

The love of a dog

By Rita Buettner

Flurry was a dog in a million – or maybe 10 million. I was never good at math. All I know is that she was the perfect dog for our family.

By the time I met her, I had asked for a dog for years, for every birthday, Christmas and every possible time in between. But my parents – kind, loving and generous people that they are – always said no. They had six children to raise. They didn't want a dog.

Then one hot summer day when I was almost 15, I asked again, and my mother accidentally said yes.

The truth is that she misspoke. "The only way you could ever get a dog," she said, "would be if I never had to deal with it."

That was enough for me. My younger brothers and I pulled everything out of the family garage to make room for a dog and left the stuff in piles in the yard. While my father was hiring someone to haul it all away, I was circling classified ads, looking for the puppy who would join our family.

We found her. My father drove me to a farm where we met a litter of husky-shepherd puppies. The owner placed a fuzzy, brown-eyed puppy in my arms, and I could barely speak. I handed over a few crumpled bills I had borrowed from my sister Shaileen's dresser drawer (and which, come to think of it, I have never repaid), and rode home with our brand-new puppy sitting nervously on my lap.

My prayers had been answered. Then that first night Flurry escaped and ran away. I was devastated. We spent the next morning running all over the neighborhood, hanging signs on telephone poles, until we learned that our neighbors had found her. Home she came, and home she stayed.

From the beginning, she was a onefamily dog. She was not social. But she loved my brothers and sisters, and she adored my parents. And, although my mother has never become a dog person (and never will), she became a Flurry person. She was often the one, as mothers do, who reminded us that Flurry might like another walk through the neighborhood, and Flurry knew – of course – that my mother was the source of all the best treats from the kitchen.

A dog's love is complete and unconditional. Many times Flurry and I walked together or sat together and she listened as I talked about everything and nothing. I discovered that one of the most extraordinary things about Flurry was that she brought us even closer together as a family. As mysiblings and I went away to college, we always returned home to her, a nearly 100-pound wriggling wolf-like dog who could have exploded from the joy of being with us. All she ever wanted was to

be near us – oh, and maybe the end of that ice cream cone.

Flurry was 12 when we had to say goodbye to her, and I well remember the sadness of that last farewell. In her last moments, I managed to find the strength to sing her one last lullaby, the one I had sung to her so many times, “All Through the Night.”

This Oct. 4, as we celebrate the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, I will think of Flurry, as I always do. How fortunate we are that our Father in Heaven gives us animals who bring so much comfort and joy to our lives.

As a child, I had longed for a dog to walk and play with and call my own. I never dreamed that a dog could teach me so much about love. But she did. And she changed my world.

“For it is in giving that we receive,” says that beautiful line from the Prayer of St. Francis. Who better to teach us that than our beloved pets?

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