

A VETERINARIAN'S STORY: HOW MY DOG HEALED ME

By Dr. Daphne Mobley



“People let me tell ya ‘bout my best friend...” was first line to the theme song for a popular 70’s television show *The Courtship of Eddie’s Father*. Well, let me tell you about Pappy, who has in many ways become my best friend. This cute, lovable, energetic creature, Pappy, was given up for adoption and came into my life. We just celebrated the two year anniversary of his adoption and that decision was one of the best of my life. How could it be that destiny would provide a role reversal – a dog that healed a veterinarian? Well it is true!

Most of my life was filled with what many have said were great accomplishments. I grew up in the South Bronx with a great family and graduated from a premier NYC high school, an Ivy League institution as well as a veterinary college. I worked for a short time as a veterinarian at an emergency clinic, had success working my way up the corporate ladder at Fortune 500 corporations and eventually worked for the CEO/Chairman of a leading pharmaceutical

company. However, during my career journey, I had somehow moved from helping animals have healthier lives to helping people have happier, healthier lives.

Shortly before my birthday in July of 2011 I reawakened my passion for animals and gave myself the best birthday gift - Pappy. It took a couple of months to find the dog that I absolutely knew was the one for me. I finally saw Pappy in a video on a pet adoption site and frantically raced to contact the organization before someone scooped up this adorable dog. The foster parents brought him to my house to assess me and my home environment. I knew without a doubt that this sad faced dog with a very unique appearance, a beautiful brindle color and white legs, was going to be with me. After the adoption I took Pappy with me everywhere. As a matter of fact, after I picked him up I immediately took him with me to a barbeque that a friend of mine was having nearby.

Over the next few months I realized there was something so very special about my furry friend Pappy. Yes I know that all pet parents say that about their dogs but Pappy was different. Any time that we took a walk people were curious about him. "What kind of dog is he?" they would ask. "He is a mixture of Pug and Boston Terrier but he got the tall genes like I did.", I would respond because he is larger than both breeds. But I soon knew that this dog who some of my neighbors lovingly nicknamed 'Sweat Socks' was special because of the way people responded to him. As a veterinarian I was trained to observe and I saw how people stopped their cars in the middle of the street, oblivious to the angry drivers swerving around them, to ask about Pappy when we walked together or how other pet parents would run to join us and say, "This is my favorite dog!", or how nursing home residents squealed with delight as Pappy jumped up to give them kisses as they sat in their wheelchairs or how kids would run over to pet him when they saw us walking at the end of a school day. These occurrences happened every single day with strangers and acquaintances alike.

Yes Pappy is special and I knew it not only from countless positive receptions from people but also from my very own personal experiences. He healed me. Pappy helped me overcome issues that I had with impatience and the need to control the outcomes of situations which was a tremendous breakthrough for me. Not only did he assist me with those issues but let me throw in two more huge ones. Pappy also soothed the tremendous grief that I had associated with watching my mother's mental decline due to dementia and he opened my heart up to love. Each one of these problems is colossal in its own right but all of them occurred simultaneously. I bet that it is hard to believe that a dog, not a therapist, could help me with all of this!

Let me start by explaining how Pappy cured me of my impatience and the need to control how I felt things should proceed. For all of my life I had plans to get where I wanted to go in life. I was planning this that or the next thing and planning for others too. My brain was always taxed and on overdrive. If Plan A did not work, then surely Plan B, C or D that I also crafted would. Acclimating a dog to a new environment brought new and unfamiliar challenges. When I returned home I would often find any of these items on the floor - urine, shoes from my closet or silk sofa pillows. After some time I thought, "He should know the acceptable behavior by now and these problems should have stopped!". In the process of teaching Pappy I learned to have patience and relinquish the need to control when things should happen. How could I judge when

Pappy was able to learn the correct behavior and adapt to a new environment? After all Daphne you have never been given up by your pet parents, moved to a foster home and dealt with yet another unfamiliar environment with new people! Each being addresses their issues in their own ways and in their own times. So after numerous mishaps with Pappy I finally learned how to release the need to know when something would happen and how it would turn out. I had to actually adjust how I was looking at the situation and stop worrying about it. Anger, impatience and worry were replaced by compassion, love and patience. Everything happens at the right time and in the right way.

As I mentioned earlier, Pappy also helped me overcome a terribly tough period of grief. During the time before and after I adopted Pappy my mother's health declined to the point that I felt that she was not the person that I knew all of my life. My mother was a very popular, active, outgoing, cheerful, loving, and caring woman who I thought became a mere shell of her former self. She could no longer walk on her own or speak intelligibly. On countless nights after my visits with my mother I would sit on the steps in my house crying my eyes out and longing for the times when we laughed into the wee hours of the night, shopped together or she provided loving advice for whatever I was experiencing at that moment. Who was there to comfort me during this extremely difficult period when I felt lonely with my grief? You got it, my furry friend Pappy was right there to lick the salty waterfall that cascaded down my face. His attention, constant companionship, and responsiveness absolved all the pain and helplessness that I was feeling after those visits to the nursing home when I was uncertain whether my mother even knew who I was. My story is the same story that my mother used to tell about her mother. My mother used to say, "If I could only hear my mother say my name one more time." But I always felt better after I threw my arms around my furry friend and he gave me kisses. Over time my experience with my mother improved dramatically because I adjusted the lens that I looked through to view this situation. I eventually saw that my mother was the same loving soul that she used to be. All the employees at the nursing home where she resided would say, "Your mother is so sweet and loving." I used to give them this incredulous look and think, "How do you know how my mother USED to be?" It took me some time to realize what they knew about Mom immediately.

And lastly, Pappy opened my heart to love. He allowed me to experience the kind of love that would cause me to jump in front of an oncoming car to protect him, the kind of love that worried when he had a growth on his foot or was not feeling well. Yes that kind of love that has not been experienced to this degree in quite some time. Pappy helped me return back to opening my heart to love and my first love (no not Fred Brown but rather my first career love) - the love and care of pets.

If it was not for my precious Pappy who knows how long it would have taken me to learn these important life lessons. If it was not for Pappy I would not be so free to be at peace with my life and have the knowledge that everything happens at the right time in the right way. Thank you my sweet, adorable Pappy – I love you!