

I never owned a dog before the summer of '98. One little visitor was the exception. I'll name him Jason.

It was July at Grandma's. Sis and I were enjoying our freedom from our parents in the northern part of the state. Watching tv until late. Racing in the house and backyard. We never knew boredom, but we did want a dog.

On the other side of town, an uncle was looking for a place for a little stowaway. The visitor was handed to him by a friend of a friend, looking for a home. Our uncle knew of his two little nieces staying at his mom's house for the summer, so he paid a visit.

Sis and I saw the guest before we saw our uncle. He had brown, thick fur with a white spot on his left paw. He had floppy ears, a growing body, and he was adorable. He would have been perfect, if not for the fleas.

"We should ask Dad if we can keep him," Sis would say. "I want him."

"I want him too," I would say.

We called Dad and Mom, telling them about the puppy, casually forgetting he had fleas, begging to take him with us.

"No. It's a strange puppy. He already has a home. We can't afford to keep him."

Fine. We complied. We were still determined to keep him for the summer.

We didn't have dog food, but we had Lucky Charms. We didn't have a doggie bed, but Grandma offered a box with one of her sheets. We didn't know that puppies had to go for walks to do their business, so we let him go anywhere, to Grandma's dismay and exasperation. We were young, but we made the most of it.

Jason smiled all the time, panting, wagging his tail. Grandma gave him water. Otherwise, we wouldn't know. At midnight when I still had energy, I would walk to the guest bedroom where Jason was sleeping. His eyes twitched as the fleas ravaged his eyelids, but he was peaceful in slumber. I took an old wash cloth one night and dampened it, running it across his eye so the fleas would leave him alone. He woke up, sat up straight, and smiled at me. "Get some sleep," I told him as I rubbed his head, and went to sleep. When I woke up, he was under my bed, so I pulled him out, carried him and put him back in the box. It didn't work. He followed me.

One afternoon after play, I saw that he left a present for us in the carpet. I was the elder of the two girls, so I had a responsibility to clean and scrub the spot. Childhood came over me. I watched Beethoven the movie years before, where all the dad said was "Bad Dog." So, I went over to Jason, pointed my finger, and said the same thing. Jason knew what it meant. He didn't appreciate it, because he started avoiding me.

My uncle came later that day and picked Jason up to send him somewhere else. We only had him for a week. Guilt tore away at me, leaving me to wonder where Jason had gone. I wanted to apologize and make things right. Sis didn't know what I was talking about.

A week later, I saw a puppy of the same age in the neighbor's yard. The neighbor didn't like children like me, but he respected my grandmother, so he said nothing when I trespassed. The puppy was fluffier with no fleas, but he had a white spot on the left paw. That's all that I saw before I made my move. I walked over, talking to who I thought was Jason.

"Do you remember me?"

"I'm sorry."

"You're such a good dog."

The puppy didn't move from his spot in the driveway. I don't even remember if he looked up. I petted him. He did nothing. I picked him up. He used his dead weight to anchor himself to the ground. I got the message.

I set the puppy back down, waved to the neighbor on the porch, and walked back to Grandma's, heartbroken.