, I hope everyone will look to the many amazing humane societies, no-kill shelters and rescue organizations. They all have a wide variety of mixed breeds and, yes, even pure-breed dogs looking for loving homes.

Many of these dogs are already housetrained and socialized by foster families who have nurtured them to provide an adoption that is easy and successful. In my community at the Plano Animal Shelter, you can adopt a dog for a top price of \$80, which includes all shots, spay/neutering procedures and even a micro-chip.

During the first few weeks after Marty died, I spent a lot of time online looking for support with this search phrase: "grieving the loss of a dog."

I found an article published in *Psychology Today* titled "The Grief Over the Loss of a Dog and the Joy of Remembering" by Stanley Coren. In it, Coren shares a letter written by the famous playwright Eugene O'Neill, who owned a beloved dalmatian named Blemie. I couldn't imagine a the man who wrote such intense, dark plays could possibly provide an uplifting commentary. But he did.

O'Neill, to demonstrate to his wife that he could cope with their aging dog's passing, sat down and wrote a "Last Will and Testament" from Blemie's point of view.

In it, Blemie says, "For love of me, have another. It would be a poor tribute to my memory never to have a dog again. What I would like to feel is that, having once had me

in the family, now you cannot live without a dog."

One of my favorite pictures of Marty is of him in my daughter's car with his snout hanging out the window. I captioned it, "Sniff long. Sniff hard. Sniff often."

And I am struck by another thought now. What Marty would tell me:

"Love long, love hard, love often."

Leeanne Rebic Hay of Plano is a business professional and a frequent Voices contributor. Her email address is leeanne.rh@gmail.com.

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Jerry Schultz

121 days ago

That brought tears. Bless you for loving and giving a rescue a home. I volunteered at a rescue until recently, and I can tell you hearts were broken there every day. But the happy endings made the tragic a little more bearable.

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