

My Little Love

Jude Laurén

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Dedication

This book is an incredibly moving ode to all the amazing pet parents who have enriched their lives with love, tenderness, and happiness alongside their four-legged friends. You've made your houses into comfortable havens, showered your pets with love, and even given up your favorite place on the couch so you could see them happy.

As a pet parent, you've danced through life to a tune only your furry friends can compose. You've been their confidant in times of thunderstorm fright, playmate in times of boundless joy, and unwavering partner in navigating life's twists and turns.

You've loved their quirks and have celebrated the hilarity they bring to the table. You've watched them grow and learn new things under your loving care, feeling the pride at every milestone.

Through tears and goodbyes, you've carried the memories of the love and laughter they've bestowed upon you. This book is your spotlight, dear pet parent, shining on your boundless love, unwavering care, and the extraordinary connection you share with your fur babies.

Lastly, I dedicate this book to my mom, the constant light in my life.

Message from the Author

For just over 20 years, I've been an unapologetic dog enthusiast, and let me tell you, it's been a pawsitively transformative journey! My love for animals has been like a trusty old friend, constantly adding vibrancy to my life.

Even though my professional life might keep me busy, I often find myself slipping away into the delightful chaos of playing fetch with dogs, cuddling with cats, championing animal welfare causes, or jet-setting to far-flung corners of the world. I'm a globetrotter with a passion for diverse cultures and destinations!

I'm a firm believer in the limitless power of imagination and the magic of following your heart. There is no limit to life unless you allow challenges to hold you back. Me, Tutti and Buster are firm believers of taking charge of your life.

Whether I'm diving into a new project or indulging in a hobby, my creativity has been my secret sauce for breaking boundaries and soaring to new heights. Traveling has shown me how intricately we're all woven together. I'm convinced that each of us has a role to play in brightening the world for both humanity and our furry friends. That's why I pour my heart and skills into sparking positive change wherever I can. 🌍🐾

Disclaimer from the Author

The content in this book is based on my experiences with Buster, a real-life account of our journey and our adventures together. While there are some tips and insights on pet care and dog ownership, it's important to understand that what worked for my dog, Buster, may not work for every dog.

Always seek professional guidance and advice from a qualified veterinarian who can offer tailored recommendations.

Preface

My Little Love is the remarkable story of how I stumbled into the role of a devoted pet parent to a Shih Tzu named Buster. This little ball of fur gave me some of my best memories.

I often wonder how an 18-pound ball of fur like Buster left such a profound mark on my life and on those around me. The moments we shared were unforgettable and to this day, make me laugh and cry.

Buster was something else. He was perfectly imperfect. And today, I'm excited to share our story with the world, hoping that his story will touch your heart as deeply as it felt mine.

This book could also be a valuable guide for fellow pet parents and furry companions.

This is our unconditional love story.

Prologue

February 4, 2021

Dear Buster,

The past 12 years of my life were perfect because of you. Your heart was pure, kind, and generous. I'm sorry I couldn't bring you back home with me this time. The tumors in your spleen were malignant, and your gall bladder was compromised. There was no way that you could have survived the surgery due to your body's overall condition. But I'm glad you and I could play one last time.

You've given love to a lot of people around you, and they love you so much. When I'm ready, I will share your photos and videos with all of them. I would also publish a book about my little love.

But for now, let me mourn the loss of the most precious gift life has given me.

I love you, Buster!

- Momma 

Contents

Dedication	i
Message from the Author	ii
Disclaimer from the Author	iii
Preface	iv
Prologue	v
Chapter 1: Love at First Sight.....	2
Chapter 2: Ruckus in the House with Tutti	15
Chapter 3: Road Trips & Tricks.....	25
Chapter 4: Santiago de Compostela	40
Chapter 5: Dog Chef/Home-Cooked Meals	57
Chapter 6: Beach Bum USA	69
Chapter 7: 2020 Vision	79
Chapter 8: Darn Allergies	91
Chapter 9: Farewell Princess	106
Chapter 10: Away in Hogmanay	113
Chapter 11: Sugar Baby	132
Chapter 12: Halloween Costumes Best in Show	142
Chapter 13: I Wish I Could Take You Home	162
Chapter 14: The Lifecycle of Pets.....	177
My Thoughts	188
End Note	190
Acknowledgment.....	192
My Little Love <i>Animated Version for Kids</i>	193
Source Materials.....	194

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT



Love at First Sight
MY LITTLE LOVE BY JUDE LAURÉN

Chapter 1: Love at First Sight

How We Met

Perhaps soulmates do exist, and they aren't always in human form.

I believed in the connection going beyond our physical realms, and it didn't simply exist within the bounds of romantic or platonic relationships but extended to all entities of life. I firmly believed in crossing paths with those who were meant to meet us in our lifetime and how life would play out.

Destiny unfolds on its own terms.

It was a normal day in 2008 and I was having my usual Sunday outing, taking a leisurely walk with family and my Shih Tzu companion, Tutti, at a neighborhood plaza. It had become a cherished tradition to enjoy a meal at the dog-friendly restaurant, followed by casual window shopping. While the small pet store had always been a familiar sight, I only paid much attention if I needed something for Tutti.

As we casually walked by the pet store that day, a slight movement in the window immediately drew my attention. I turned my head swiftly, aiming for a better view. There it was an utterly captivating sight. In all its splendor, a 3-month-old Shih Tzu puppy

stood, flaunting the most adorable, happiest face imaginable. Without a second thought, I found myself pushing open the door, my heart set on meeting that little ball of joy.

His big, bright eyes glistened with interest, giving off the impression of a lighthearted and mischievous disposition. Long, floppy ears hanging down on either side of his face framed his hairy face, giving it a charming, endearing appearance. With a small, button nose and a mega-wide pink tongue, his mouth seemed to curve into a cheerful grin. His fluffy fur looked soft and gentle, with shades of white, tan, and brown that complemented his rosy cheeks. With every wag of his tail, his body would light up, and the space would fill with joy.

Just looking at him made me excited, and I felt something melting inside me. He was adorable, and I can say without a doubt that it was love at first sight.

At that moment, time stood still for me and this puppy. It was just me and him, and a philharmonic orchestra at the back would have made it more dramatic. We were all that each other could see and hear. I felt this crazy wave of emotion, so I had to step out of the store to catch my breath. It was puzzling at the time, but looking back was a sign of what was coming.

After a few minutes, I returned inside to see how he was doing. Although I could hear Tutti's excited barks beside me, I found it nearly impossible to tear my gaze away from this irresistible puppy. He continued to tap his soft little paws against the cage, and upon realizing my return, his excitement only intensified as he sought my attention. He was such an affectionate, playful, and endearing little fellow.

This little guy was fighting for his life, like a tiny gladiator against bigger pups, tossing and turning him over. I could have sworn that was the cutest gladiator I had seen!

The trio of dogs didn't take kindly to my boy's enthusiasm. They ganged up on him, growling. It was evident that fear gripped him, but this courageous little soul stood his ground firmly. Despite the others repeatedly knocking him down, my boy rose like the sun, unwavering in his determination. His focus remained steadfastly on me as if their meanness were invisible to him. It was a simultaneously amusing, beautiful, and enchanting sight.

It was official. I had completely fallen for this adorable white and brown puppy, daydreaming about taking him home with me. I could almost picture us two running on the beach, while he happily chased me with his fur blowing in the wind in slow-mo, like the main character in a rom-com.

But as quickly as I had fallen for the achingly attractive imagery of my desires, I was struck by reality. I still had reservations about impulsively bringing home a new furry friend, especially with Tutti in the picture. Having experienced firsthand the immense responsibility that comes with raising a dog, I was hesitant to rush into anything. I felt obligated to consider Tutti's feelings as well. As I left the pet store, thoughts of him lingered on my mind all night.

In the coming months, I made regular visits to the pet store to see my dream pup whenever possible. Each encounter brought me joy, yet beneath it lingered a sense of sadness, realizing he endured countless nights without a loving family. I kept a watchful eye on him, yearning for any sign that our connection was destined to be.

Three months had gone by, and I observed a notable change. The little guy was now on sale for half the price. While this offer tempted me slightly, my doubts remained prominent. Could I take in another pet?

At the five-month mark, his price had been slashed by a staggering 80%, and the store proudly displayed a huge sign on the window listing: microchip, neutering, and all vaccinations completed. I couldn't fathom why nobody had scooped up such a

sweetheart. My heart ached, and I longed for him to become a part of my life.

One more month elapsed, and I strolled through the mall on a late evening. A faint glow emanated from the dimly lit pet store, enticing me to peer through the glass window. There, I saw my boy, confined within a small wire cage, all by himself. I was taken over by numerous emotions. I felt sad, relieved, and excited, and all of this was coupled with my desire to comfort the little soul.

When the store opened the following day, I asked about investing some energy with the beguiling, youthful little guy. The store owner, friendly and accommodating, promptly took him out of his cage. The pup's entire furry form quivered with enthusiasm and delight. He could hardly contain his excitement. I devoted a considerable amount of time to the lively furball, and ultimately, I made a decision. On that day, I rescued Buster Brown, the white and brown Shih Tzu boy, from that pet store!

The deep bond between Buster and me became unmistakably evident upon returning home. Buster trailed closely behind me wherever I went, an ever-faithful shadow to my every move. His cushioned tail swayed with uncontainable excitement, and his brilliant eyes never faltered from my strides. Whether I wandered into the kitchen, the lounge room, or the yard, this excited little friend was dependably there,

reflecting all my activities with a charming combination of interest and commitment. We were a perfect match, harmonizing in every way.

Often, individuals gravitate toward pets whose temperaments align with their own. I thought, *was I this cute to have felt inclined toward this gorgeous little boy?*

For instance, a Labrador might be the ideal choice if one leads an active lifestyle due to its energy level. Conversely, those seeking a devoted companion for quiet moments may find solace in a Maltese or Chihuahua. For families with little kids, the Golden Retriever emerges as an ideal choice. Known for their gentle and affectionate nature, they offer remarkable safety to the family, especially to infants and toddlers.

I enjoy indoor, as well as outdoor activities, but I am not a fan of hot weather. What I wanted was a small lap dog that preferred staying inside an air-conditioned room. So, I conducted my research, and the results were insurmountable. Shih Tzus have an aversion to heat, and they like cool weather. We were the perfect match!

As one of the most seasoned canine varieties, Shih Tzus has been reared for quite a long time. Shih Tzu is derived from the Mandarin Chinese word 'Shīzi Gǒu', which means 'Lion Dog.' Its likeness to a lion flaunts

a rich and entrancing history that goes back north of 1,000 years. Beginning in old Tibet, these little canines were profoundly regarded in Tibetan cloisters and worshipped for their hallowed status. Shih Tzus were specifically reared by Tibetan priests, who tried to make a friend canine with a delicate and cherishing demeanor. These canines were viewed as blessed and were many times given as gifts to Chinese rulers. They became prized pets inside the magnificent court of China during the Ming and Qing dynasties. During their time in China, Shih Tzus were fastidiously reproduced to epitomize the characteristics wanted by honorability, like a sumptuous twofold coat, an unmistakable pushed-in face, and a streaming tail conveyed nimbly over the back. They were spoiled and worshipped, carrying on with lives of extravagance inside the Forbidden City. In the mid-20th century, following the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the end of imperial rule in China, many Shih Tzus found their way to different parts of the world as gifts to diplomats and foreign dignitaries. The Shih Tzu breed was formally acknowledged by the American Kennel Club (AKC) in 1969, and it has since turned into a famous and darling sidekick creature around the world.

Once Buster settled into my home, his amazing qualities and quirks started shining through. I always knew he was a happy pup, but his energy levels were off the charts. If springs could walk around and be

covered in fur, that would be Buster. Always ready, and for what? It seemed that he didn't care, for as long as I was on the move, so was he!

He let out enthusiastic yaps and boisterous barks to express his love and pure joy, always exuding a perky, attentive vibe, tuned in to the slightest sounds. Buster was hardly ever in a bad mood. Though he often showed a diabolical side-eye and gave 'attention sneezes' whenever I wasn't paying attention to him, fitting perfectly into the Shih Tzu stereotype of a regal charm. It was like living with a pint-sized version of 'The Lion King.'

A responsible pet owner understands their furry companion's unique way of communicating. Dogs convey their thoughts and feelings through sounds, tail movements, and body language. For instance, when your dogs hold their tails high and wag them happily, it signifies relaxation and contentment. On the other hand, caution is warranted if they become stiff, bare their teeth, and start growling, as this could indicate a potential risk of biting you or another dog.

On the flip side, floppy ears and joyful barking are clear indicators of a playful mood, signaling your dog's desire for affection and attention from you. He might even lean in close and gaze at you with those soulful, pleading eyes, a telltale sign that cuddle time is in order! Canines love it when you humor them with tummy scratches (or a full-body rubdown) and

delicate neck kneads, further developing the connection among you and your fuzzy companion.

Canines are driven by a craving to satisfy their owners. When we spend a lot of time and pay close attention to our pets, we build a stronger bond and a deeper relationship. It is also a source of love and affection for you. A dog's happiness is contagious and can instantly help you if you feel sad or upset about something. Buster did that for me often. Buster always cheered me up, especially when I was having a bad day.

Like us, dogs can also feel tired or sad. Something isn't right if a dog is prone to walking away or hiding when you are in sight. If their tail is tucked low between their legs, their ears are flat against their head, or they are licking their lips, these could all be red flags. Dogs have feelings and different emotions, and they do their best to let us know.

During his time at the pet store, Buster shared a cage with larger puppies for several months, an experience that left him feeling uneasy and vulnerable. He endured their aggression and bullying, which made him apprehensive when I placed him in an animal crate for safety. It quickly became apparent that confinement in such a manner didn't sit well with him. In response, I decided to switch to a car seat equipped with a secure harness, providing him comfort and safety during our travels.

Buster exhibited incessant barking toward larger dogs in the beginning, almost as if attempting to shield himself from them. Whether these dogs were friendly or unfriendly, his apprehension toward bigger dogs remained consistent. The trauma he had endured at the pet store had a lasting impact on him, shaping his behavior and interactions with his larger counterparts for some time.

Buster also struggled with separation anxiety, a condition in which canines feel scared and upset when they are taken away from their companions. Dogs suffering from separation anxiety often experience extreme stress, which manifests itself in how they behave. They whimper, whine, and sometimes even destroy things to get comfort or pass the time when they are left alone.

In Buster's case, his unease was especially palpable when he found himself alone in the house, especially without his companion, Tutti. To help him cope, I provided him with a variety of chew and squeaky toys, fluffy blankets that seemed to comfort him, and always a bowl of water. Dealing with such concerns requires thoughtful solutions. Gradually exposing dogs to short periods of alone time when they are young can help them acclimate to temporary separations. Leaving them alone for extended periods when it causes undue stress can lead to various behavioral and health issues, including anxiety,

depression, destructive tendencies, and even physical health problems.

Canines are attention seekers, longing for human connection and friendship, and they turn into drama kings and queens when denied of their spotlight, which may result in stress and weariness. You don't want that for your fur baby.

Prolonged isolation can be harmful, potentially leading to negative consequences such as increased destructive behaviors like chewing and digging, as well as physical issues due to inactivity. It is essential to avoid leaving our little friends alone for extended periods. Instead, we should provide them with ample exercise, mental stimulation, and companionship to ensure their happiness and well-being.

I found a couple of neighborhood doggie day camps where Buster could make friends and get exercise while I was away. This approach addressed his need for social interaction and provided mental and physical engagement.

Although Buster initially had reservations about larger dogs, his perspective gradually evolved, and he found great joy in the company of other small puppies, relishing in playful interactions. To my surprise, he genuinely loved cats, effectively debunking those myths that dogs and cats cannot

coexist. This even made me think he was a cat in his past life, at least, his enthusiasm showed so.

As I grew acquainted with him, I fully appreciated Buster's remarkable character, complete with his imperfections, which I wholeheartedly accepted. It felt like the cosmos had graced my life with something enchanting, and our connection was instantaneous.

I met my little soul mate at a pet store and not riding in on a white horse with a sword in one arm. My gut knew before my mind could comprehend that we were meant to be with each other. My bond with this beautiful pup has become one of the most enriching experiences of my life.

And, in fact, changed my life forever.

JUDE LAURÉN



Ruckus in the House with Tutti
MY LITTLE LOVE BY JUDE LAURÉN

Chapter 2: Ruckus in the House with Tutti

Tutti meets Buster

I was already in a committed relationship.

Let me introduce you to Tutti, a dainty Shih Tzu with an incredibly playful and sweet nature and a most distinctive, endearingly demanding, and somewhat whiny bark. Her round, dark eyes sparkled with curiosity and an irresistible innocence, inviting you into her world of joy.

Tutti had a unique perspective on life; she fancied herself a little girl rather than a dog (though we kept that secret safe). My friends and family were well-acquainted with Tutti and cherished her as dearly as I did. In fact, she had unquestionably carved out a special place within our family tree.

Born in July 2000, Tutti was named by her pet parent, Chris, who deeply loved the philharmonic orchestra. Hence, the name Tutti, an Italian word for ‘*all, the whole orchestra or chorus.*’

During that time, I was consumed with a career in Information Technology (IT), wholly devoted to my profession and often on the road for work-related travels. Returning from a business trip, the petite 11-ounce Tutti eagerly accompanied Chris to pick me up

from the airport. As soon as I settled into the car, Tutti scurried up and down my body like an enthusiastic little hamster, overflowing with joy at our introduction. Her snuggling melted a piece of my heart at that moment, and now, I was an ice cream cone out in the open on a hot summer afternoon. I could no longer hold myself back from feeling all this love for her!

She swiftly became my constant furry companion, never straying far from my side. Tutti would faithfully follow me and keep me company while I toiled away from home. Whenever I worked in my home office, she would nestle beneath my computer chair. Remaining there for as long as I was at work, even enduring the occasional accidental step on her tiny frame. Our bond grew remarkably strong, and it was no surprise that when I relocated to a new apartment, Tutti essentially adopted me as her permanent mom.

Tutti seamlessly slid into my cozy circle of friends and family. My IT team at work was well-acquainted with her and her antics since I talked about her daily. She's been a spectator at countless life events: birthdays, graduation shenanigans, the ups and downs of changing jobs, the relationship rollercoaster, travel adventures, volunteering (we tried), and the lively mix of social gatherings and holiday celebrations. She's practically our furry socialite! She was the ultimate companion everyone wished for. An all-around friend who never held back.

Her mere presence deepened my appreciation and compassion for animals. As my first pet, Tutti assumed the role of my most esteemed instructor, bestowing priceless lessons upon me. Through our journey together, I discovered a wealth of knowledge about dogs and, perhaps more significantly, about myself.

Tutti lived a life of grandeur within my home. My loved ones acknowledged her sovereignty, treating her with the reverence of a princess. I admit, I might have spoiled her just a tad. It's ironic, considering my life as a busy IT pro, barely able to catch my breath. Then, out of the blue, I panicked, worrying that Tutti might be 'hangry.' I was happily eating a bag of Cheetos for dinner while preparing a nice chicken and rice feast for her. I had to pause and ask myself, *"What is wrong with this picture?"*

And then, the memory of Tutti's custom dog car seat popped into my head. Complete with her name on the front and a color that matched my car, that thing was like a velour-lined throne for her. Hidden pockets for her royal treats and all. My friends teased me about it, especially about its height. *"Why so high up?"* they asked. With a grin, I replied, *"Well, if we're out for a drive and I'm enjoying a breathtaking view, Tutti's gotta catch those scenic vibes too!"* Now, she's not just a passenger; she's my co-pilot, giving her a unique

‘pawerspective’ on the world as we cruise through life together.

Me and Tutti would soak up the calm vibes outdoors, taking long strolls at the dog park. After our lazy strolls, we stumbled upon this chill pond in the late afternoons. Watching the ducks do their graceful water dance became my go-to Zen moment. I’d close my eyes, take a deep breath, and those ducks would pop back up with pure joy, adding to the laid-back setting. I couldn’t have asked for a more relaxed way to spend a lazy afternoon with Tutti. What fascinated me about her was her agreeable nature in transitioning from a slow-paced activity to going completely unhinged; this lady knew how to experience the best of both worlds.

Despite her petite stature, Tutti possessed boundless energy that never ceased to astonish me. She could engage in play for hours, leaving me in awe of her vitality. Moreover, she displayed a remarkable level of attachment and possessiveness, which I found endearing. Her traits and demeanor consistently radiated affection not only for me but also for everyone in her presence. Interestingly, Tutti was a social butterfly but with humans rather than other doggos. She’d make friends in a flash, cozying up to all my besties like she had no clue she was supposed to be part of the canine club. I was worried when Buster showed up on the scene.

Oh boy, was I right.

With the addition of another dog to the household, I witnessed a side of Tutti that had remained hidden during our seven years together. Her reception of the newcomer needed to be more welcoming; instead, she exhibited intense jealousy and distress. Signs of aggression and rejection were palpable as Tutti emitted loud growls whenever Buster shared a room with us. After all, I had been all hers for all this time, and now we were in a love triangle where I was the prize and the two wanted my attention equally.

Tutti's response, reminiscent of a 'drama princess,' intensified with each passing day in reaction to Buster's presence. While Tutti used to roam freely throughout my home, since Buster's arrival, she confined herself to the couch. For two weeks, she refused to eat, drink, or even approach me. I had to bring her food and water and I realized she was suffering from depression. The situation left me in a state of anguish and worry, prompting me to seek advice from other pet parents. One suggestion was to take Buster and Tutti to a public place, allowing them to interact without my interference as a routine. I wish I had done this before taking Buster home. She aggressively bared her teeth and attempted to bite him multiple times. It was certainly a valuable lesson.

Whenever Tutti attempted to bite him, Buster transformed into a gentle lamb. He never retaliated or

engaged in any form of confrontation. Not once did he initiate a fight with her. Instead, Buster chose the path of escape. Watching him put in the effort to hop as fast as he could with his tiny legs flopping around was a sight to witness.

Tutti's incessant barking would reach a fever pitch if Buster dared to inch closer to me in the same room. In contrast, Buster would lie down, resting his head on the floor to calm himself. My heart felt heavy for poor Buster. As a concerned parent attempting to navigate the conflicts between these two, I couldn't shake off the weight of the situation.

I found some comfort in Buster's natural intuition. He recognized Tutti as the household leader and was perfectly content with assuming the role of second-in-command. Unlike some male dogs who eagerly sought dominance and were unafraid of confrontations with other dogs, Buster displayed none of these traits.

He understood that Tutti was the alpha, and he had no desire to challenge or supplant her. When they slept in my bed, Buster had grown accustomed to occupying the side of the bed that Tutti didn't claim as her own. Tutti's spot was on the right side. Both pups had designated dog beds in various areas of the house too. Whenever Tutti exhibited unusual behavior, Buster sought refuge in his bed, a sanctuary away from her.

As I explored more about dog behaviors, I learned that a jealous phase is often observed when introducing a new dog into a household, particularly when there are significant age differences between the two dogs. Older dogs, not always welcoming of exuberant young puppies, might perceive the arrival of a new canine companion as a challenge. Usually, the new dog quickly recognized the necessity to assume a submissive role within the dominance hierarchy and refrained from challenging the older dog. Still, some puppies needed to catch these social cues more slowly. Depending on the older dog's temperament and the age gap, the acceptance process can span from a few weeks to much longer, as was the case with Tutti.

Ever wondered how long it took for Tutti to warm up to Buster? It took a whopping year for Tutti to cozy up and tolerate Buster's antics. Yup, 365 days of canine drama before she finally said, metaphorically, *"Okay, you're family now, Buster."* What a wild ride it was, watching their relationship evolve over a year of lively chaos!

With Tutti settling into her new groove, we could now enjoy peaceful, quality time together. As mentioned, I love the outdoors: mountains, beaches, lakes, and botanical gardens all breathe life into my soul. I brought my little furry entourage along with

loved ones to experience these beautiful places with me.

Seeing my two Shih Tzus finally click and become loving siblings filled me with profound relief. Taking care of these little troublemakers went beyond just a job. It felt like a second job that brought me immense joy. Embracing pet parenthood with them, I discovered the beautiful world of unconditional love. Turns out, when you sprinkle some patience and a whole lot of devotion into every playful bark and sweet gaze, the transformations are nothing short of remarkable.



Helpful Pointers

Engaging in outdoor activities with our dogs offers a multitude of benefits for both humans and their furry companions:

- 1) It promotes physical health by encouraging regular exercise, helping us maintain an active lifestyle, and preventing obesity in our dogs.
- 2) It strengthens the bond between owners and their pets, enhancing the emotional connection and trust.
- 3) Spending time outdoors provides mental well-being by reducing stress levels, boosting mood, and offering a break from the daily grind.
- 4) It encourages social interaction, as dog owners often meet and connect with others who share their passion for outdoor adventures, fostering a sense of community.

In the end, these outdoor adventures contribute to our overall well-being and help forge lasting memories with our cherished four-legged companions.

JUDE LAURÉN



Road Trips & Tricks
MY LITTLE LOVE BY JUDE LAURÉN

Chapter 3: Road Trips & Tricks

“Dogs are our link to paradise. They don’t know evil or jealousy or discontent. To sit with a dog on a hillside on a glorious afternoon is to be back in Eden, when doing nothing was not boring. It was peace.”

–Milan Kundera

Road trips with Tutti and Buster shattered the monotony of my daily grind, breathing life into a routine grown stale. My soul soared with the wind, reborn in the wide embrace of the open road. With no strings pulling me back, each mile was an uncharted adventure, a perfect rebellion against the predictable. Breaking free from the mundane, I reveled in the wild unpredictability of the moment, an untamed craving I didn’t even know I was starving for.

I took in the breathtaking beauty of Mother Nature, as I drove past quiet streets and busy highways, noticing the intricate details around me. These travels became albums of precious moments with cherished loved ones, and the times with Buster and Tutti added a unique palette of joy. They would pop their heads out of the window with curiosity, making it clear that I wasn’t the only one who felt the shift in energy as we entered a brand-new city. My dogs’ expressions, from humorous reactions to simple things to quiet reflections in peaceful moments, became the foundation of our shared love for exploring the road

together. We were all travelers in our mini caravan, fully immersed in the moment and savoring it while it lasted and that is what made it special.

The best thing about road trips is accessibility. You don't need permits or passports. All you need is the right vehicle, and the road will serve as a blank canvas to paint a beautiful picture. And here we were, two little artists and one not-so-little artist (me), scavenging the new terrains like explorers, sniffing out unique and memorable experiences. P.S. It's the best drug you can take.

California is a great place for pet owners wanting to plan an adventure with their furry canines. This paradise has all the dog-friendly things you and your dog can think about. Imagine moving across the iconic Highway 1 as you feel the wind in your hair while your dog's ears flap like Superman's cape. It's pure magic! The only thing that was missing was red underpants, but I don't think Tutti and Buster needed those.

There are several pet-welcoming parks, beaches, as well as trails you would like to explore. There, you can chase waves at Carmel-by-the-Sea, or you can hike through the majestic redwoods, and even explore the amazing terrain of Joshua Tree. This state is indeed a dog's paradise. The roads are filled with countless pet-friendly hotels, motels, and campgrounds where you can stay peacefully,

knowing your dog is always welcome. It has the best restaurants and eateries with pet-friendly patios, where you can enjoy fancy or casual meals while your fur baby sniffs other fur babies. It is a win for all.

The weather is almost always mild, so you can head out for a walk with your dog, knowing you will have an amazing experience! Before Buster and Tutti entered my life, I hadn't fully appreciated how pets could elevate travel adventures. It was like having my own private escorts. Though, in reality, it was the other way around but we had our moments of enjoyment.

In the summer of 2010, pre-Instagram era, navigating the pet-friendly travel landscape felt like trying to send a carrier pigeon with a handwritten note asking, "*Do you accept pets?*" to hotels. There were no Instagram-worthy pet poses by iconic landmarks. It was all about relying on 1990s-looking websites designed by your Aunt Sophie's cat, Ms. Mochi. Your best source of information? A blog post by someone's uncle's neighbor's cousin who once traveled with a chihuahua and documented it in grainy photos and if you're lucky then you may find some comment saying, 'Amazing.' You may not always know what's amazing, but you'll give in to curiosity and try it out for yourself, transforming into Sherlock and trusting your intuition to choose the perfect place to stay.

Pet-friendly travel was like the Wild West of vacation planning. No filters, just fur-tastic uncertainty.

One of our first trips together took us to explore Central California, including the charming towns of Cambria, Paso Robles, and the picturesque Morro Bay.

My bestie Robbin and I set off on this adventure in my SUV, with Buster and Tutti comfortably occupying the backseat. At first, I wasn't too keen on bringing them along, but since it was my birthday, I couldn't imagine celebrating without my fur babies. This trip taught me the importance of having a doggie checklist.

We reserved a pet-friendly bed and breakfast, kicking off our adventure with a picturesque and delightful drive along the coastline, covering miles.

The dogs relished the windows down, their fur tousled by the wind. Robbin and I took turns driving and taking pictures, witnessing the pure joy in Buster and Tutti's eyes. We made sure to make stops every two hours for potty breaks. By the time we arrived at the B&B, just past sunset, the dogs were fast asleep, snoring away. But as soon we checked in, they woke up with renewed energy.

"You mean we get to have our beds?" That was the look we received. The room I had reserved came with two queen-sized beds and two comfy dog beds on the

floor. After our long travels, we just wanted to hop into our beds and relax.

As soon as we stepped inside, both dogs hopped onto one of the queen beds, leaving their scents behind and marking their territory. This was their way of ensuring that no intruder would come to harm us or take their place, our little lion king and queen protectors!

After feeding them chicken and rice, which we had thoughtfully brought in a cooler and warmed up, Buster and Tutti enjoyed a restful night's sleep. They looked so adorable.

The next day, our hospitable host welcomed us to the patio with a delightful breakfast feast. We enjoyed cappuccinos, eggs, crispy bacon, and fresh fruits. Meanwhile, Buster and Tutti relaxed beneath the rustic table, basking in the dappled morning sunlight as they nibbled on their dog-friendly snacks. The atmosphere was truly enchanting, with the patio surrounded by a picturesque French garden. Many of our fellow guests were pet parents as well, making it a perfect setting for Buster and Tutti to make new friends, which they eagerly embraced.

The following morning, we drove to the dog-friendly town of Cayucos and explored the charming shops along the street. The real paradise for dogs was the Morro Bay Dog Beach. The length of the coastline

was six miles, and it offered a picturesque backdrop of Morro Rock.

Travel blogs described Morro Rock as a globally recognized landmark. Another name for it is ‘Gibraltar of the Pacific.’ It’s a massive outcrop of volcanic rock, 576 feet above sea level and steeply emerging from the coast. Its distinct conical shape and dark, weathered exterior make it a visually striking feature along the coastline. The rock also holds cultural significance for the local Chumash Native American community, who consider it sacred. As a renowned ecological site, it serves as the perfect nesting place for various species of seabirds, making it a popular destination for bird-watchers. Some of the most notable breeds include peregrine falcons and certain gulls. The surrounding waters are home to rich marine life, making fishing, swimming, and surfing common activities.

I remember taking tons of pictures and videos of Buster and Tutti as they ran along the sandy beach, totally lost in the moment. They made new furry friends, occasionally glanced back at us with those looks of pure happiness, and looked like little celebrities with their fur blowing in the wind and their tongues hanging out. So much fun! This day at the beach was the ultimate highlight for my high-energy fur babies.

In the following days, we drove to Paso Robles in San Luis Obispo County, as Buster and Tutti had acclimated to the road trip rhythm. We found a pet-friendly hotel conveniently located near hot springs, wineries, and a store that offered olive oil tasting. I love reading travel and food blogs more than anything else. Frankly, I enjoyed them more than my technical books. So, during the drive, like the geek that I am, I proudly shared with Robbin my knowledge of the four regions of the Central Coast namely Paso Robles, Santa Barbara County, Monterey County, and Edna Valley. The regions' diverse microclimates were unique in that they created ideal conditions for growing grapes, especially Pinot Noir, Syrah, and Chardonnay. Paso Robles is famous for its bold red wines like Cabernet Sauvignon, Rhône-style blends, which I love, and Zinfandel. My favorite Paso Robles winery to date is Justin. What do I love about wine tasting? It's a mixture of excitement, calmness, and that special atmosphere that comes with being in the vineyard. You feel like the main character in a wide-brim sun hat, sipping wine while gazing into the distance. Moments like these are even more special when spent with loved ones. Additionally, most wineries in this region are pet-friendly, and Buster and Tutti loved being our royal companions.

This birthday trip elevated my passion for more pet-friendly road trips, and in the subsequent years, we discovered pet-friendly spots in Santa Barbara,

San Diego, La Jolla, as well as the world-famous Napa and Sonoma wine regions. They offered a unique blend of history, viticulture, and panorama while savoring a variety of regional wines.

Old pictures and videos pop up in my iPhone memories and always make me smile. These are the memories I cherish most. Traveling by car with your pet is a wonderful way to deepen your bond, create lasting memories, and experience special moments of joy. So, instead of leaving your dog with a sitter when you plan a road trip, consider taking them along in your adventure. And, don't forget to create a doggie travel list!



Helpful Pointers

Traveling with pets has gained popularity in recent years, becoming a newfound social trend. When it comes to hotels and their pet policies, there are some variations to be aware of. Some hotels are pet-friendly across all their rooms, while others reserve specific rooms for pet guests. The fees for accommodating pets can also vary, ranging from nightly rates to a flat fee for the duration of your stay. Additionally, some places require a refundable deposit as a precaution against potential damages.

Some hotels may have specific criteria regarding the size, weight, age, and the specific breed of your dog. If your dog does not meet these criteria, finding suitable accommodation might be a bit challenging. To ensure a pleasant stay, I recommend asking the right questions about the hotel's policies before reserving a room.

My doggie checklist consisted of the following items:

- **Dog Tags:** Dog tags are crucial for your pet's safety. They should contain current and relevant information about your dog, including your contact details and an alternative contact, such as a dog sitter. In pet tags, it's important to include medical conditions, such as diabetes, which demand specific care such as insulin administration. Buster and Tutti wore unique and

highly functional tags resembling driver's licenses, enabling me to provide essential information that could be crucial in an emergency.

- **Vaccination Records:** When setting out on your travels with your canine companion, it's paramount to have your dog's vaccination records easily accessible. They may be required by hotels or lodging establishments. A good approach is to screenshot these records and save them on your mobile phone for convenient access.

- **Comfort:** Make sure your furry companion has access to a spacious and comfortable area throughout the journey. Avoid overloading your vehicle to the extent that your dog is squeezed amid luggage with minimal space to rest comfortably. Consider the discomfort of being stuck in the middle seat on a cramped ten-hour flight. Neither you nor your dog would desire such an experience. Offering sufficient space promotes better behavior from your pet during travel. Enhance their comfort by bringing items such as a dog bed, a yoga mat, a blanket, or even a foldable foam sleeping pad.

- **Treats & Rewards:** Effectively trained dogs display better behavior and enhance the overall enjoyment of a trip compared to those without training. While training your pet, it's important to offer small rewards for completing tasks and showcasing desired

behaviors. This principle of positive reinforcement extends to your travels with your pet. By providing treats for good behavior, you enhance the chances of a joyful and hassle-free journey.

- **Hydration:** As you prepare for your trip, include water bottles and your dog's drinking bowl in your car essentials. It's important to keep them hydrated, and they shouldn't have to wait until you reach a gas station to access water. For longer journeys, keep a secured water bowl easily available in the back seat, allowing your dog to quench their thirst whenever needed.

- **Bathroom Business:** Beyond treats and water, it's important to offer your dog brief breaks from the car every few hours. This provides them the opportunity to relieve themselves, and these pauses are beneficial for their well-being much like how we need breaks to stretch our legs during a lengthy drive. These stops allow them to walk around for a few minutes at a pit stop, aiding in the prevention of car sickness.

- **Carrying Toys:** When packing for your trip, remember to include a selection of high-quality toys to enhance your dog's enjoyment. Toys keep your furry companion engaged and mentally stimulated during the journey. It's essential, though, to avoid bringing toys that can be easily damaged, such as stuffed toys. Instead, opt for durable items like a frisbee or a ball. This choice will

spare you the hassle of cleaning up a mess if your dog happens to shred a fragile, bone-shaped stuffed toy.

- **Camping at Local Parks:** Consider seeking a nearby park where your dog can revel in a natural setting during your trip. Local parks provide a stimulating environment that can captivate pets. You'll have the opportunity to engage with your furry companion in open play, savor the beauty of nature, and, if feasible, set up camp. Camping provides your pet with more space to explore and can be a simpler and more budget-friendly alternative to finding a pet-friendly hotel.

- **Hygiene:** Ensuring your dog stays clean is essential to protect them from potential illnesses while traveling. Nobody wants their beloved pet to fall ill during a trip. If you're concerned about your dog shedding fur or having accidents, it's a good idea to pack a couple of old rags for quick cleanup and a hose to wash away any mishaps. Wash their paws with pet soap and water after frolicking in muddy or salty areas. Furthermore, ensure you have poop bags readily available to responsibly pick up after your dog.

- **Study the Location:** Planning a trip can be thrilling, but conducting thorough research is equally important. While you may assume your selected destination is pet-friendly, there may be strict regulations in place concerning pets. There are beaches

that don't allow dogs during summer. It is important to know these things beforehand.

- **Car Temperature:** While on the road, it's crucial to closely monitor the weather. Oftentimes, we fail to realize how hot our cars can get on sunny days. They can also suffocate and even dehydrate our dogs. Schedule regular breaks for fresh air and ensure your pet stays well-hydrated throughout the journey. I paid close attention to my car's temperature during road trips because Shih Tzus have double coats.

- **Dog Safety Belts:** Certain dogs feel secure when crated during car travel. If you choose a crate, it's important to secure it in the vehicle with a seat belt. This is one of the safest protection methods.

Yet, if your dogs, much like Buster and Tutti, delight in wagging their tails and gazing out of the window, think about investing in a premium dog car seat with a harness that can be securely fastened into the vehicle. This enables them to relish the scenery while ensuring their safety throughout the journey.

- **Other Considerations:** When visiting areas with abundant wildlife, it's imperative to maintain a safe distance from the animals. Make sure your dog is leashed, so you may control their movements. This may

JUDE LAURÉN

even allow you to guide them to safety in a potentially dangerous situation.

SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA



Santiago de Compostela
MY LITTLE LOVE BY JUDE LAURÉN

Chapter 4: Santiago de Compostela

When I was five years old and one moment no one was looking my way at my grandmother's place, I decided to sneak off to the beach, which was half a mile away. In my flip-flops and a navy sundress, under the sun, I can still recall the soothing ocean waves, while observing fishermen catching fish and crabs.

Looking up, the beautiful blue sky covered a fantastic view of the beach. I stayed there for a long time, wholly captivated, until a local couple recognized me and grew concerned that I was alone. They knew my grandmother, so they ensured I returned safely, gently following me home while I insisted, *"I know where I live!"* Looking back, it's funny to think of myself as that tiny explorer.

Traveling to different places and meeting other people is incredibly thrilling. Each journey teaches us something new, fosters new connections, and opens us to different perspectives.

I had planned to learn different languages and am still in progress with that, but enjoying different cuisines is something I mastered. Yes, I'm a total foodie. Traveling frees me from daily stresses and gets me completely rejuvenated.

In the summer of 2012, my close friend JT invited me to visit him in Galicia. At the time, I hadn't even heard of Galicia, and a quick Google image search showed me a fantastic paradise, the northwest Atlantic coast of Spain.

He told me his company had assigned him to a two-year project there and set him up in a stunning apartment with ocean views. I was immediately intrigued. Having never been to Spain, I couldn't resist exploring a new country. So, I planned a three-week trip to Galicia, eager to embrace whatever adventures awaited.

One thing about me is my adventurous nature. If a loved one invites me to explore a place I've never been, as long as it feels safe, my answer is almost always yes. I don't even need to know the itinerary. The mystery and surprise make it even more fun.

JT picked me up at the airport and took us straight to Santiago de Compostela, the entrance to this fascinating region of Spain. Strolling through the enchanting tapestry of this ancient town left me in a perpetual state of wonder. The medieval vibe of the place just radiated from every cobblestone beneath my feet, and each building's detailed design was fascinating.

As an architecture enthusiast, I loved exploring the different styles such as Romanesque, Gothic,

Renaissance, Baroque, and Neoclassical, adorned along Rúa do Preguntoiro in the old town. Shops ranged from artisan and craft, food and wine, religious art, pilgrim gear, and even fashion boutiques. Panning around, every building seemed to tell a story from a bygone era, from the monasteries to mansions and the cathedral.

Located right in the center of Santiago de Compostela, the cathedral was surrounded by a vibrant, energetic atmosphere. There was a tangible excitement in the air, brought on by pilgrims from all over the world. Thousands of pilgrims from various walks of life visit this cathedral annually for religious reasons.

Groups of pilgrims paid homage to martyrs throughout their journey, especially to Santiago the Elder, also known as Saint James the Greater, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ, who holds a special place in Christian tradition, particularly in Spain. These pilgrims of today follow the same paths as countless others who have gone before them, pulled by centuries-old tradition and spiritual devotion.

As I entered the 'Portico de la Gloria,' it invoked an almost sacred stillness and a deep sense of spirituality that seems to stretch back through time. This grand entrance was a Romanesque masterpiece by Maestro Mateo in the 12th century.

The rich history of this region made it an even more enticing experience to witness how history and faith unfolded within these intricate infrastructures. Imagine so many stories stored within architecture, witnessing generations and multiple eras. Walking across them was like revisiting the past, a timeline that I could only imagine what it could have been like.

As the sun warmed the ancient city, locals and tourists gathered around quaint tables and chairs in the cobblestone squares around the church. The air was filled with the lovely sounds of laughter, discussion, and silverware clinking on China.

The air was heavy with the smells of excellent Galician food, luring passersby to join in the feast. People enjoyed a lovely selection of meals that represented the rich culinary traditions of the region at the beautiful outdoor cafes.

There were many tempting alternatives on the menu, such as:

1. Pulpo A La Gallega: A traditional dish, it's a delicate meal of precisely cooked octopus seasoned with olive oil, Spanish paprika, and coarse salt.
2. Lacón con Grelos: A powerful meal that embodies the robust flavors of Galician cuisine, lacón is made with cured ham and grecos are turnip greens.

3. Pimientos de Padrón: A light and tasty snack made from little green peppers that have been blistered and seasoned with sea salt.
4. Tarta de Santiago: This almond dessert, which symbolizes the journey to Santiago de Compostela, is topped with the famous cross of Saint James, providing a sweet finale to the dinner.
5. Empanada Gallega: This mouthwatering pastry explodes in your mouth with every bite, loaded with a delicious blend of meats, seafood, or vegetables.

The moment I tasted their Jamón Serrano and the array of exquisite ‘quesos,’ dreams and reality seemed to merge, and I wondered whether I was truly experiencing what I had been longing for.

My phone rang amid all the enthusiasm, alerting me to a text from home that quickly soured my mood. Buster seemed to be experiencing pain in his hind area. I felt a wave of anxiety rushed over me as my heart raced.

I quickly focused on finding a solution, suggesting an immediate trip to the vet. Thankfully, everyone at home was as supportive as ever, reassuring me that everything would be okay. Still, I couldn’t help but keep my phone close, constantly checking for updates.

JT drove us west from Santiago de Compostela to Salamanca, an old heritage city also known as the ‘*Golden City*,’ due to its architectural and gastronomical culture. I wandered around the cobblestone streets in the magical ambiance of this town.

Plaza Mayor is its main public square, considered to be one of the largest plazas in Spain, known for its eloquent Baroque architecture and bustling atmosphere. JT and I enjoyed people-watching in the plaza while catching up on our lives, as he had been in Galicia for a year.

He told me how much he was enjoying his life in Galicia, his wonderful colleagues and new friends, learning the Spanish language more and more, and how this place had given him an amazing perspective on life. We explored different tapas bars, and after a few small dishes, we treated ourselves to a variety of ‘helados.’

The next city we visited was Vigo, a coastal city known for its pristine beaches. Vigo boasts the largest fishing port in Europe, with a palpable maritime culture. The port area features a bustling fish market and unbelievable fresh seafood. The old town, ‘Casco Vello,’ is a lively hangout for locals. Yet what I loved most was the peacefulness of the city, which brought me a sense of calm and gentle tranquility.

In the following days, we traveled to Seville, where I was in awe of the grand Gothic cathedral, the Catedral de Santa María de la Sede, with its ethereal sculptures, ornate capitals, and stained-glass windows. One night, we attended an incredible Flamenco performance. The guitar playing, dancing, and hand clapping were filled with fiery passion, though I couldn't help but be distracted by thoughts of Buster back home.

My little bubble of adventure and bewitchment popped the following day when I received the terrible news that sent a shiver down my spine. Buster had inexplicably vanished from the house, and when he was eventually discovered, he lay trembling on the grass in the yard.

It's a harsh reality that dogs, in their innate wisdom, often retreat when they sense their vulnerability, knowing they're unable to protect themselves. In Buster's case, this solitary act was his instinctual way of seeking safety and self-preservation.

Those who attempted to gently lift Buster from the grass found themselves wrestling with a heart-wrenching challenge, as he was clearly in agonizing pain.

My mind couldn't help but make up vivid images of Buster in such a distressing state.

He was rushed to his regular vet, who urgently recommended an appointment with a spine specialist. Lucky for Buster, the specialist was available that afternoon.

Buster's MRI results delivered a harrowing diagnosis: degenerative disease in Stage 4 that demanded immediate surgery. Without it, the outlook was grim, with the looming possibility of paralysis or even more dire consequences, all while he endured excruciating pain.

As the news sank in, my knees grew weak, and tears welled up as I struggled to bear the emotional weight of Buster's diagnosis. Carrying a heavy heart and a profound sense of unease, especially being so far from home, I made a quick and firm decision, *"Let's proceed with the surgery. I need him to be okay."*

Being away from Buster while he was in this condition was an ordeal of excruciating proportions. I grappled with a profound sense of helplessness, but the unwavering support of my loved ones abroad and at home served as comforting anchors.

They encouraged me to redirect my focus toward my much-needed vacation and put my trust in the capable hands of vets caring for Buster. *"He is in ICU,"* they said. *"And you can't be with him in that room, even if you wanted to."* Still, his condition remained a constant presence in my thoughts.

While I was in Spain, every visit to a cathedral or look at a piece of religious art became a chance to hold onto hope and believe that Buster would get better. Kneeling in front of the altar, legs a bit shaky, I searched for some comfort and guidance. I had always been more spiritual than religious, but in that moment, I found myself embracing both.

“Please, dear God, take away his pain.”

After enduring a seven-day stay at the veterinary specialty hospital, Buster was finally discharged and allowed to return home. The specialist recommended getting a roomy playpen measuring 63 x 63 x 36 inches, as Buster would need to be confined in it for several months. He had to be taken for regular checkups to make sure he had been recovering fine.

As I neared the international airport, concluding the final leg of my Spanish journey, I received a call from home.

My friend’s voice quivered with tears as she described Buster’s unsteady steps. I could feel deep concern through the phone. *“He’s so wobbly, and this condition might be permanent,”* she lamented, her concern palpable. At that very moment, my heart sank, and a profound uncertainty gripped me. This can’t happen to him. He’s the happiest, most high-spirited dog I know.

Finally, when I got back home, I stepped through the front door with my heart filled with a mix of relief and anxiety. The living room greeted me with a playpen, and inside lay my dear Buster, navigating the complexities of recovery from his recent surgery. A noticeable 18-inch wound on his back was slowly healing.

I gently touched the wound, as if my touch could somehow speed up the healing process. His vulnerability was palpable; his voice coarse and weak, while his body seemed to carry the weight of the world. But in that vulnerable moment, as our eyes locked, I saw a flicker of unmistakable love and devotion.

Despite his weakened state, his tail, though moving ever so slowly, began to wag with a determination that defied his fragility. Looking at him in tears, I uttered: *“My little love....”*

The sight of Buster, his eyes imploring, spoke volumes. His unwavering and profound affection transcended the confines of his weakened body, reaching out to me like a lifeline. Every day, I tended to his healing wound with a mix of anxiety and unwavering determination, wishing I didn't have to leave home for work.

I could see in his eyes that he understood my feelings about his situation, appreciating my efforts.

Inside that playpen, I often touched his paw pads, his paws on my fingertips becoming conduits of hope and support. I watched him while he slept, feeling that my love for him deepened with each passing moment.

Each night served as a powerful testament to the depth of our bond, a poignant reminder that in the face of adversity, the language of love between a pet and its parent knows no bounds.

In the months that followed, Buster underwent hydrotherapy, walking on an underwater treadmill, an activity he surprisingly found enjoyable. I also made sure he received essential supplements, including Omega-3 fatty acids, glucosamine, chondroitin, Vitamin E, and Vitamin B. Dog pill pockets made it easier for him to take these vitamins.

With diligent care and unwavering patience, Buster's once-vulnerable back transformed into a canvas of healing, with new life steadily spreading across his injured skin. His tenacity left me in awe. Despite all the odds against him, Buster persevered and came out of his illness with a joyous energy that lit up his eyes. He was regaining his characteristic passion for life, and I could see it as each day went by.

Once more, his tail wagged in delight, serving as a poignant reminder of the incredible power of love and perseverance.

Every morning I woke up, I felt blessed to witness his

improving condition, which brought peace to my heart.

It reminded me of the feeling I had in Santiago de Compostela, where a profound sense of peace and introspection enveloped me. There was a deep, pure connection between my little love and me, as we went through every day's progress together.

I was very mindful of his activities in the house. I allowed him to run on one floor. I carried him up and down the stairs and blocked some areas where he would be tempted to jump onto furniture.

Six months had flown by, and there we stood on the beach, ready to create new, cherished memories. My heart was bursting with joy as I watched my once-ailing companion race through the sand like a comet filled with energy and excitement, embracing each moment with a carefree vibe.

With grains of sand dancing between his paws and a tail that matched the force of a wind turbine, he charged toward Tutti and their furry pals, frolicking and playing with unadulterated bliss.

For my California pup, the beach was heaven. On that sunny day, he ran and played as if there were no tomorrow. With the sun beaming down, I caught sight of that happy face I missed so much. Yep, my buddy was back, and with him came a whole lot of joy flooding back into my heart.

“Run, my boy, run!”



Helpful Pointers

Degenerative disc disease (DDD), also known as disc disease (IVDD), can damage the vertebrae and cause pain for dogs suffering from this condition. It may lead to injuries for the dog as well. There is a possibility that certain dog breeds have a predisposition to this ailment.

The disks act as a barrier between the parts of the spine called vertebrae to enable the spine to flex without harming the spinal cord in the process. The spinal cord facilitates communication between the brain and muscles throughout the body, in the legs and excretory system.

Degeneration of the discs can lead to pain and even paralysis if the discs swell and put pressure on the cord or nerves.

In dogs, degenerative disc disease typically affects the mid to lower back or the neck. With appropriate medical care, the condition may improve over time, but in some cases, surgery might be necessary for recovery.

The symptoms of DDD differ, depending on whether the afflicted section of the spinal cord is in the neck or lower down the back. They might emerge gradually or quickly due to trauma or extreme exertion. When symptoms arise unexpectedly, disc degeneration has

likely steadily increased over time but with few symptoms.

What Causes DDD?

In dogs, age-related alterations in the intervertebral discs are usually the cause of degenerative disc disease. Other factors that can contribute to DDD in dogs include genetics, breed predisposition (such as in breeds with short legs and long backs), obesity, trauma, and repetitive stress or strain on the spine. Additionally, certain conditions such as spinal instability or abnormalities can increase the likelihood of DDD developing. Overall, DDD in dogs is often a multifactorial condition influenced by a combination of genetic predisposition, lifestyle factors, and the aging process.

With their elongated bodies and petite stature, Shih Tzus are notably susceptible to back-related concerns. Their distinctive combination of a small breed size and shorter legs can pose challenges, particularly when navigating a single step. Such minor elevations can exert undue strain on their delicate frames. Moreover, this vulnerability extends to overweight dogs, as they may encounter difficulties in ascending stairs, compounded by the potential weakness in their hind legs stemming from insufficient exercise.

The process helps alleviate pain and paralysis by easing the pressure, on the cord through creating a "window" known as fenestration in the bone to expose the spinal cord in cases of lower back disc rupture for pressure relief purposes. The treatment plan is influenced by factors such as the discs affected location and severity of symptoms experienced over time.

The wonderful news that my boy's surgery went well brought me a sense of relief. Yet, to fully recover, he would need to spend the next few days in the intensive care unit. The surgery was costly and having the assistance of pet insurance can be helpful in cases like these. Individual healthcare costs become slightly more affordable due to insurance.

The following are symptoms of DDD in the neck area:

- A lot of discomfort
- A reluctance to move the head
- Head drooping and unable to be raised
- Paralysis, starting with the back legs and spreading to all fours

The following are symptoms of DDD in the mid to lower back:

- Paralysis of the rear legs, either partial or total
- Dragging paw

SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

- Lack of feeling in the paws
- Pain
- Reluctance to get up and walk around
- Stumbling, or an uneven stride
- Incontinence of the bladder and bowel

JUDE LAURÉN



Dog Chef/Home-Cooked Meals
MY LITTLE LOVE BY JUDE LAURÉN

Chapter 5: Dog Chef/Home-Cooked Meals

“Dogs are not our whole life but make our lives whole.”

–Roger Caras

Being the ‘paw-rent’ to two Shih Tzus has been a whirlwind comedy of errors, and I mean that in the most loving way. These two furballs inadvertently turned me into an expert wannabe on pet health. When Tutti made her grand entrance, followed by the goofball extraordinaire, Buster, they transformed me in ways I never saw coming. It’s a known fact that dogs offer a one-of-a-kind blend of friendship and companionship. Dogs are the true comedians who provide solace for those of us craving some unfiltered personal interaction.

With Princess Tutti’s regal demeanor and Buster’s knack for comic timing, my daily life became a never-ending sitcom. Despite their woeful lack of opposable thumbs, they had a knack for understanding me and my feelings better than most humans. And in return, I’ve become their loyal stagehand, always ready to cater to their every whim. My heart used to tap-dance in my chest whenever I heard a melodramatic canine shriek echoing from somewhere in the house or saw them with a stubbed paw or a ‘puppy-dog eyes’ sad expression.

If I'm being honest, Buster and Tutti were more than just animals. They were my furry family, true companions for me, and the loves of my life. Their little hops and quirky behaviors brightened my days, time and time again. They were the companions who eagerly waited for my return as if I was a rockstar returning from a world tour. Their world revolved around me, the one who chose to welcome them into my family. It's a responsibility, no doubt, but one that brings boundless joy, with rewards beyond measure, and I wouldn't have traded that life for anything.

Typical days with Buster and Tutti felt like a wild whirlwind where hours slipped unnoticed. A day off from work transformed into a delightful adventure, juggling feeding, playtime, naps, and the epic battle known as bath time. The splashing rivaled any refreshing shower you've ever experienced.

But one evening, when I returned home utterly exhausted, expecting the usual canine fanfare, I was greeted by silence. The absence of Buster and Tutti's usual antics raised a concerned frown on my face. Something was amiss, and it was far from my typical evening routine. As I hung up my coat and kicked off my shoes, I ventured further into the house, calling for my furry duo. A sense of unease gnawed at me until my gaze fell upon Buster, who appeared to be under the weather.

He was shaking on the floor like a fish out of water while Tutti ran around the place, worried. I hadn't the faintest idea what was going on.

So concerned, I dropped everything on the floor and ran over to check on my dog. "*What's the matter, baby boy?*" I asked, my gaze alternating between Buster's perplexed eyes and Tutti's anxious expression. Something was wrong, and my worry was escalating.

Tutti sought solace by nudging her head into my lap, and my anxiety deepened as I noticed Buster's energy fading, his eyelids drooping with each passing second. I decided it was time for a vet visit. Little did I know that this day would reveal a foodie mystery. It turned out Buster had staged a culinary rebellion against a well-intentioned pet food recommendation from a friend. His reaction had left him sluggish, dehydrated, and loss of appetite. Changing pet food brands had been my attempt to pamper him, but I had unknowingly forgotten how sensitive he could be to such changes.

We immediately went to see a vet specializing in digestive health, who strongly advised against the store-bought food we had been giving him. Buster's gut and skin health were at risk. The vet recommended a wholesome diet of boiled lean meat paired with vegetables such as carrots, broccoli, sweet potatoes, zucchini, and peas. If his symptoms

persisted, we would have to play the elimination game, removing one ingredient at a time. It was a trial-and-error culinary saga that eventually led me to discover the perfect recipe. Before long, Buster, my happy-go-lucky dog, was back to his usual self. He was running around like a dog tornado, eating heartily, and sleeping like a champ!

“Every misadventure in life leaves behind a valuable lesson,” as the saying goes. To be clear, I’m not advocating homemade pet food for every pet that exists. Renowned commercial pet food brands provide premium canned and kibble options that are painstakingly prepared by veterinary specialists. These items are thoroughly inspected to ensure your pet is receiving a balanced diet that includes all the necessary nutrients. Additionally, pet parents can easily find these products in supermarkets and pet stores.

That said, Buster’s culinary escapade was driven by his unique dietary quirks, which prompted me to embark on a gourmet journey to concoct meals with ingredients that wouldn’t send him on a fur-raising adventure of discomfort. It all came down to ensuring his peak health and happiness, a path I chose to navigate with culinary flair, one delectable ingredient at a time.

What to Feed Your Dog

For those of you finding yourselves in the same culinary quandary as I did, where crafting home-cooked meals becomes necessary, let me underscore the importance of maintaining a harmonious recipe. After all, no one wants their furry companion to stage a culinary protest! Fear not if you're hungry for inspiration. I've sprinkled a few of my kitchen wizardry concoctions throughout this chapter for your tasting pleasure. Bon appétit, both to you and your discerning pet palate!

How Much Food to Feed

There are no fixed rules when it comes to feeding your dog. A dog's nutritional requirements resemble a customized recipe that factors in age, activity level, health, and even the doggie DNA. While some dogs are bottomless pits, others pick like fine dining reviewers. Because various breeds require different diets, it's also a fashion display.

For instance, Shih Tzu pups are like mini-gourmands-in-training, craving a rich blend of proteins, vitamins, and minerals. But here's the kicker. Their little bellies can only handle bite-sized portions at a time. So, we go gourmet by dishing out several mini-meals a day. Think of it as a canine 'tapas' party. We feed them three times a day until

they hit around four or five years old. Then, we segue to a more straightforward two-meals-a-day routine.

Now, let's remember the star of the show: your pet's activity level. If they bounce off the walls like a four-legged ninja, their calorie count must keep up with the action-packed lifestyle. It's all about balance. Keep a keen eye on the scale, not yours, but your pet's. Make dietary adjustments if they start to resemble a sausage or a toothpick.

In Buster's case, he was a two-square-meals-a-day kinda guy, which worked wonders for him. His diet was like the superhero squad of canine nutrition, giving him the power to grow stronger and healthier with every passing day.

My Own Concoction

Recipe # 1: Organic Chicken with Brown Rice & Veggies

Start by tossing some organic chicken chunks (or substitute with ground turkey, pork, or beef) into a saucepan with brown rice and a medley of veggies. Picture it as a veggie runway show with butternut squash, carrots, peas, broccoli, and cauliflower strutting their stuff.

Now, here's the secret sauce literally. Add a cup of low sodium chicken broth to give it that gourmet soupy twist. Allow the entire mixture to simmer. Once

it reaches its peak deliciousness, let it cool down because no one wants a burnt snout!

And finally, it's supplement time. Think of it as the sprinkles on the doggie cupcake. Those little extras that make it pop: ground multivitamins and a drop of Omega 3. Voilà! You've just whipped up a feast fit for a canine king or queen.

Recipe # 2: Sauteed Steak or Fish with Sweet Potatoes & Veggies

Fire up your trusty pan and get ready to whip up a feast worthy of a five-star chef (well, in their pup eyes, at least). Add some olive oil, followed by steak slices or slices of salmon or tilapia. When used in smaller quantities, olive oil offers the right antioxidants and monounsaturated fats. It is great for keeping a dog's skin and fur in good condition.

When your masterpiece of protein is browning, add the sweet potato chunks and additional vegetables of your choice and simmer over low heat until they are done. After letting it cool, sprinkle in the supplements just like in step #1.

When you're planning a getaway, prep like a pro by packing up their meals into snack-size Ziploc bags. If you're traveling for five days, that's 10 bags in the freezer, ready to roll. Your pet's caretaker will have the freezer at the ready, microwaving each bag for 2 minutes with the finesse of a culinary maestro. Voila!

Dinner is now prepared for your beloved pets, and you've earned the title of their exceptional chef. Enjoy, you culinary virtuoso!

Snacks

Buster, with his eyes gleaming like a carnivorous connoisseur, was all about chicken and beef jerky. If you peeked into my pantry, you'd find it fully stocked with treasures like 'Happy Hips' and 'Milo's Kitchen,' ready to fuel his meaty adventures. He had a one-way ticket to Flavourtown, and he knew it!

Now, onto Tutti, our resident part-time veggie virtuoso. She'd occasionally dabble in sliced apples and carrots, making her the health-conscious snacker of the bunch. But when it was time to pull out all the stops, bacon was the main event—a special treat that left them both dancing like they'd won the doggie lottery. Because in their world, every mealtime was a gourmet gala, and bacon was the confetti on top!

Supplements

Adding some extra goodies to these homemade meals was a must to keep that well-rounded diet going strong. I made sure to toss in Omega 3 and a daily dose of multivitamins. And when my Buster hit those golden senior years, here's what we sprinkled into the mix:

- Liver supplement
- Probiotics
- Zylkene as a calming supplement
- Glucosamine to help with hips and joints

Some products came in liquid form, and I would get them before the tablet forms for ease of use.

Was It Expensive?

Making a monthly budget and using it to manage your dog's dietary expenses can be helpful. The first few days may be challenging since you and your dog will learn together as you prepare food and observe how they respond. This time is when you understand your pet's food preferences. A friend of mine's Shih Tzu went on a raw diet, which corrected her allergy issues.

Surprisingly, my expenditure for food in a month was less expensive than purchasing canned and processed meals. I bought organic chicken from Costco and always kept a large bag of brown rice and frozen peas in the refrigerator. I paid attention when fish and beef were on sale.

Last but not least, whether you're donning the apron for your fur baby or shopping for commercial pet foods, always put on your ingredient detective hat and consult with your vet. After all, a healthy digestive system is the secret sauce for your pet's boundless happiness and tail-wagging life!



Helpful Pointers

In Chapter 8, I've detailed a comprehensive guide on food allergies. For a deeper understanding, please refer to that chapter. Equally important is another critical aspect of your dog's health, and that is dental care. If we don't pay attention to their teeth and gum care, it can lead to discomfort, infections or something more serious.

Here are some essential tips for Dental Care:

- Introduce a dental care routine when your dog is a puppy so they are used to it.
- Brush their teeth regularly, if not daily, at least a few times a week. Human toothpaste can be toxic, so use dog-specific toothbrush and toothpaste only.
- Give your dog dental chews as this would reduce plaque and tartar buildup.
- Offer dental toys, which are both fun and effective for scraping away plaque and massaging the gums.
- There are water additives that freshen breath and control plaque and tartar. Consult your vets for more information.

DOG CHEF/HOME-COOKED MEALS

- Always check their mouth for signs of issues. Bad breath, bleeding or swelling are red flags to watch out for.
- Consider professional dental cleaning annually. Most vets offer this service, which helps prevent serious dental disease.

JUDE LAURÉN



Beach Bum USA
MY LITTLE LOVE BY JUDE LAURÉN

Chapter 6: Beach Bum USA

“Happiness is a warm puppy.”

– Charles M. Schulz

Living in a beach city was an absolute blessing, especially when it meant spending a perfect day at the beach with my two Shih Tzus. These tiny furballs had unique ways of enjoying the salty breeze and the endless shoreline. Their energy pumps up and they look like balls of fur flopping around, jumping with the breeze.

I called Buster a beach bum because of his love for beaches; his tongue would slip out from his overwhelming joy each time he found himself at the beach.

He was so fond of the seaside that his tail wagged whenever he saw me trying on my beach shorts and sunglasses. And, of course, how can I forget what happened when I started packing the beach basket? The two of them start jumping around me as soon as they get even a hint that we are hitting the beach. It was like we were telepathically connected or something. It would often remind me of professor Xavier from X-Men and his ability to read minds.

They had become so apt at catching hints before the beach trips: each time, hovering over our packed bags, unable to hold themselves back any longer.

Buster had been to many dog beaches. Being a happy and enthusiastic puppy, he was always adored by people and never failed to impress them when playing games at the beach.

The moment that we arrived at the dog beach, Buster couldn't contain his excitement. He was like a tiny tornado on four legs, immediately breaking into a round of zoomies. Zigzagging across the sandy stretch, he dodged waves like his personal slalom course. He would chase the wave, and whenever it would return, he'd jump around in excitement of having defeated his invisible archnemesis.

His joyful barking echoed like a canine cheerleader, urging everyone to join in the fun. And as for his sandcastle-destruction service, he had a knack for targeting the most meticulously crafted structures and dismantling them faster than a team of demolition experts. He was Handy Manny, except in an alternative universe, where his name would've been Clumsy Manny.

But then Tutti was the Yin to Buster's Yang, and she had a more grounded approach to beach life. She was a solitude-loving beach gal.

Tutti looked like a Yogini in the middle of a meditation session, her paws firmly planted in the sand as she calmly stared out to sea. She appeared to be reflecting on life's meaning or maybe just enjoying the calming sound of the waves. Even amid Buster's frenzied antics, her inner calm held firm. They were two sides of the same coin; while one took over the role of being an entertainer, the other one took the entertainment.

It was impossible not to smile at the difference between the two. Buster, the embodiment of boundless energy, and Tutti, the epitome of calm, formed a comical beach dynamic. They were like a comedy duo performing on the world's silliest stage, and the audience was everyone lucky enough to witness their antics.

We were truly fortunate to call this beach city home. The dog beach was a paradise where my two fur babies could fully express themselves, whether they were whirlwinds of excitement or Zen-like beach bums like Tutti. There, the sun, sea, and sand combined to make every day feel like a vacation.

Buster and Tutti used to relish playdates with their best friend, Beemer, the cutest Westie mix with a heart as white as his fur. Though Beemer only had three legs, missing his front left one, you'd never know it by the way he strutted around with so much

swagger. Beemer and Buster turned beach playtimes into sidesplitting wrestling matches, like watching a furry WWE showdown but with way more laughs.

Imagine Beemer hopping around like a crazed kangaroo, attempting his signature one-legged tackle, while Buster executed ninja moves that could make Jackie Chan jealous. With two masters of different fighting techniques, we got to witness an action movie unfold live before us.

If Tutti could roll her eyes, unimpressed by Buster and Beemer's wrestling moves, she surely would. These cherished moments and simple joys made my weekends.

My busy workdays often blurred together throughout the week. The heavy responsibilities and demands of the workplace emphasized the importance of prioritizing self-care. My workdays consisted of constant meetings, meticulous computer software implementations, and supporting end-users around the clock. Making time for a little downtime, reflection, and self-care became a must. My daily Hatha yoga practice kept my mind, body, and soul in balance.

The same went for my little companions. Though they had the freedom to roam around the house, frolicking outdoors would be restorative for them. I

wasn't one to cancel plans with Buster and Tutti; instead, I tried to get them out for walks whenever I could.

I was thrilled when my former employer arranged a senior team retreat at the Montage Hotel in Laguna Beach, California. Upon checking, I discovered that the hotel was dog-friendly, which thrilled me. So, it was a perfect opportunity to spend quality time with my fur babies while building relationships with my dear colleagues. Buster and Tutti got worried whenever I packed a suitcase, so I made sure they were out of sight before I did.

I couldn't contain my excitement, so when they returned, I said: *"Guess what, dogs? I am going to stay at a 5-star hotel for a week, and you are coming along!"* Their tails wagged wildly, as if they understood every word I said and were just as thrilled for 'their' vacation.

Driving to Laguna Beach along the coast was mesmerizing. To my right, the Pacific Ocean extended in an endless horizon, a wide expanse of glittering blue meeting the azure sky. Seawater sprayed into the air as waves broke gently against the imposing cliffs. The gorgeous path was bordered on the left by verdant hills and rocky outcrops, lending an air of rough appeal to the spectacular journey.

Our drive was a symphony of fun and laughter. Playing co-pilots, Buster and Tutti alternated between sticking their heads out the window to enjoy the sea breeze on their fluffy faces. Their antics had me laughing so hard, especially when they tried to start a barking war with the local seagulls.

The excitement peaked when we finally arrived at the lavish Montage Laguna Beach. The process of checking in went well, and the helpful staff greeted us with big smiles and extra goodies for my dogs traveling with me. I was astounded by the stunning vista of the ocean that stretched out before us as soon as we stepped into our room.

The room was a canine paradise. Two plush dog beds awaited Buster and Tutti on the floor, strategically placed to take in the panoramic ocean view. The dogs quickly decided that the jar of gourmet treats the hotel had left on the side table was their favorite feature of the entire room.

As we sat down, the sun was lowering, filling the area with a cozy, golden warmth. The sound of waves crashing against the coast brought a deep sense of calm. With my furry friends snoozing on their beds, I was overcome with happiness and gratitude for this perfect little escape.

As the retreat wrapped up, I decided to drive to Laguna's public beach, which was also dog-friendly during the fall season. I grabbed my trusty beach basket and playfully called, "*Ready, my little beach buddies?*" Buster and Tutti bounded toward me with tails wagging in enthusiastic agreement.

The sun was sparkling on the water, making everything look amazing that morning. A cool breeze messed up our hair, but it felt great compared to the warm sand under our feet. The beach was buzzing with people. Some were swimming, others playing volleyball, building sandcastles, or tossing Frisbees with their dogs.

Carrying my beach basket, I pulled out a soft sheet and spread it elegantly over the sandy ground, securing each corner with a reliable rock to withstand the playful gusts of wind. As I lounged there, Buster and Tutti enjoyed the good life with some tasty treats, all while I marveled at the different ways fellow pet owners were bonding with their dogs. Some strolled casually along the shore, others reveled in high-energy games of fetch, and a few captured precious moments through their camera lenses. But the most jaw-dropping sight was seeing a dog on a surfboard.

That week was unquestionably one of the most unforgettable moments spent with Buster and Tutti.



Helpful Pointers

Here are some tips for pet parents to ensure a fun-filled event with their furry companions:

- Many dogs don't like getting wet. Some don't even know how to swim. To be safe, using floaties for your dog is the best bet, as I have seen many pet parents do that at the beach.
- Dog paws can be sensitive to the hot sand at the beach. If you feel like it's a hot day, either avoid the beach or bring doggie rubber shoes with you.
- Use Epi-Pet sunscreen to prevent sunburn, and never use human sunscreen because it has zinc oxide. You can apply it on sensitive areas like the nose, around the lips, and on the ear tips. Always reapply sunscreen when your dog comes out of the water. Consult your vet when in doubt.
- Bring a beach blanket or umbrella along with you to rest with your little buddy, and take a lot of pictures to capture these moments.
- Never let your dog drink seawater. Always keep them hydrated by bringing a bowl and pouring fresh, clean water into it for them to drink.

BEACH BUM USA

- Make sure you give your dog treats, as they will be burning a lot of calories at the beach and may run low on energy.
- If they start shaking, it could mean the water is too cold, and they are not comfortable. When this happens, towel dry them or wrap the towel around them and give them a warm hug.
- If it gets too hot at the beach, take your dog back home or to the hotel because the heat can cause distress or heatstroke.
- Lastly, rinse all sand and seawater off your dog's fur with clean water to prevent skin irritation. Leftover sea salt and sand can cause itchiness and discomfort. If it is licked by your pet, it can cause digestive issues as well.

JUDE LAURÉN



2020 Vision
MY LITTLE LOVE BY JUDE LAURÉN

Chapter 7: 2020 Vision

“Animals are a window to your soul and a doorway to your spiritual destiny. If you let them into your life and allow them to teach you, you will be better for it.”

– Kim Shotola

Let's take a moment to appreciate dogs' incredible impact on our lives. When the world feels heavy and solitude creeps in, dogs step in as the warm embrace we need. Some may argue that they're just animals, unaware of our words, but my dear Buster and Tutti proved otherwise. They possessed an innate understanding of my emotions, a silent connection transcending language. They felt my joy, sorrow, guilt, contentment, and gratitude.

There was nothing like going home after those never-ending workdays when I was completely exhausted. I threw my computer bag on the table, collapsed onto the living room couch, and gave in to fatigue. Yet, without any beckoning or formalities, my fur babies came bounding over, radiating boundless joy. They're attuned to my weariness. One perched on the couch and nestled onto my chest, showering my face with affectionate licks, while the other chimed in with barks and a tail that wagged like a metronome on the highest setting. These two were pure embodiments of love.

Being on the receiving end of such unwavering affection and care filled me with a profound sense of completeness. Their mere presence acts as a gentle balm, soothing away the shadows of negativity. I hurried home from work every day, eager to reunite with these faithful companions who awaited my return with bated breath. Their affection revitalized me and their presence brought me comfort.

One morning, I was late for work and hurried down the stairs. I lost my footing and twisted my ankle before falling on the landing, a loud ouch escaping me in pain. I went over to the couch to check my ankle. Thankfully, it didn't seem bad, even though it swelled up quickly and hurt quite a bit. Buster, hearing the loud crash, sprang out of his cozy bed and rushed over to find me.

I limped over to the refrigerator to grab an ice pack. I realized that heading to work was out of the question for the day, as any movement would exacerbate my ankle's condition further. With a groan escaping me, I made my way back to the couch and gently placed the ice pack on my throbbing ankle. Buster joined me then; his worried eyes were fixed on the ice pack and my ankle.

Dogs are truly extraordinary creatures, with an incredible intuition that alerts them to any disturbance. This image will forever be etched in my

memory: Buster's paw resting gently on my ankle, his deeply caring eyes locked onto mine.

Loving them back comes as naturally as breathing. I often told my loved ones just how heartbroken I would be if I ever had to say goodbye to either of my furry companions. When they became unwell, I was thrown into a panic.

When Buster turned 5, I noticed his fur had changed from brown and white to a cool salt-and-pepper look. That's when I stopped calling him Buster Brown. But my B-boy's personality stayed the same, just a little less puppy-like.

Summer had finally come around. I found myself enjoying some needed relaxation at home after a hectic week at work. I took the opportunity to unwind and watch TV while my friend graciously took Buster and Tutti out for a walk. It was the chance to kick back and snack on some chips.

The light was shining through the window, teasing my eyes as the clock approached noon. I was unable to get up and close the drapes, though, because of my extreme laziness. I heard the sound of the door being unlocked after about an hour. I whispered, "*Oh, they're back,*" as I grudgingly removed the blanket from myself. A smile was starting to appear on my face as I walked over to the door and opened it. "*Hi there, back again.*"

Tutti's sharp bark silenced my words. My friend stood there, cradling Buster, her expression etched with concern. A frown crept onto my face as I sensed something wasn't right. Stepping aside, I welcomed them in and quickly inquired about what had happened. She gently placed Buster in his cozy bed and met my gaze, her eyes filled with worry.

"Um, there might be something going on with Buster's eyes. Have you noticed any changes recently? Like, during fetch today, instead of going after the ball, he kept running the other way."

I knelt down next to Buster and listened with sympathy, patting him on the back. At that moment, I was unaware of what was happening. *"Hey there, B-Boy. Don't worry, we'll drive to see Dr. Sam tomorrow. We will figure this out."* Meanwhile, Tutti was scuttling around me, appearing as thrilled to talk about Buster as she was concerned. I lifted her up and hugged and kissed her. *"Don't worry, sweetie. Buster will be okay, I promise."*

At the appointment, Dr. Sam conducted a thorough check-up on Buster, and since Tutti was there too, he decided to examine her as well. Thankfully, their vital signs were normal, but he recommended that Buster see a veterinary ophthalmologist commonly referred to as an eye doctor. Fortunately, we were able to secure an appointment for the very next day to see her.

The eye doctor confirmed that something was affecting Buster's vision but wanted to wait for the test results before giving a final diagnosis. So, we returned home, anxiously awaiting more information.

The next day, I received a call from her about the test reports, confirming that Buster had cataracts. Because of Buster's young age and general eye health, he was an ideal candidate for the procedure, and I was reassured that it's a very safe and common procedure. She also clarified that if it had been Tutti, surgery wouldn't have been possible as her cataract had deeply embedded itself in her retina.

I gently held Buster close, realizing that his recent trouble focusing and seeing things clearly explained why he hadn't been himself lately. He was scheduled for surgery in two weeks, and I felt comforted knowing this would help him tremendously.

The procedure was pricey, and I was grateful for our pet insurance, which covered 80% of the expense. I strongly recommend pet insurance, especially at an early age, as the premiums tend to be lower.

For pet parents seeking alternatives to surgery, anti-collision collars, also known as 'Halo Rings,' are readily available online. These specialized collars protect pets with impairments from bumping into furniture or walls.

On the day of the surgery, I opted to remain in the waiting area as the entire procedure was expected to last three hours. While waiting, I did some quick research on my phone and learned that cataracts can have various causes. They may be inherited, result from eye injuries, or be linked to conditions like diabetes. In some cases, they simply appear as a natural part of aging. Some cataracts seem to occur spontaneously, without any specific cause.

After Buster's surgery, he was fitted with a cone, and I could immediately tell his mood was happier. He kept looking around eagerly, and I let him explore the vet's hallways.

Over the next two weeks, he fully recovered, and we finally removed his cone. I'll forever remember that day. His whole demeanor changed as he joyfully returned to all his favorite activities such as zoomies, running, playing with boundless energy, and barking with pure delight. My heart swelled with happiness, knowing my baby was truly back to his old, fabulous self. That moment was priceless. His vision remained crystal clear for the rest of his days.



Helpful Pointers

Below is some essential information for pet parents who might need to become more familiar with this condition:

Cataracts

This eye ailment may affect both people and dogs. It could cause blurred vision, which might eventually result in blindness. For dogs, having clear vision can be as difficult as seeing through fogged glasses. Surgery helps, but it is discouraged if the patient has experienced retinal damage in the past.

Treatment

Surgery helps treat cataracts in canines as it involves replacing damaged lenses with artificial ones. But veterinarians can only consider options once they are certain that the dog's eye is in a state to withstand such a procedure.

Surgery may not be recommended if a dog has glaucoma or pre-existing eye conditions, like degeneration or severe inflammation.

Because cataracts tend to worsen over time, receiving a diagnosis as soon as possible is essential.

Procedure

1. **Testing:** After your dog is diagnosed with cataracts, have your dog's eye tested. Typically, vets use ultrasound to check for issues such as retinal detachment or a ruptured lens. An electroretinogram (ERG) is also performed. If the results of these tests point to retinal or lens issues, the dog may not benefit from surgery.

2. **Surgery:** Giving the dog anesthetic is the first step. The surgeon might also give a muscle relaxant to help keep the dog's eye in position during the surgery process. In canines, 'phacoemulsification' is the term used for the procedure to eliminate cataracts. Using ultrasonic technology, the process breaks apart and removes the hazy lens from the eye. When the original lens is removed, a fake lens is placed in its stead. In order to provide sharp images on the retina, an intraocular lens is usually used.

3. **Post-Surgery:** Your dog's doctor can advise an overnight stay in the hospital for health monitoring following a successful treatment to ensure no problems arise. For at-home care, the veterinarian might also give

medication and/or eye drops, much like Buster's doctor suggested.

4. **Aftercare:** Your dog must wear an e-collar or cone for the duration of their recuperation after returning home. They have to limit their activities to walking on leashes. It is crucial that you adhere to the veterinarian's recommendations at this time and take the recommended meds on schedule.

5. **Recovery Time:** In some instances, dogs can regain their vision as soon as the day after surgery, as was the case with Buster. The recommended recovery period is approximately two weeks for the vision to stabilize and for the eyes to adjust to the effects of surgery. Additionally, I adhered to the recommended vet check-ups every other week for the first year and then twice a year in the following years.

Cost and Risks

The cost of the procedure can vary significantly across specialized institutions and veterinarians. It's crucial to remember that the costs include more than simply the procedure itself. Medication and eye drops needed during the post-surgery phase are additional expenses.

Pet owners generally remain optimistic about the outcomes of their pets' surgeries. Even so, it is vital to know the risks associated with such procedures. Veterinarians emphasize that post-surgery complications in a dog's eye are rare occurrences. There is a possibility of issues such as corneal ulcers and increased pressure within the eye. Therefore, it's crucial to remain vigilant and have your dog thoroughly checked by a vet once the recovery period has passed.

Pet Insurance

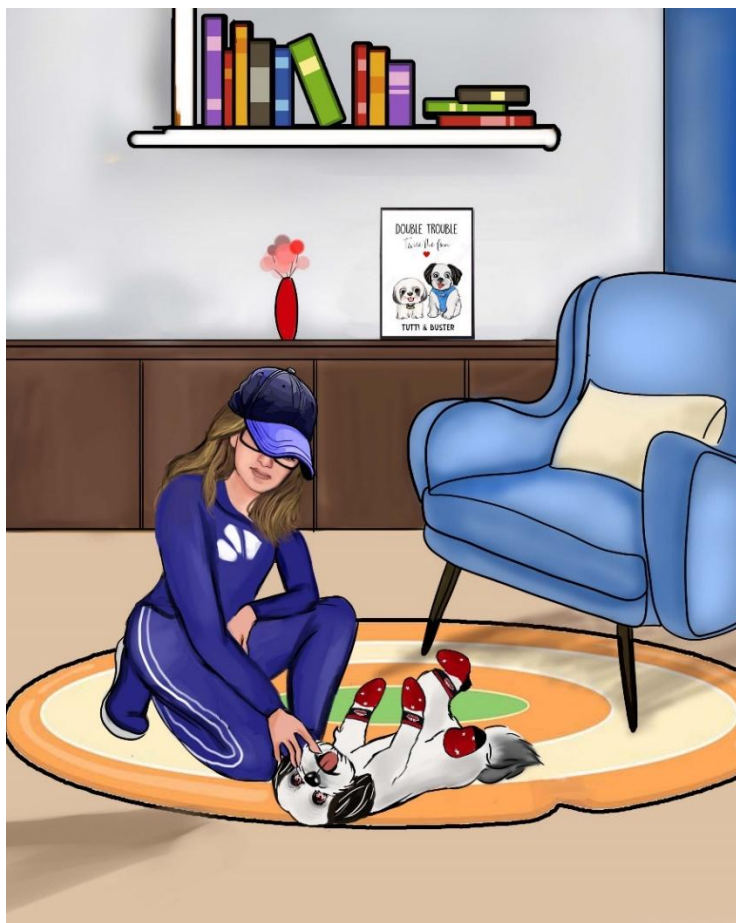
Covering the costs associated with surgery can be quite burdensome, particularly when considering various related medical expenses. Pet insurance has become crucial in the realm of pet adoption.

I strongly recommend that every pet parent consider obtaining pet insurance as soon as their furry companions become part of their lives. Having it during your pet's early years can serve as a vital safety net, easing the financial pressures of veterinary care and offering a protective shield against unforeseen medical challenges.

Veterinarians may be able to accommodate you if the expense of your pet's care is a concern by working with you to create a payment schedule or by offering reasonable cost breaks.

The online community can be a very helpful resource for support if none of these solutions work for you. You can get assistance from charitable organizations and kind people to partially or completely defray the cost of the medical procedure.

JUDE LAURÉN



Darn Allergies
MY LITTLE LOVE BY JUDE LAURÉN

Chapter 8: Darn Allergies

“Until one has loved an animal, a part of one’s soul remains unawakened.”

– Anatole France

“Buster, what are you up to?” I chuckled as I watched him slide around on his back across the floor. This enthusiastic gesture was commonly called the ‘happy wiggle.’ My amusement quickly turned to concern when he suddenly got up and started rubbing his face against the wall.

When I gently lifted him, his eyes looked dull and watery, and he seemed disinterested in being cuddled or petted. I let him squirm out of my arms, watching as he shook his head vigorously and headed to the couch, as if trying to massage his head. It was clear something was wrong with my handsome boy, whose good looks sometimes masked his playful side.

Buster’s behavior indicated an allergic reaction, a common health issue that affects many dogs. Over the years of caring for my dogs, I have learned about food, environmental, and flea allergies. I have compiled some information in the ‘Helpful Pointers’ section of this chapter.

Around age 7½, Buster’s paws became a persistent issue, marking the start of a chronic condition that tested our resilience. It kept my loyal

companion, his caregivers, his veterinary dermatologist, and me deeply involved for years to come.

During a leisurely walk in the park one day, a sense of unease washed over me as Buster suddenly began limping. I carefully inspected his paws, gently parting the fur, and was alarmed to see the redness and severe inflammation.

His pained yelps showed he was in real discomfort. I whispered soothing words to comfort him, deeply troubled by his pain we made our way to the vet, *“Hey B-Boy, I’m so sorry about this. We will figure this out.”*

Despite my efforts to stay calm, I felt an overwhelming sense of helplessness. I wished he were healthier; his carefree spirit didn’t align with his physical condition. Glancing at him while driving, seeing Buster in such misery hurt me too. At this stage, Buster was poked and examined by so many vets that it felt like he could never catch a break from his health issues.

“Why can’t you just be a normal boy, Buster!” I was visibly distraught. Buster trembled as he looked up at me, gently touching my arm with his bruised paw, almost as if he was trying to comfort me.

The vet suspected that foxtails might be behind the swelling and recurring infections. To address the issue, he recommended putting Buster under

anesthesia so he could properly look inside and remove the foxtails if they existed. My gut doubted his prognosis, but I felt completely lost and out of options.

After the procedure, the vet told me there were no foxtails in Buster's paw. I sobbed, "*I knew it!*" I felt utterly defeated and regretted not trusting my instincts. It had been a trying day, and while I had learned to compartmentalize many things in life, this was a day when I simply couldn't.

After that incident, I reached out to a well-recommended veterinary dermatologist in the area. He took a thorough look at Buster's medical history, and when it was time to give his prognosis, I went in to see him.

I remembered his words vividly, "*Jude, Buster's case is complicated. His paws are deeply compromised, and this is going to be a trial-and-error process that might really test your patience. There will be periodic outbreaks even when we try our best to provide him with the right care.*"

In the subsequent months, I worked with him on Buster's rigorous treatment. It wasn't easy. Some of the medications didn't mix well, and we had to keep adjusting doses which was tricky. But Buster's beautiful soul kept me inspired and motivated. During that time, I discovered baby socks as a simple yet

effective way to shield him from external allergens and irritants.

Dog socks can get pretty pricey, so I decided to get a little creative and came up with a cheaper solution: baby socks and Velcro cable ties. I found that non-slip baby socks, sizes 1-3 months, worked perfectly and were way more affordable. I secured them around Buster's legs with reusable cable straps, and they worked like a charm.

Soon, Buster became the trendsetter of the neighborhood. We didn't just stop at functional; we went full-on fashion. His socks had to match his shirts or sweaters because, honestly, why not keep those paws cozy and make a style statement at the same time?

So, there you have it. Buster, the canine fashionista confidently strutting his stuff in stylish baby sock ensembles! Buster and Tutti's social media account provided daily entertainment for our circle of friends and fellow pet parents, who eagerly followed their delightful adventures. Buster, with his dashing looks, undeniably stole the spotlight.

Embracing Hubbard's adage, '*When life gives you lemons, make lemonade*,' I adopted the same mindset with my special needs dog. Planning his outfits became such a fun little ritual. He loved all the extra attention, and I enjoyed making him look stylish and cozy.

Reflecting on Buster's complex paw issues, I've understood that caring for ailing pets is a journey of unconditional love and resilience. As pet parents, we encounter difficulties with optimism, accepting the fact that we cannot change everything.

If there is one takeaway from this chapter that I would like pet parents to understand, it is the need to take care of ourselves. Although I would have loved to support Buster in every struggle, I had to realize that there were some things I could not control.

It is important to note that taking care of a pet with health issues can be stressful and may also be associated with high costs. Therefore, do not forget to be gentle with yourself, set some me-time, and seek ways of refreshing your mind, as this is important for both you and your best friend.



Helpful Pointers

In 2022, Nationwide Insurance reported that skin diseases were one of the two most common reasons for veterinary visits in the USA. Many pet articles emphasize that Shih Tzus are particularly susceptible to allergies, especially those affecting their skin. Interestingly, many experts and pet care articles note that these allergies often manifest more prominently as dogs age, rather than during their younger years, typically at two or three years old.

The most common type of allergy observed in dogs is allergic dermatitis, often referred to in veterinary terms as 'atopic dermatitis.' This condition underscores the importance of vigilant care and early intervention for managing allergic responses in susceptible breeds.

Skin allergies can fall under any of the three main categories of canine allergies, depending on the underlying cause:

1. Flea Allergy Dermatitis
2. Food Allergies
3. Environment Allergies

Flea Allergy Dermatitis

Allergy to flea bites that occur when the flea manages

to land on the dog's skin result in dermatitis. Fleas are microscopic, nearly invisible parasites that feed on blood from the skin, causing itching and scratching.

Among the 2,200 species of fleas worldwide, the ones that target the dog are called the dog flea, scientifically named *Ctenocephalides canis* or simply 'Curtis.'

A good way to remove those specks of fleas is to know which kind of product you need to buy for your dog. Like lice, the difficulty of flea removal depends on how big they are and how often they lay their eggs inside the dog's hair. Under favorable conditions, the flea can likely survive for several months.

Unlike lice that can hold onto your hair for dear life during movement, fleas can be shaken off to the ground when the dog moves around, shakes its fur, or scratches itself. Though this will benefit the dog, it isn't the most effective way to remove the fleas.

Flea allergy dermatitis is extremely uncomfortable and might cause your dog to scratch their skin. As a result, their skin may become red, irritated, and even scabbed. Pay attention to where they scratch; you might notice that they often focus near the base of their tail. The reason for this lies in the flea saliva. Similar to how a mosquito's saliva makes its bite itchy for a human, the same effect occurs when a flea bites your dog.

Food Allergies

10 most common symptoms of dog food allergies:

1. Itchy skin
2. Chronic ear infection
3. Digestive Issues (vomiting, excessive gas, diarrhea)
4. Red or inflamed skin
5. Hair Loss
6. Paw licking or chewing
7. Chronic skin infection (bacterial or yeast infections)
8. Swollen face or paws
9. Behavioral changes (irritability, restlessness)
10. Hot Spots (painful, moist, red areas of irritated skin).

If you're not cautious, your dog might be tempted to eat anything with an appealing smell, potentially leading to food allergies. These allergies can manifest in various ways, from vomiting to severe diarrhea.

Buster experienced his fair share of these unpleasant episodes, some resulting from my experimentation with multiple dog foods based on recommendations from fellow pet parents. Over time, I understood that Buster's stomach was far more sensitive than most, particularly during his early adulthood.

DARN ALLERGIES

Dogs can develop allergies to proteins and complex carbohydrates. Common food allergens include beef, lamb, chicken, soy, dairy, and gluten from wheat products.

Buster and Tutti weren't fond of standard kibble, which often contained a mix of these ingredients. One piece of advice from Buster's vet was to use a process of elimination, which, as mentioned in Chapter 5, became the best solution for my dogs.

For pet owners seeking more precise information, veterinarians can perform several allergy tests to identify the specific foods your dog may be allergic to. These may include blood tests, skin tests, elimination diet trials, and, in some cases, hair and saliva testing.

Environmental Allergies

During shifts in weather, humans often find themselves sneezing, itching their noses, or sniffing: the allergy season. Dogs, too, may undergo similar reactions to changes in their surroundings. Common sources of environmental allergies for dogs include pollen, dust, grass, fungi, and mold.

Each of these sources can disrupt a dog's immune system. Unfortunately, Buster developed an allergy to a specific type of grass. To mitigate his exposure, I

diligently washed his paws after our park outings and took additional precautions during spring when allergens were prevalent.

As environmental allergies can contribute to respiratory problems, it's essential to take immediate action when your dog faces difficulties. Familiarity with the symptoms can help identify whether your dog is dealing with an allergy. Additionally, awareness of various symptoms can assist you in recognizing when your dog needs your intervention, particularly during a severe allergic reaction.

When irritants upset dogs, they will use their teeth and nails to scratch their skin, paws, and tails, which will cause them a great deal of distress. In situations like these, consulting a veterinarian who can offer the required support is the best line of action. A good dog shampoo might provide some comfort temporarily by efficiently removing any dirt or grime that might be causing the itching.

Several natural remedies can be quite effective in certain instances. One excellent alternative involves using witch hazel on your dog's skin, as it provides a soothing and comforting response. Another method is applying a cool green or black tea bag to the affected area, which can offer relief. Anti-dandruff shampoo and conditioner or products made with coconut oil soothe

DARN ALLERGIES

irritated and itchy skin, helping the dog's coat become clean and shiny again.

Buster benefited from using oatmeal shampoo and conditioner to maintain a healthy coat. To soothe minor inflammation on his paws, his vet suggested using Epsom salt. I would add a generous pinch of Epsom salt to warm water in the sink and gently soak his feet for at least fifteen minutes, repeating this calming therapy two or three times a week. While he stood in the sink, I massaged his neck and back to keep him relaxed and prevent him from trying to leave. These became his beloved spa days, moments he truly cherished.

The cleanliness of our home was essential to Buster's health, especially given his sensitivity to allergens. Keeping clean bedsheets and pillows was particularly important since he shared the bedroom with us.

To accommodate his needs, we switched to environmentally friendly detergents and added an air purifier equipped with the HEPA filter aimed to get rid of bacteria and other particulate matter. While these measures may be optional, they are a good recommendation for anyone looking to improve living conditions with their canine companions, especially those prone to allergies.

Regular dusting is essential for maintaining a clean home, as dust can easily settle on surfaces and irritate your dog's nose, leading to environmental allergies.

During cleaning, make sure to fluff pillows and use gloves to reach into tight corners, ensuring that every part of your living space is free of dust. When it comes to bathing, the needs can vary between breeds. Some dogs may benefit from frequent baths to manage allergies, while others may not require them as often.

The best approach is to consult your vets, who can offer personalized advice on cleaning routines and care practices tailored to your dog's specific needs.

What are foxtails?

Foxtails are annual plants, which means that they grow in the spring and set seeds in the summer, and the seeds they set are tail-like in appearance, like that of a fox. These seeds harden in summer and fall and die in winter. They also get caught in fur, which is dangerous for the pets.

Foxtails are very sharp and can cut through a dog's skin, paw, nose, ear, eye, or mouth, and if not removed, they can cause infections. In summer, foxtails are often seen in open grasslands, trails, parks, and meadows.

DARN ALLERGIES

Some signs that may be observed in dogs exposed to foxtails include limping, snorting, sneezing, or excessive grooming of particular body parts. If ingested, a foxtail can require an immediate visit to the vet as it may pierce the intestines or cause an infection that may result in an abscess.

Here are some precautions to protect your dog from foxtails:

1. From spring to fall seasons, steer clear of grassy fields, trails, parks and meadows where foxtails are common.
2. Always inspect your dog's fur, paws, ears and nose after outdoor activities.
3. It's important to keep your dogs groomed. This can reduce the likelihood of foxtails getting in their coat.
4. Protective gear like booties, paw wax or dog vests can be very helpful during outdoor activities.
5. Ensure that your own yard is free from foxtails.

Additional Considerations

Some pet parents may use a cone around the dog's head to prevent them from reaching their skin and scratching.

You cannot blame the poor dogs if they keep trying. It would be best to help them with the right solution: regular grooming, flea preventative use, and maintaining a clean living environment, rather than restrict them from doing something instinctual.

Facts:

- Flea populations are now resistant in many areas of the U.S. to common topical flea medications.
- Topical products can be poisonous to both humans and pets if the pet accidentally ingests it, or you get it on your skin when petting them.
- Most vets recommend monthly flea control. Depending on where you live, you may not need to treat 12 months of the year.

FAREWELL PRINCESS



Farewell Princess
MY LITTLE LOVE BY JUDE LAURÉN

Chapter 9: Farewell Princess

“Don’t cry because it’s over, smile because it happened.”

– Dr. Seuss

Having joy is essential in life, and pets bring so much of it, especially in today’s increasingly complex world. Unfortunately, certain moments, like the one in May 2015, can truly shake us to our core.

Unlike Buster, Tutti had aged gracefully and, at 15, had experienced few health issues. But on that unforgettable Friday, she refused to eat and appeared unusually lethargic. A visit to the vet delivered the devastating news that cancer had unexpectedly spread throughout her lungs, and I needed to make a swift and heartbreaking decision to put her down.

My mind was spinning. Finding out that Tutti had lung cancer was such a shock because she seemed perfectly fine in the days and months before. *Why didn’t I see the signs that something was seriously wrong?* She had always been a fixture of joy in my home, and the thought that she was quietly suffering through such a serious illness made me feel overwhelmed with guilt.

My first instinct was to call Robbin, and she was just as devastated when she heard about Tutti’s condition. It was a long, emotional conversation, but opening up to my bestie about how I felt was a relief.

With the little strength I had left, I focused on what I needed to do next for both Tutti and myself.

As a fellow pet parent, Robbin gently suggested, “*Why not take Tutti home for the weekend so she can say goodbye to all her loved ones?*” I agreed. It was a compassionate idea that would allow Tutti to spend her final moments surrounded by those who cared for her.

That weekend, our home became a gathering place for friends and family who loved Tutti. We turned the master bedroom into a cozy, peaceful space filled with cherished memories and warm, tender hugs. My nephews, younger sister and her husband, close friends, neighbors, and my mom all came by to be with Tutti, gently kissing her, taking her pictures, and stroking her fur. It was a small consolation knowing they had a chance to say goodbye to one of our dearest family members.

On that Sunday afternoon, Robbin, her mom, Buster, and I took Tutti to the peaceful shores of the dog beach, her favorite spot. The ocean waves mirrored our tumultuous emotions. We cherished every precious moment with Tutti, knowing they would come to an end.

Tutti nestled gently on my chest as I lay on the cool sand with tears streaming down my face. I spoke to her softly, expressing my deep gratitude for the

unwavering love she had given us all these years. The overcast sky above seemed to empathize with our sorrow as if nature itself was mourning the inevitable goodbye.

The next morning, a bleak Monday, Chris was by my side as we made the heartbreaking journey to the vet's office. As Tutti's first pet parent, Chris wanted to support me on this incredibly difficult day.

It was a day etched with the most profound sorrow I had ever known. It was the day I had to bid farewell to my cherished little girl and release her from her suffering. Tutti, our little princess, had been an inseparable part of my family for countless years, and her passing left an immense void in my heart.

After Tutti was tenderly taken away for cremation, Chris and I drove along the Pacific Coast Highway. My heart ached with searing pain as if it were on the verge of shattering into a thousand pieces. Finally, we arrived at the shoreline and settled into the sand, which provided a faint sense of grounding amid the overwhelming grief. My hands were shaking, reflecting the turmoil I was feeling inside.

When I returned home, my friend Kyoko was waiting at the front door. She immediately pulled me into a tight, comforting hug. Through tearful eyes, I managed to say, "*Tutti's gone!*" Standing there with my friend, memories of Tutti came rushing back, and

I couldn't help but think of those incredible 15 years we shared. She had been such a constant presence in our lives, always there, and I wished more than anything that she could have stayed forever.

In the months that followed, the emptiness at home was palpable.

A college friend suggested we visit San Antonio, TX, to take a weekend trip. We wandered along the Riverwalk's gentle path, letting the soothing sound of the flowing river bring a sense of calm that I desperately needed. We also indulged in the best margaritas, with laughter and music filling the air, giving me a much-needed break from the sadness I was feeling. I was grateful for her support and our long-term friendship.

But after I got back home, I'd often find myself sitting quietly on the stairwell, lost in thought, just staring up at the ceiling. A strange emptiness inside me made it hard to connect with my love ones.

Even Buster, my loyal sidekick, could sense how subdued I was. He stuck by my side, wandering through the house, searching for Tutti, and letting out mournful howls when he realized she was no longer there.

I realized then that Buster was grieving too; it was a sound I'd never heard from him before. We both took comfort in each other's company. With Tutti

gone, I felt Buster's closeness and affection more than ever. He paid extra attention to me, always sticking by my side. Most days, I stayed in bed, and Buster would curl up beside me, always on the left because he knew the right side had been Tutti's spot. Those quiet weekends with him were a comfort, a small respite from the loneliness that had settled in.

As summer approached, the ache in my heart over losing Tutti slowly began to ease.

One Saturday, I found the strength to pull back the curtains and blinds that had kept the house in darkness. Sunshine poured into every corner, bringing warmth to my soul for the first time in weeks. It felt like a turning point.

Knowing how much Buster loves riding in the car, I decided to drive to a local pet store. I looked at him and said, "*B-Boy, today is all about you. Whatever you want in this store is yours.*" Without a second thought, he sprinted straight to the treats aisle. Nearby, I spotted a cute baby blue harness and matching leash, and once I put it on him, Buster looked absolutely dashing in his new gear.

I also picked out a stainless-steel dog tag engraved with his name and contact details. It was such a joy to see him so happy and proud of his new outfit, strutting around like he knew he looked good.

Our next stop was the park, where Buster's excitement knew no bounds. He enthusiastically chased after ducks, his energy contagious among the park's Marigold gardens. As he playfully nuzzled one of the yellow blossoms, I couldn't resist capturing the moment, a snapshot of pure beauty and happiness.

When we got home, I pushed the front door open, and Buster shot inside, racing up the stairs with that endless, joyful energy of his. I could hear the cheerful jingle of his new tag bouncing off his collar, echoing through the house. Watching him, it felt like his excitement was filling every corner, bringing a fresh wave of life and warmth back into our home.

He launched into a whirlwind display of zoomies for three minutes, darting up and down the stairs with unrestrained energy. When he finally exhausted himself, he perched atop the stairs, gazing at me with a mischievous grin, his oversized tongue playfully hanging out. In that moment, our eyes locked, and I could see the happiness in his gaze, understanding exactly what was on his mind.

I'm the king of the world, master of this house!

I was so amused. In that moment, I realized my heart was open to joy again, knowing that my angel, Tutti, would always be by our side.

JUDE LAURÉN



Away in Hogmanay
MY LITTLE LOVE BY JUDE LAURÉN

Chapter 10: Away in Hogmanay

I started scheduling social events over the next few months. One day, my friend Kimberly from New York texted to ask if I was familiar with Hogmanay and if I would be open to the idea of traveling with her. She wanted to visit Scotland and be a part of that epic event.

I was initially unsure about going on the trip and felt a bit hesitant, but when Kimberly vividly described the unique and special New Year's Eve celebration, my curiosity grew. Eventually, I decided to go.

But almost instantly, a thought surfaced: What about Buster? Where would I leave him, and who could I trust to care for his special needs? My search led me to *Rover*, a dog-sitting app featuring profiles of caregivers who walked and boarded dogs in their homes. I knew a traditional kennel wouldn't suit Buster, so I began interviewing a handful of sitters who piqued my interest.

Three of the many profiles stood out: Tammy, Jonah, and Jamielynn. Jamielynn's profile particularly caught my eye with its impressive 161 five-star reviews. I was instantly captivated and decided to visit her home with Buster.

Upon arrival, I was pleasantly surprised by the immaculate cleanliness, meticulous organization, and the warm, pet-friendly ambiance of her residence. Buster wasted no time befriending three other charming dogs as Jamielynn and I talked. She explained that she had a policy of hosting a maximum of three small dogs for boarding. During our discussion, she provided a thorough tour of the entire house. I imagined Buster going on his vacation, and Jamielynn struck me as a genuinely lovely individual: detail-oriented, gentle, and well-versed in the art of dog care.

When she mentioned that Buster could share her bed, I knew I had found the perfect caregiver.

The Scotland trip was still a few months away, but I wanted Buster to become accustomed to staying with Jamielynn and the other dogs in her home.

She began taking Buster for walks, and I scheduled occasional overnight stays. I was genuinely impressed by her exceptional care. She would often send me adorable photos of Buster caught in amusing moments, showcasing her remarkable photography skills. I mean, getting four small, adorable dogs to sit in a row on a bench and smile for the camera is a truly impressive talent in my book! Buster consistently came back home content and happy. What more could I ask for?

What I loved most about Jamielynn was that I never had to wonder about Buster's well-being. She proactively kept me informed. My iPhone was brimming with pictures and videos of Buster having a blast at the park, the beach and at her home.

After a couple of months, she had earned my complete trust. This newfound confidence allowed me to indulge in my love for travel, knowing that Buster would always receive exceptional care whenever I was away.

Kimberly and I delved deeper into the plans for our upcoming winter vacation. She mentioned that our trip would start with a flight to England, followed by a scenic train ride to Scotland. I was particularly thrilled about the many cities we would explore as part of this Hogmanay trip, so I began browsing various travel websites to learn more.

I learned that Hogmanay is a time-honored Scottish tradition that welcomes the New Year with vitality and good fortune. The day is typically characterized by feasting, singing, and dancing, creating an atmosphere of joy and optimism. It is believed to have roots in French, Norse, and Gaelic traditions, reflecting the diverse cultural influences on Scotland over the centuries.

Many age-old Hogmanay customs have endured through the centuries, including the ceremonial

burning of the clavier, the cherished first-footing ritual, and the singing of a timeless classic, 'Auld Lang Syne,' written by Robert Burns in 1788.

Travel websites offered numerous articles about Scottish culture, cuisines, and rich history, leaving me in awe. The thought of experiencing it all firsthand filled me with growing excitement.

As an experienced traveler, Kimberly took care of our entire itinerary, so all I had to do was show up at the airport. While waiting for our plane's departure in the airport lounge, we raised our glasses and offered a hearty 'Slainte!' But when I raised my glass, I unintentionally spilled wine all over Kimberly's skirt. Quite an exciting beginning to our adventure!

Thankfully, we had accumulated enough airline points to secure an upgrade to first-class seats on British Airways. We settled into our private pods, and I felt cocooned by the window beside me.

It was a Christmas night, and a deep sense of peace settled over me as I gazed out at the dramatic view of the endless blue sky, with the fluffy white clouds spread in every direction.

I looked through a few of Buster's latest photos that Jamielynn had sent me, knowing it was going to be one of those times soon when I would have to put my iPhone on airplane mode.

I discovered a plush, lie-flat seat within my pod that invited me to transform it into my cozy bed. I had all sorts of goodies at my disposal, including a nice cushion, a deluxe amenity box, a variety of apps on the 15" TV including several excellent movies, and a selection of delicious chocolates and snacks.

I thought it would be nice to have a glass of Pinot Noir when the flight attendant offered me a drink. As I got comfy, the cool cabin air perked me up, and the distant hum of the engines added a calming vibe to my thoughts.

I got wrapped up in a thriller movie, ensuring I saved enough time for some shut-eye on this ten-hour, non-stop trip from LA to London. In my quiet and relaxing pod, my mind drifted to Buster, thinking it must be late back home. I pictured him chilling with Jamielynn and his new buddies, wondering if his coziness matched mine.

Soon, I was asleep.

Time flew by, and it was finally time to hop off the plane. Another announcement echoed through the cabin, rousing me from my slumber as my friend gently shook me awake. I struggled to fully awake for the first five minutes fully, but the seven-hour nap left me feeling wonderfully relaxed, a definite perk of traveling in first class.

With a contented stretch, I rubbed my eyes and let out a big yawn before rising from my seat and gathering my personal belongings scattered throughout my pod.

Out of sheer curiosity, I pulled out my iPhone to check for messages, and what do you know? There were tons of Buster pictures and videos waiting for me. It looked like they had a fantastic day at the beach! It was delightful to see Buster's squad Boss, Gracie, and Henry joined in on the fun. I couldn't help but chuckle at those rascals, their tongues hanging out and all, captured in some incredible action shots by Jamielynn as Buster and the gang tore it up on the beach.

I was the first passenger to descend the stairs connecting the plane to Gatwick Airport through a transparent tube. I closed my eyes, breathing in the fresh, damp air with the roar of engines. I watched people racing to get to their appointed gates while the planes continued to take off and land in a whirlwind of activity at an airport. And if the strange signboards only reminded me that now, at least, I was in a foreign land, sated my lust for wandering.

Gatwick Airport lies approximately 49 minutes away from London by train. The journey from the airport to London was a prelude to our exploration of the English capital. Starting with the boarding of the Gatwick Express or Southern Railway, travelers were

swiftly transported through the suburban environs, gradually transitioning to the dynamic urban landscape of London.

I was excited to see the sights and fully immerse myself in a new culture as I finally set out on an amazing trip. Even if the landscape lacked the classic charm of picturesque views, it nevertheless provided a first look at the city's lively pulse and prepared me for a future tour of the city.

Lounging in my seat, I observed my friend beginning to doze off as the train's gentle swaying took effect. But her rest was abruptly interrupted by the conductor checking tickets. I stole a glance out the window, catching sight of the town on the horizon, adorned with greenery, snug shops, and delightful cobbled streets.

We arrived in London on time, and whether it's sunny or drenched in a torrential downpour like it was that night, the city always leaves me in awe. The dark clouds hung low, and the winter breeze seemed to dance across the night sky. There was something strangely beautiful about the whole scene that captivated me.

We quickly made our way to a nearby pub and dug into some of the best fish and chips in town, fully soaking in the moment. As we strolled along Regent Street, shielded by umbrellas, we encountered the

grandest Christmas light display, ‘The Spirit of Christmas.’ The radiant light adorning the streets contributed an extra layer of enchantment to the city’s already vibrant atmosphere. Our stroll through London was so inspiring, and the whole experience left me ready for a good night’s sleep. Even though we were in the city for just one night, it was absolutely amazing.

The next day, we walked from our London hotel to the train station, enjoying the crisp English air. My curious eyes soaked up all the city streets’ sights, smells, and sounds. That moment, right there, was something special.

The sense of history and culture all around me made it even more impressive. Plus, we lucked out with comfy first-class seats on the train, and I couldn’t stop eyeing the food carts. As we left London behind, I waved goodbye to the city, excited to start our train ride to our first Scottish destination, Glasgow.

The sun sank below the undulating hills that surrounded us, and the train started its steady clatter along the rails. Travelers snugly covered themselves in coats and scarves as the winter cold began to bite. Some were engrossed in their iPads and laptops, while others attempted to steal a few minutes of sleep. Some decided to read for pleasure or to sit and think outside the window.

I fell into the latter category, occasionally capturing moments with my DSLR camera. The wintry scene unfolding outside captivated me. The trees, homes, and patches of snow raced by, gradually disappearing into the distance as our train gained speed transporting me further into the realm of dreams. The rolling hills, dressed in vibrant greenery, extended endlessly, enveloping picturesque and charming villages within their embrace. The sun beamed its warm rays upon the landscape, coloring the sky with a stunning hue of blue. The entire scene resembled a tableau from a bygone era, a flawless picture.

Throughout the journey, the train stopped multiple times, allowing passengers to board and get off until it eventually arrived at Glasgow's busy GLC Station. Eager to reach our destination, we shuffled up the platform with our bags and suitcases in tow. We felt a tangible sense of exhilaration as the train pulled away, marking the start of our adventure in this new location.

Breakfast was our first priority when we got to our hotel. We opted for the full Scottish breakfast, which is well-known for its delicious and substantial morning meals. This featured a tantalizing spread of toast, mushrooms, tomatoes, black pudding, haggis, tatties, and eggs. This delicious feast had already been

high on our list of priorities, as I had done my fair share of studying on Scottish gastronomic pleasures.

Glasgow is a lively, cultural city with so much to offer visitors. Kimberly and I spent the next two days checking off our list of 10 must-see spots. Our first stop was the Kelvingrove Art Gallery, which housed a remarkable collection, including works by Salvador Dalí and Vincent van Gogh, along with contemporary exhibits that piqued my interest.

We walked along the West End, beloved for its blend of art, nature, and social spaces. We spent time people-watching at a café on Byres Road while also sampling various local whiskies, a first for me. We took photos in front of St. Mungo's Cathedral, famous for its Gothic architecture.

Glasgow is one of the most welcoming cities I've ever visited.

Finally, we were on our way to the highlight of our trip, Edinburgh the capital of Scotland. As we boarded the train, anticipation grew for the chance to discover the city's stunning architecture, rich history, and Hogmanay. What a mystery!

Upon our arrival, our first stop was Victoria Street, the beating heart of Old Town Edinburgh. My eyes were immediately drawn to the multicolored buildings lining the steep, curving cobblestone road.

Each building was painted a different hue, creating a striking rainbow effect. Every building exuded a distinct personality, featuring attractive windows, charming signage, and cute facades that conveyed an enduring charm.

With its enchanted architecture and meandering layout evoking the whimsical alleyways of Diagon Alley, it was no surprise that this idyllic location had been cited by J.K. Rowling as her inspiration for the Harry Potter series. It seemed like stepping into a real-life storybook where imagination and history had merged as one strolled along Victoria Street.

Since it was the Christmas season, Victoria Street had undergone a mystical makeover. With seasonal decorations, the already charming stores looked even more enchanting. Twinkling fairy lights across the street created a warm and inviting atmosphere. The establishments emitted a waft of delicious gingerbread and pine as they decked out with garlands, wreaths, and holiday decorations.

The street had a delightfully happy atmosphere as a large number of people, both locals and visitors, went about their everyday activities while wearing cozy scarves and caps.

Victoria Street was the ideal location for holiday shopping and festive indulgence, with Christmas markets and street vendors set up and offering

handcrafted ornaments, seasonal delicacies, and unusual presents.

It was almost New Year's Eve, time to celebrate Scotland's major holiday. The final day of the year, known as 'Hogmanay,' holds extensive historical and cultural importance.

Originating from the Winter Solstice celebrations and the Viking Yule feast, the festival carries depth and significance rooted in ancient traditions and customs.

Edinburgh's New Year's Eve festivities started with a magnanimous ritual. With tens of thousands of people, Kimberly and I marched up the ancient Royal Mile to Edinburgh Castle, holding burning torches in a vibrant and breathtaking procession. This visually beautiful show symbolizes the purging of the old year and the greeting of the new one with light and hope. It serves as a wonderful prelude to midnight and the larger Hogmanay festivities, which include a fireworks show over the famous castle, bringing friends and strangers together.

It was exhilarating to experience it all. I finally understood what Kimberly meant when she predicted this trip would be epic. As I made my way up to the castle, I felt a mix of feelings: awe, excitement, reflection, renewal and joy.

My iPhone buzzed with a text from Dr. Sam, Buster's primary veterinarian, catching me completely off guard. Dr. Sam was not one to send text messages, so this was out of the ordinary. Puzzled and slightly anxious, I stepped away from the bustling crowd and quickly dialed his number. The moment he answered, the gravity of the situation became clear.

Dr. Sam shared concerning news about Buster's blood test results, revealing alarmingly high ketone levels. He strongly recommended immediate hospitalization to begin necessary fluid therapy.

Emphasizing that dehydration is a common complication in dogs with ketosis, he explained the critical role of intravenous fluids (IV). These fluids would help rehydrate Buster, restore his electrolyte balance, and lower the excessive ketones in his bloodstream. Dr. Sam stressed the urgency of this intervention, highlighting its importance given the seriousness of Buster's condition.

My next text call was to Jamielynn. After explaining the situation, Jamielynn offered much-needed reassurance without hesitation. She immediately committed to handling all the necessary arrangements and assured me that she would take Buster to the pet hospital right away. Her calm demeanor helped ease my anxiety. I then called Dr. Sam back to inform him that I had authorized

Jamielynn to make decisions regarding Buster's health in my absence.

The following morning brought some relief when Jamielynn informed me that Buster was at the pet hospital, receiving treatment through an IV, and was in stable condition. Her texts were so reassuring: *"Jude, I'm here with Buster. Everything will be okay, enjoy your vacation, you need it badly. ☺"*

Feeling somewhat relieved about the situation, I joined Kimberly that day to visit one of the oldest medieval churches still standing in Scotland.

Built in 1160, St. Mary's Church holds significant historical, architectural, and cultural importance. In present day, it is a cultural hub for events during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. As I entered, I felt its magnanimous presence, its energy of peacefulness and comfort.

The hand-carved stone altar at St. Mary's exuded a majestic and divine presence. In its aura, I found a sense of solitude and peace, my thoughts drifting between Buster and the sanctity of this place. The church's ceiling revealed itself as a true masterpiece, showcasing intricate Baroque-style patterns meticulously crafted from plaster. Predominantly painted in white and gold, it depicted religious scenes and figures from the Bible. The artwork was elegantly framed by ornate moldings adorned with gold

gilding, a testament to Sir George Gilbert Scott's skill and honoring the talent of the designers and sculptors who brought these frescoes and scenes to life.

With humility, I offered a heartfelt prayer for Buster, lighting a candle with a hopeful wish for his swift recovery upon my return home. In that moment, déjà vu took me back to 2012, to Galicia, Spain, where I was during his DDD surgery. *"My dear Buster, I pray that you pull through this too. You are so resilient. I love you so much."*

I can't say it was a miracle, but I received another text from Dr. Sam stating that Buster was out of the woods. I quickly called him to hear what he had to say. Buster was in stable condition but had, unfortunately, been diagnosed with diabetes. It wasn't the good news I was hoping for, but at least we had a clear prognosis. Dr. Sam went on to explain that in order to manage his hyperglycemia, Buster would need insulin shots twice a day, morning and night. I asked, *"for how long?"* His answer hit me hard: *"his entire life."* I gasped.

I wasn't confident in my ability to administer insulin shots, so I asked Dr. Sam to hand the phone to Jamielynn, who had visited Buster that afternoon. Her poised and confident voice reassured me of her expertise in administering insulin shots. Generously, she offered to guide me through the process.

Jamielynn explained that injecting insulin into the loose skin on Buster's neck would be painless since that area lacks sensory nerves. She also mentioned her experience administering insulin to other diabetic dogs. Her expertise was a huge relief, reassuring me that Buster would likely adapt to his new daily routine without discomfort.

After hearing the news, I felt the need to walk along the cobblestone lanes of the Old Town to let this new reality about Buster sink in. I paused occasionally to close my eyes and take a deep breath. It was New Year's Day, and as I reflected, I began to realize the significance of the moment. The year 2018 was a brand new book of courage, resilience, hope, and positive change on the horizon. The second day of the new year brought a new adventure. I knew Kimberly had included a Sled Dog Safari in our itinerary, but I had no idea just how unexpected this road trip would be. The two-and-a-half-hour drive from Edinburgh to Aviemore was stunning and Instagram-worthy moments. I took endless videos of towering mountains, thick forests, and shimmering lochs. It felt as though I was in one of my favorite streaming movies.

Our adventure led us deep into the stunning Cairngorm National Park. Guided by a magnificent team of twelve dogs, we glided effortlessly, immersing ourselves in a winter paradise.

The extreme cold was invigorating, yet harsh enough to freeze my iPhone repeatedly. To protect it, I tucked it inside a glove, which I then placed snugly in my chest pocket. Despite the biting chill, there was something incredibly refreshing about the intense weather. A strong reminder of nature's sheer power. The crisp, cold air was so fresh and energizing, it made every breath feel rejuvenating.

Beneath the sled, the grass shimmered with a delicate crystalline frost, each frozen dewdrop like a tiny crystal. These miniature marvels together attested to the exquisite artistry of the natural world. The soft sound of the dogs' paws on the fresh snow, mixed with their excited barks, created a rhythm that set the mood for our adventure down the winding trails. We moved effortlessly with these incredible dogs, and the wild beauty of the outdoors left us feeling absolutely exhilarated. In that moment, I realized we were in Winter Wonderland.

This Sled Dog Safari wasn't just an excursion. It felt like a journey into the heart of nature's icy beauty. I was completely humbled and awestruck by the untouched wilderness, my spirit soaring with every breathtaking view.

In the following days, we reached the final leg of our trip and chose to unwind with some lovely sightseeing in Loch Ness. The serene beauty of this loch provided me a quiet moment of introspection.

I can't thank my friend Kimberly enough for including me in this transformative journey. I wholeheartedly enjoyed meeting warm-hearted Scots, savoring eclectic cuisine, and experiencing unique adventures. Even now, the memory of Hogmanay remains vivid and I feel the undeniable urge to immerse once more in the winter magic of Scotland.

When I got home, I was greeted by the most heartwarming sight. Buster, my loyal dog, bounded onto the bed, howling with pure joy, his tail wagging furiously, brimming with the energy of a roaring lion. Tears of happiness welled up in my eyes as I saw him in such high spirits, no longer needing the IV treatments that had caused me so much worry during my absence.

Buster was the very definition of resilience. I was grateful to be home, and my only wish was to stay with my little love for as long as possible. The joy we shared was indescribable. In those precious moments, laughter came easily, stress melted away, and the warmth of our companionship filled our hearts with quiet solace.

SUGAR BABY



Sugar Baby
MY LITTLE LOVE BY JUDE LAURÉN

Chapter 11: Sugar Baby

*“Health is a state of complete harmony of the body,
mind, and spirit. When one is free from physical
disabilities and mental distractions,
the gates of the soul open.”*

–B.K.S. Iyengar

Finding Jamielynn, a devoted and kind dog sitter, online was truly a blessing.

In a moment when the alternative could have meant leaving Buster in the hands of an inexperienced sitter during a crucial health crisis, I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude that fate led me to Jamielynn. Her sincere love and commitment to Buster were not just evident. They were deeply touching. Seeing how tenderly she cared for him reminded me that there are truly extraordinary people who go above and beyond, sharing our unwavering devotion to our furry friends.

In the following months, I consciously put off any plans for leisurely vacations, both domestic and international, dedicating all my energy and focus to Buster’s well-being. Still, since Buster had formed such a close bond with his besties Boss, Gracie, and Henry, thanks to Jamielynn’s loving care, I made sure their playdates stayed a regular thing. Even while keeping Buster’s health as my top priority, it felt

important for him to have that joy and companionship.

Since Buster was diagnosed with diabetes, I dove deep into understanding the illness. Its nature, how it affects his body, and the various treatment options. The more I researched, the more I felt equipped and confident to manage his condition.

Overcoming my fear of needles and blood was crucial to caring for Buster effectively. With the support of Dr. Sam and Jamielynn, I managed to ensure I could provide him with the necessary care and medical interventions without hesitation, contributing to his overall well-being and health. Becoming a more confident and responsible caregiver for animals was a relief, especially after learning that there's a specific area on a dog's neck where they don't feel pain, which was true for Buster as well. Unfortunately, some pet owners might not be aware of this and may inject the syringe in less ideal spots. I hope that after reading this book, my readers will become more mindful of this important fact.

Throughout this journey, I learned to deeply appreciate Buster's life as a diabetic dog. Despite his condition, he never lost his zest for life, continually bringing us endless joy, love, and laughter. He became a constant source of delight, showing us the resilience and spirit that pets possess. Our pets have

JUDE LAURÉN

so much to teach us, and through Buster, I discovered what it means to be a selfless caretaker not just for animals, but for my loved ones as well.



Helpful Pointers

First, some basics: the body produces ketones, compounds created when fats are broken down for energy. Normally, this occurs when dogs fast or don't consume enough carbohydrates to fuel their bodies.

Elevated ketones in a dog's blood or urine can be indicative of a variety of conditions, such as diabetes, pancreatitis, or any number of other metabolic disturbances. When Buster's blood work revealed high ketones, it was clear that something was off, prompting Dr. Sam to perform more tests.

Diabetic ketoacidosis is one of the most serious complications of diabetes mellitus in dogs, which can actually be life-threatening. It is caused by a notably marked decrease in the production of insulin, leading to accumulation over the permissible limits for blood ketones.

Symptoms

- Increased thirst
- Frequent urination
- Increased appetite
- Weight loss
- Vomiting
- Weakness and lethargy
- Abdominal pain

- Dehydration
- Acidosis
- Sweet and fruity breath odor
- Rapid, deep breathing
- Decreased consciousness
- Coma

Diagnosis

In Buster's case, Dr. Sam detected elevated ketones through a blood test during his routine check-up. The results came back while I was already in Scotland, prompting him to contact me right away. Another way to check for underlying issues is through an abdominal ultrasound. Like in humans, early detection and treatment are key to pets' health.

Buster's At-Home Treatment

Buster's blood sugar levels required insulin injections every morning and evening. In order to guarantee a consistent supply, I stocked up on two necessities: 1) U-40 syringe boxes; 2) Vetsulin bottles. When I started buying bigger quantities, I found that wholesalers were open to offering lower prices.

Vetsulin bottles must be stored at a temperature between 36-46F to remain effective. The insulin can lose its potency if exposed to temperatures outside this

range, so proper storage is required. This means keeping it refrigerated at all times and never leaving it out at room temperature or in extremely hot or freezing conditions. When we did our road trips with Buster, I always brought a portable car refrigerator to ensure the insulin stayed at the correct temperature.

Prevention & Maintenance

A. To prevent diabetes in dogs:

1) Maintain a Healthy Diet

- a. Feed your dog with a balanced, nutritious diet that is low in sugar and refined carbohydrates.
- b. Avoid overfeeding and giving too many treats as obesity is a significant risk factor for diabetes.
- c. Table scraps can contribute to weight gain and poor insulin sensitivity, so don't get into the habit of giving them to your dog.

2) Regular Exercise

- a. Keep your dog moving. Go to parks, beaches, road trips. Play fetch, walk, and run with them.

- b. Exercise helps reduce stress in dogs.
Stress can affect insulin regulation in dogs.
 - 3) Check your dog's weight periodically
 - a. If your dog is overweight, work with a vet to develop a safe weight-loss plan.
 - b. Regular weigh-ins at home or at the vet can track progress and make adjustments if needed.
 - 4) Regular Vet Visit
- B. To take care of a diabetic dog:
- 1) Keep an eye on your dog's blood sugar levels and make sure they stay within the desired range. Glucometers, or pet glucose monitoring kits, are available and may be helpful.
 - 2) Maintain a well-balanced diet. There is prescription diet diabetic dog food available at veterinary clinics and using this type of product can eliminate the guessing game.
 - 3) To ensure your dog's health, it's important to maintain consistent food consumption without significant fluctuations. For example, Buster reliably ate the same portion of food twice a day.
 - 4) Ensure your dog frequently drinks fresh water.

SUGAR BABY

- 5) Diabetic dogs need regular exercise to maintain a healthy body weight. Help them maintain an active lifestyle.

Ensure the insulin dosage is accurate by working closely with your vet to maintain proper dosage.

Here's a list of instructions provided by Merck Animal Health:

A. Preparing the Dose

Once your hands are clean, remove the Vetsulin vial from the fridge. Shake the insulin after it turns milky white.

- 1) Carefully remove the cap from the needle and insert the needle into the vial.
- 2) Turn the vial upside down, making sure the tip of the needle remains in the vial.
- 3) Withdraw the correct dose into the U-40 insulin syringe.
- 4) Before removing the needle from the vial, check the syringe for any air bubbles. Push them out with the plunger and withdraw the correct dose.
- 5) Remove the needle from the vial.

Giving the Injection

- 1) Injection should be given under the skin, 3/4 to 2 inches from the middle of your dog's back, varying from behind the shoulder blades to the middle of the back region and alternating sides.
- 2) Gently insert the needle in the center of the folded skin.
- 3) Push the plunger until all of the insulin is given.
- 4) Pull the needle out and dispose of the syringe in the appropriate sharps container.

Conclusion

Dog DKA is a dangerous condition requiring urgent treatment. There can be countless potential causes, and the situation can prove fatal if it remains unchecked. But most dogs will recover fully with prompt and efficient care. As pet parents, we should be aware of the symptoms that define DKA. It's through regular check-ups with a veterinarian that we can get proactive care and, with certainty, diagnose if our dog develops diabetes.

HALLOWEEN COSTUMES BEST IN SHOW



Halloween Costumes Best in Show
MY LITTLE LOVE BY JUDE LAURÉN

Chapter 12: Halloween Costumes Best in Show

Oh, I thoroughly enjoyed writing this chapter. It was the lightest topic and the most fun! You can't imagine how excited Buster, Tutti, and I were when Halloween came around. It was our favorite time of the year. While California didn't give us the changing autumn leaves, we enjoyed the crisp, cool fall air. It was our signal that our most awaited time of the year had arrived. The subtle shift in the air and the weather was a hint of approaching festivities and all the exciting events to come.

Halloween was a much-anticipated event for us. Our planning began months in advance to ensure that we were ready. We took this holiday seriously, and it wasn't just about the candy, costumes, and décor but everything else that came with it. Our friends and family would often debate what theme we would choose for the year.

We would transform our home into a haunted haven, much like the rest of the neighborhood. Each corner of the street came alive with lanterns and ghostly figures, and seeing the results was always a thrill. There was joy in the small details, the crunch of leaves underfoot, the flickering lights, and the sight of creativity coming together to create something magical.

If I talk about decorations, our neighborhood went all out with them. If there was an Olympic category for best Halloween decorations, we would probably win the gold medal.

One year, my neighbor transformed his front yard into a spooky cemetery that made everyone passing by shudder. It looked straight out of a movie set from *'The Mummy.'* The setup included a painstakingly assembled assortment of worn grave markers with spooky inscriptions, man-made mist that covered the floor, low lighting creating menacing silhouettes, and life-sized skeletons and enormous spiders hiding among the tombstones. Carved pumpkins with menacing faces had provided a macabre glow, and eerie sounds had filled the air.

The graveyard also had faux bones scattered on the ground, skeletal hands reaching out from the soil, and other terrifying creatures like zombies and ghosts. An entrance with wrought iron gates, warning signs, and haunting props had made it even more unsettling. Altogether, this Halloween cemetery had created a hair-raising and atmospheric scene that had everyone in the neighborhood talking about it long after the holiday had passed. Buster and Tutti had been unsure of what to make of them, so they had continued to sniff around the Halloween cemetery, and that had just made me chuckle.

The most enjoyable part of Halloween was watching my Shih Tzus play with their doggy friends in costumes at the Greenbelt, a vast grassy area in our complex. In which they looked like miniature characters from horror movies, the sight was something!

They would run around together, sniff each other's outfits, and wag their tails excitedly. Probably complimenting one another on their chic outfits. Even the shy dogs seemed to come out of their shells and joined in the fun; that's when you know the party was lit!

Watching everyone interact was a heartwarming experience, one of those moments that brings a sense of calmness and contentment, as if reassuring you that life had been well lived.

Our Main Street during Halloween night had been the place to be. The streets had been all decked out with spooky decorations, and you had seen people and their furry pals strolling around in fabulous costumes. Dogs as superheroes, cats as witches, you name it, they had it. Each year, a non-profit organization hosts a pet costume contest. Although my furry friends Buster and Tutti had never participated, we had always looked forward to seeing the parade of contestants and finding out who had won. Picture us in Halloween costumes, silently rating everyone's outfits on a scale of 1 to 10.

Trick-or-treating had been another highlight of Halloween. The local shops had been into the spirit, too. They had treats and water bowls out for the pets, and you could have found pet costume stalls for those last-minute outfit additions. Each shop would turn vibrant, twinkling, spooky lights and cheerful decoration pieces.

The shops would go above and beyond for fur babies during this festival. It had been a blast, with laughter and excitement, as folks and their pets had come together to have a good time. The joyful chaos of the night would echo laughter, and infectious excitement was visible among everyone, from humans to fur friends.

Our city's main street was packed with people and pets, showcasing incredible creativities. One year, there was a chihuahua dressed in Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt, perched on a luxurious chariot and draped in a silk-like gown adorned with golds and gems. I joined in the fun, dressed as a prisoner with my handcuffs tied to a chain around Tutti's waist. She was also dressed like a prisoner, and we were quite a hit. The parade was filled with animal superheroes, princesses, and even hotdogs; it felt like a real-life 'Animal Planet' episode gone wild. These annual events created meaningful connections with my friends and family, who were fellow dog parents, making the night even more special.

Lastly, we participated in events that raised awareness and funds for animal rescue organizations. Halloween served as a constant reminder of the importance of helping animals in need, especially those who were less fortunate and didn't have loving pet parents.

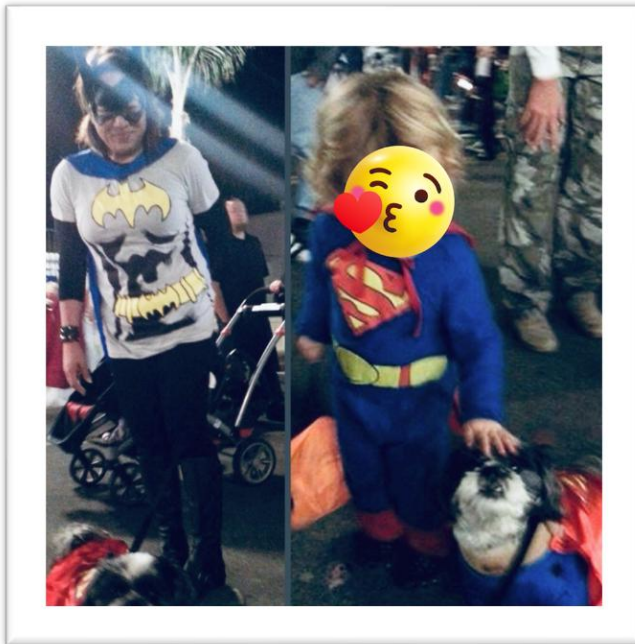
It was great, but let's be honest, the best part was the free furry therapy session.

Halloween Dress-up!

Over the years, I've picked out a bunch of different costumes for Buster and Tutti, and I want to share a few of them.

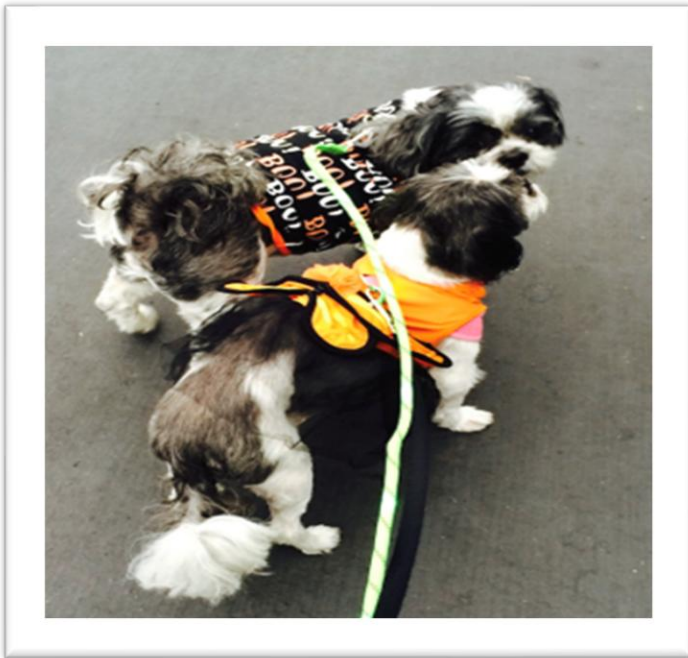
SuperDog

Check out the picture below. It captured Buster's sheer joy as he's getting some love and attention from a cool little dude dressed as Superman and I joined in the fun as Batgirl!



P.S: He was probably feeling a little competitive about who the town's best Superman was.

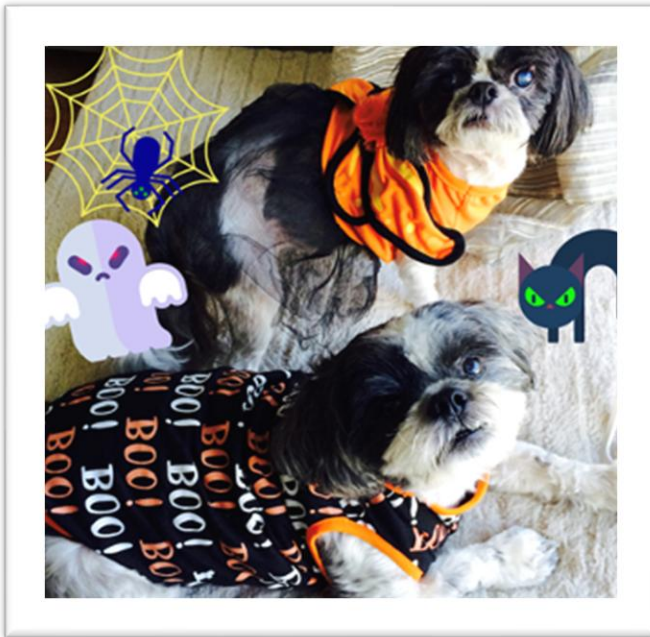
In this picture, they both are out on a walk with me, enjoying the view of our Halloween-themed neighborhood.



Note: They understood the assignment!

HALLOWEEN COSTUMES BEST IN SHOW

Close-up of these two troublemakers.
Aren't they cute?



They were caught in the middle of their master plan!

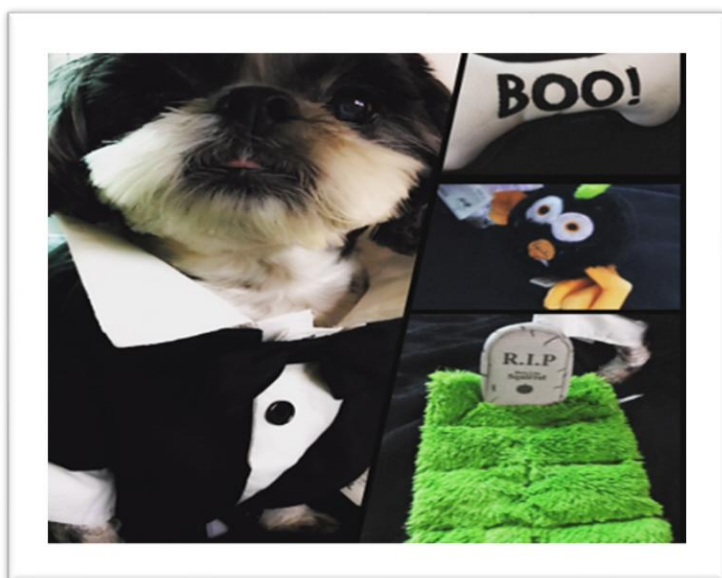
DogCula

What can be more fun and dramatic than seeing a dog looking like Dracula? It was both adorable and a little spooky at the same time. Honestly, I think this might be one of the best costumes Buster has ever worn!



And just look at him, he knew I was taking pictures!

HALLOWEEN COSTUMES BEST IN SHOW



DogCula, Picture 2 - Boo!

Chewbacca

With his powerful fighting abilities and steadfast allegiance, Buster the Chewbacca, a famed Wookiee warrior and Han Solo's co-pilot aboard the Millennium Falcon, is ready to battle for the freedom of the galaxy!

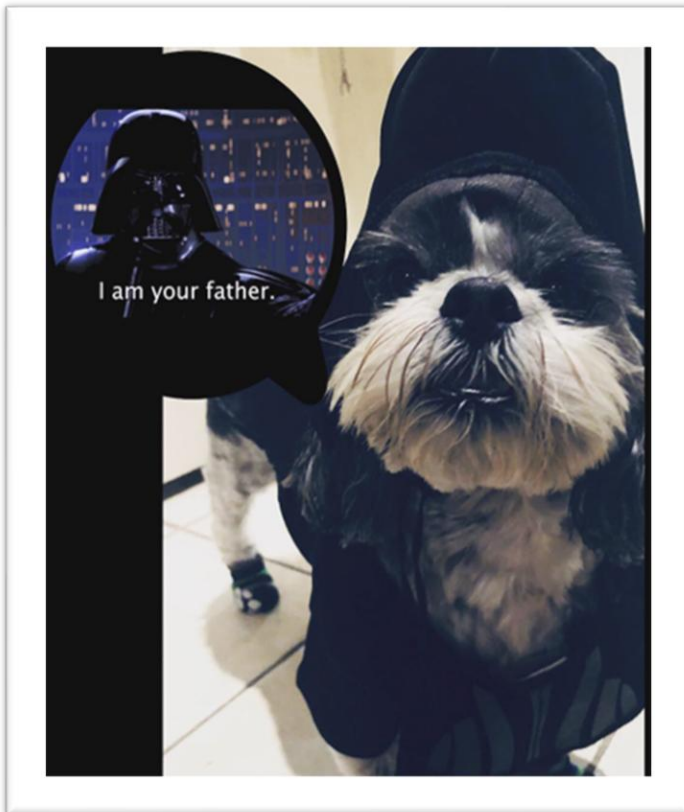


Look at him, doesn't he look absolutely adorable?
Those doe eyes can melt anyone's heart!

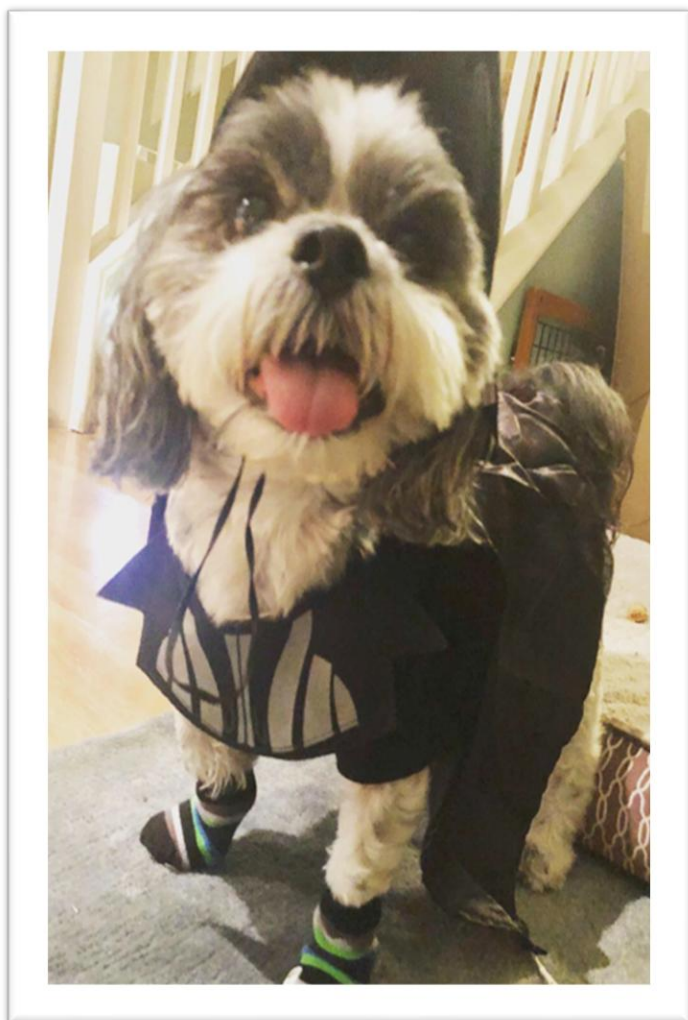
Jedi

“Luke Skywalker, I am your father!”

I’m sure most of you know this famous line of Darth Vader. And, if you are a Star Wars fan (just like Buster), when someone yells, *“It’s a trap!”* you know exactly what they mean!



My little Darth Vader

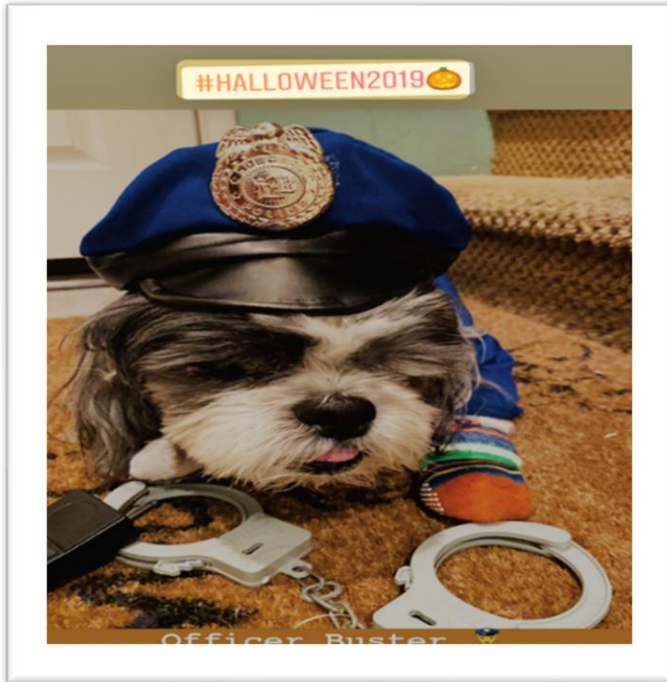


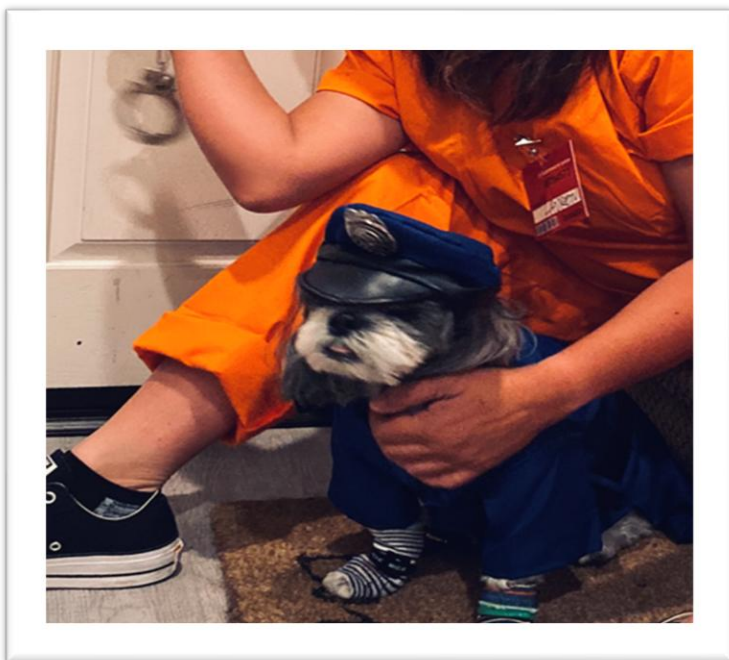
My Little Darth Vader, Picture 2 – tongue out!

HALLOWEEN COSTUMES BEST IN SHOW

Mr. Police Man & His Prisoner

Can you believe it? I got busted by Officer Buster!



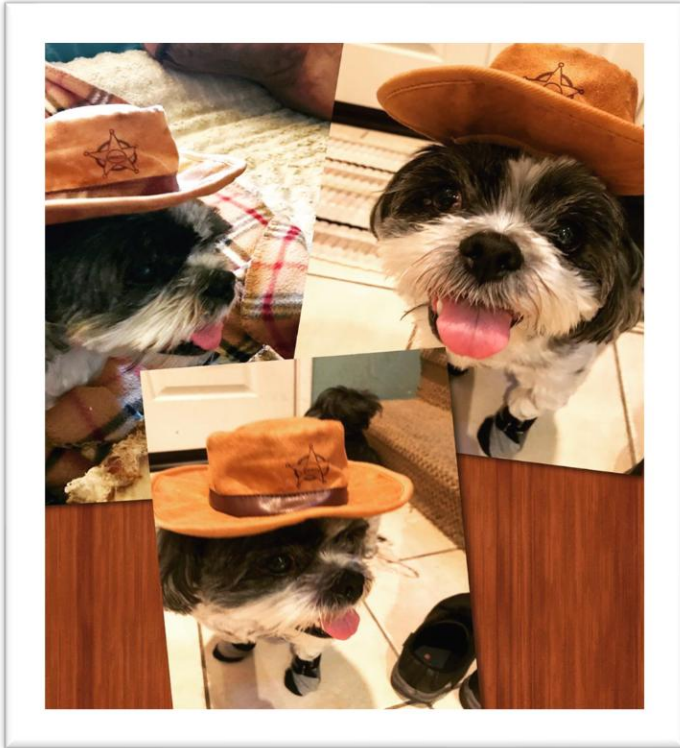


And why, you ask? Well, apparently, attempting to steal his heart was considered a crime too!

HALLOWEEN COSTUMES BEST IN SHOW

Buster, the Sheriff

Meet the Sheriff, the toughest lawdog in the West!



Yeehaw, it's a ruff life in the wild, wild West! 🐾

Little Pineapple



And this was the last Halloween costume that Buster wore before his passing. He was dressed as a pineapple, and we were quite entertained that day!

The only thing missing was Patrick and Spongebob. Buster was nailing his impersonation of Bikini Bottom!

But I think if he could talk, he might have said something bad out loud, *"Are we done yet?"*

Jeez, my dog looks annoyed!

As a dedicated pet parent, I went all out for Halloween to make it a blast for my four-legged buddies. It was a chance to include Buster in all the fun, from dressing up to hitting the neighborhood for

some treat-trotting. Halloween was when we got to share some quality time and indulge in some pet-safe snacks together, all while strengthening our bond and creating fun memories. It had become a tradition I eagerly anticipated every year.

Plus, let's be honest. Watching Buster's reaction when he saw himself in a costume or got extra treats was pure magic. His little tail would wiggle out of pure joy and it warmed my heart each time.

Halloween gave us, and all our families and friends, a reason to go all out and create unforgettable moments, and it was a time when we could be a bit silly and enjoy some quality time with our furball. So yeah, we turned it into our favorite holiday, paws down!



Helpful Pointers

Here are 6 Halloween safety tips for dogs:

- 1) Don't feed them chocolates or candies.
- 2) If you're dressing up your pets, please be mindful of the costumes. They need to feel comfortable in them and would not restrict their sight or breathing. Their costumes should not have small parts to be chewed or swallowed.
- 3) Always use leashes and identification.
- 4) Glow sticks can be dangerous around them if chewed on.
- 5) Be mindful of decorations. Candles and electrical cords can pose risks. Keep them out of reach.
- 6) Supervise your dogs around fall decorations to prevent them from chewing or eating anything.

I WISH I COULD TAKE YOU HOME



I Wish I Could Take You Home
MY LITTLE LOVE BY JUDE LAURÉN

Chapter 13: I Wish I Could Take You Home

*“The reality is that you will grieve forever.
You will not ‘get over’ the loss of a loved one.
You will learn to live with it.
You will heal and you will rebuild yourself around the
loss you have suffered.
You will be whole again but you will never be the same.
Nor should you be the same nor would you want to.”*

– Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler

As Buster reached the age of 11-and-a-half, he faced numerous medical challenges. He suffered recurring chronic ear infections and an unforeseen issue with one of his intraocular lenses, years after cataract surgery, required two different eye drops: one to stimulate tear production and another to fend off inflammation.

His diabetes necessitated regular Vetsulin injections, and he wore protective socks to guard against environmental allergies. Buster’s dermatologist, understanding the complexity of his condition, provided dedicated and continuous care over the years. Despite steadfast efforts to adjust medications and deliver the best care possible, Buster’s precious paws had significantly deteriorated by this stage.

Here's a screenshot of his morning medication.
(Same number of items during nighttime):

Morning

1. SLIT – 15 min before or food (refrigerate)
2. Diclofenac **eye drop** (1 drop every 12 hours) - **wait 20 min before next eye drops**
3. Tacrolimus **eye ointment** (every 12 hours)
4. Vetsulin (with food)
5. Doxycycline (1 tablet) – **with food**, 1x a day
6. Clamavoxillin – with food
7. Saline solution – right nostril
8. Pentoxifyline (1/2 tablet)
9. Atopica
10. Proheparin supplement – 2 tables per day

While I was away traveling, Jamielynn thoughtfully shared delightful pictures and videos of Buster, keeping his spirit alive in my absence. At the same time, she also sent heart-wrenching images of his inflamed paws. Witnessing his discomfort was a harrowing experience for me.

Even with numerous medications, Buster's paw became inflamed periodically. The initial signs typically included redness and swelling in the affected area. The warmth of the inflamed paw made it sensitive to touch, prompting him to avoid contact. As the inflammation worsened, he would begin to limp or favor the affected paw, enduring the most intense pain at this stage, often expressed through distressed yelps. Witnessing this was agonizing for both of us.

Eventually, his skin would break, revealing raw and bloody areas. Paradoxically, this release of blood appeared to bring him relief, and the pain would subside, allowing the healing process to begin anew. Sadly, this distressing cycle persisted throughout most of his adult life despite the faithful daily medications he took.

While under Jamielynn's care one day, she reported that Buster kept yelping while eating and was struggling just to open his mouth. I got off from work early and took him that afternoon to the vet to get his teeth and gums checked. I was completely surprised to learn that an ear canal infection was the actual problem.

Vestibular Syndrome, also known as canine idiopathic vestibular disease, affects the vestibular system in dogs, which includes the inner ear and parts of the brain for balance and coordination. This condition was commonly seen in senior dogs. This disease manifests as sudden and severe vertigo or dizziness, making it challenging for them to stand, walk, or maintain balance. Buster's primary symptom was a head tilt that led to stumbling and falling.

He was prescribed Meclizine to provide immediate relief from vertigo, and the vet administered laser treatments twice a week for three weeks. Following the treatment, his condition improved significantly,

and he no longer stumbled or staggered. Although his head tilt became permanent, it didn't affect his demeanor at all. He was the B-boy I knew, sweet, playful, and loving. If you refer to Chapter 12, where he's dressed as a pineapple for Halloween, you'll notice his head was tilted, yet his big brown eyes still radiated love and sweetness.

Navigating the trials of being a pet parent, there were moments when it would have been easy to lose hope, and I must admit, I faced my share of exceptionally challenging days. Yet, my love for Buster was a deep, steadfast affection that transcended words. It was an affection that soaked into each heartbeat, showed itself in every grin we exchanged, and infused every moment we spent together. Buster was more than just a pet; he was my little sweet companion, a loyal friend, and an integral part of my life.

Buster enriched my daily life with endless joy. His eager eyes, wagging tail, cocked head, and warm, welcoming greetings each morning were like sunshine breaking through the clouds, making each day brighter. He had an incredible way of sensing my moods, offering quiet comfort when times were tough and sharing in my joy during the good moments.

Because of this deep, unspoken bond, I devoted my time to him, even if it meant taking time off work for

countless vet visits, getting his medical supplies, and carefully managing his medications. While there were moments that tested my patience, I never hesitated, never gave up, and never ignored his needs.

Our love for each other was profound, nourishing our souls and leaving us with a deep sense of completeness, much like the musical term ‘Tutti,’ which refers to the harmonious moment when all instruments play together as one. Buster and I completed our life orchestra.

In February 2020, I remember having a coffee break with two of my close colleagues, anxiously discussing COVID-19, which was dominating the news. Within days, the virus's rapid spread had escalated into a global pandemic. While there was a lot unknown, the U.S. government soon mandated that citizens stay at home, marking the beginning of a new and uncertain reality. The uncertainty around how the virus could be contained had a significant impact on the global ecosystem, stressing interconnected systems worldwide.

A month later, the organization I was working for decided to implement a work-from-home model to protect the health and welfare of its employees. We had to adapt to our new work routine while ensuring productivity to support our company's operations.

Working from home was a surprisingly enjoyable experience for me. I discovered that I could maintain a high level of productivity while also finding extra time to attend to personal pursuits such as home renovations and a dedicated focus on physical fitness. Moreover, I unearthed a hidden talent for cooking dishes I never thought I could master.

Yet, amid all the benefits, one of the most precious gifts that year was the unbroken companionship I shared with Buster. Being with him 24/7 was a blessing. Each morning, I woke up with a deep sense of contentment, knowing he was right by my side, with no need for rushed departures. Buster, with his limited vision, truly cherished my constant presence. Throughout my workdays, his infectious personality brought endless entertainment. It was the little gestures and quirks that filled my heart with joy, all thanks to my perfectly imperfect special needs dog.

I couldn't help but think that if we ever emerged from the clutches of the COVID-19 pandemic, I would only continue in this job if I'm allowed to work from home, ensuring that Buster and I could sustain our unique and heartwarming bond. Life went on during the year that the pandemic overshadowed it, and we were constrained by societal norms just like everyone else. We began to celebrate birthdays, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's with Zoom get-togethers as our connections entered a virtual realm. We

occasionally found comfort in intimate, face-to-face gatherings with friends and family who formed our reliable 'bubble.' Unfortunately, the pandemic hit close to home when COVID-19 claimed the life of one of my dear relatives. Zoom provided a heartbreaking and fundamentally limited memorial service experience that will always remain ingrained in our family's memories.

As 2020 came to a close, there was a glimmer of hope with the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines. When my turn came, I went to get my shot, holding onto the belief that things would start to get better. Slowly and with caution, I began to reconnect and socialize more with family and friends, feeling like there was finally a path forward.

On February 3, 2021, I recall it started like any other routine workday, but something was notably amiss with Buster. He wasn't eating and was lethargic. Without hesitation, I grabbed my car keys and drove us to the emergency animal hospital.

Upon arrival, the staff promptly initiated IV therapy, while the attending vet that night reviewed Buster's extensive medical history. Sadly, the gravity of the situation demanded that I leave him at the hospital overnight, holding onto hope that the thorough observation would eventually provide answers and pave the way for his recovery.

I returned home and spent the entire night in restless anticipation. At 6 a.m. the following day, I received the comforting news that Buster's vital signs were stable and a specialist would be assigned to look at his case. Dr. Ashtri, an excellent internist, brought hope with her intimate knowledge of Buster's intricate medical history.

At 11:15 a.m., Dr. Ashtri called. Her voice was calm, but as she spoke, the news grew increasingly dire. She carefully listed a series of medical concerns: Buster's Bilirubin level was a worrying 4, well above the normal range of 1; his liver enzymes were alarmingly elevated; he was anemic, and a high white blood cell count indicated a significant infection. With each new piece of information, the seriousness of the situation became clearer, and the weight of it all intensified.

As the conversation unfolded, the weight of Buster's medical challenges became almost unbearable. My knees felt weak, and my hands trembled as I struggled to jot down the distressing details. I was desperately clinging to the hope that a solution might surface by the end of her explanations., but that hope never came. Dr. Ashtri delivered a heartbreaking truth, painting a poignant picture of Buster's reality. It seemed that the most compassionate choice for him might be to find comfort beyond this world.

Dr. Ashtri paused, and as I clutched my chest, I realized it was my turn to face the heartbreaking reality she had just laid out. In that moment, I knew I had to set aside my feelings, putting Buster's well-being above all else, even if it meant losing him.

With tears streaming down my face, I told her, *"I want Buster to be free from pain. If saying goodbye is what it takes, then so be it. But I want him to see me, feel my presence, one last time before his eyes close."*

I have two options: I could bring him home for the weekend, allowing us to spend his final moments together, or I could decide to end his suffering that very evening. But I had to consider the risk. Bringing Buster home could mean his spleen condition might worsen, leading to intense pain and an emergency trip back to the hospital. It was a difficult decision, and I needed to weigh what would truly be best for him.

My heart felt shattered into countless pieces, but I somehow gathered the strength to make the painful choice to let Buster go. With a heavy heart, I started calling our loved ones to share the heartbreaking news that Buster would be leaving us that night.

In one of the calls with my mom, I shared the difficult decision I just made. I could hear the concern in her voice, *"I'm worried about you, Jude. I know how you feel about Buster."* Unable to contain my emotions,

I broke down, “*He is all I have, Mom.*” She responded with comforting words, acknowledging the unique bond Buster and I shared. In that moment of vulnerability, her support became a lifeline, offering the strength I needed as I faced the painful reality ahead.

Although our loved ones dearly wished to be there to say goodbye, most lived far away. The vet hospital’s strict COVID restrictions were clear. Only one person could accompany me inside.

Without hesitation, Jamielynn offered to be that person, providing the support I desperately needed. On that rainy night, my youngest sister drove from another county, despite knowing she could only wait in the parking lot.

At the hospital, the kind veterinary staff quickly gave Jamielynn and me white coats and face masks before guiding us to a private room. I started a FaceTime call so our loved ones could see Buster and be with him virtually, even if from a distance.

The side door opened, and there was Buster, standing next to a kind staff member, still connected to his IV. His eyes lit up the moment he saw Jamielynn and me, instantly recognizing us even with our masks on. Though there was a hint of anxiety in his gaze, seeing us lifted his spirits. With a sudden burst of energy, he wagged his tail and hurried over,

snuggling close, as if hoping we were there to take him home.

In that tender moment, we held him tight, gently stroking him as if everything was okay, pouring all our love into each touch. We took off his socks, which had been part of his everyday routine, and I put them in my pocket, silently promising myself that I wouldn't wash them. Ever.

Jamielynn, trying to bring a little lightness to the moment, playfully said, *"Buster, you're finally allowed to lick your paws. Don't forget those nooks and crannies!"* Her attempt to add humor brought a bittersweet smile to my face, though I couldn't stop a few tears from slipping through.

I did my best to hold them back, knowing how Buster would always react to my tears with a mix of nervousness and guilt. I wanted to spare him from those feelings, even now. My only goal was to make sure he felt happy, secure, and loved in those final moments.

Buster kept glancing at the door, his eyes silently pleading to go home. Seeing this, I asked the staff for some blankets and I stacked them on the floor, recreating the feeling of being at the beach with his friends, one of his favorite pastimes.

After about 90 minutes, I knew it was time to say goodbye. The staff had instructed me to press a

button when I was ready for him to go peacefully. Soon, two team members entered the room. They gently explain the procedure: the first shot would be a light anesthetic to calm Buster, which would also weaken his legs, causing his body to relax and give way. The second shot would be to help Buster pass on without pain.

Our loved ones said their goodbyes over FaceTime, and we all teared up, bracing for the inevitable. Then, I gently powered off my iPhone.

Holding Buster close, I whispered in his ear, telling him how grateful I was for the incredible journey we had shared. I assured him that we would be together forever and that I would always cherish my little love.

As Buster peacefully slipped away, the staff quietly left the room, respecting the solemnity of the moment.

Jamielynn held him one last time, her tears silently expressing the depth of her love for him. Then, with a heavy heart, she discreetly stepped out of the room.

In the solitude of that moment, with Buster's once vibrant heart now still, I let my emotions take over. Tears streamed down my face, and my voice seemed swallowed by the depths of sorrow.

I loved him so much that it hurts.

For a fleeting moment, it felt as if my own heart had ceased its beat too. Gently cradling Buster's lifeless form against my chest, I closed my eyes, seeking solace in a profound silence.

After a few moments, I pressed the button, and a staff member arrived to take him away. I requested a separate cremation with his favorite blanket and toy, and the staff kindly agreed, honoring my wish to give him a final moment of comfort.

I staggered into the parking lot, clutching Buster's leash tightly in my hand. My loving support system, including Jamielynn, my youngest sister Kyoko, and her brother, all stood there, their masks unable to hide the sympathy in their eyes. We formed a circle, and as we stood together, we shared cherished memories of Buster. In that moment, I felt a deep appreciation for all of them. Their love and empathy were exactly what I needed.

Driving home late at night, the emptiness in the car mirrored the void within me. The familiar streets, once filled with Buster's joyful presence, now felt hauntingly quiet.

With every turn, flashbacks of his large eyes, that inquisitive look, reflected expressions of curiosity that tugged at my heartstrings. Alone with my thoughts, the weight of loss settled in, and tears blurred the passing scenery. The emptiness of the dog

car seat served as a poignant reminder of the absence beside me.

Our house was just as quiet. The stairs, which used to be this lively arena of his barks and zoomies, now felt strangely hushed.

When I entered my bedroom, I reached into my pocket and pulled out the last pair of socks he wore. The familiar scent of his fur hit me like a wave. A mixtape of memories, blending joy and a touch of sadness. It whispered stories of companionship, laughter, and that aching emptiness now etched into my heart, like the name on his tag, softly saying, *"Remember me, Momma."*

If he was here, he would have said,

"I may not have understood human words, but I understood the love in those eyes and the warmth of hugs. And that's all that mattered. I wasn't a human, but my heart was human..."

JUDE LAURÉN



The Lifecycle of Pets
MY LITTLE LOVE BY JUDE LAURÉN

Chapter 14: The Lifecycle of Pets

As I sit to conclude this book, I remember the first time Buster's tail thumped against the floor. And I can't help but reflect on the journey I have had so far.

Life with a pet is like diving into emotions of love, loss, and challenges. For those who know what it's like, understand the lifecycle of being fur parents. It is not about the days and years we spent together but the emotions and memories we made along the way.

There are various stages of a pet's life alongside the responsibilities that accompany each phase. At the end of it, all the joys we experience make it all worthwhile. This journey hasn't been mine alone but a shared experience of growth and connection.

The first time I laid my eyes on him and saw how his tail wouldn't stop wagging was a gesture of excitement and him welcoming me into the joys he held.

It was the start of a bond that would shape our lives forever. Puppies are curious explorers who are eager to explore the world around them, and in this stage, one of the most vital milestones that pet owners should embrace is their training and periods of transition.

Training starts the moment you bring the puppy home with you. From the first sit to mastering several complex commands, these moments are the foundation of a lifelong bond. Consistency and patience are essential, as they reinforce positive behavior. Remember to give treats and praise, as it goes a long way.

Socialization is another aspect that is equally important. It is essential to learn from these interactions with other dogs, people, and various other environments.

Taking your pet to the park, for example, allows them to interact with other dogs and animals, exposes them to different sounds and shapes, and shapes their personality into adulthood. It comes down to your willingness to invest your time adeptly in the early years, which builds confidence and a well-rounded character.

In addition to that, you must ensure that vaccinations and vet visits are all up to the mark. This is a critical aspect that you will have to be well versed in. You'll also learn about heartworm prevention, flea control, and the importance of spaying and neutering.

Each shot is a milestone towards leading a long and healthy life together. This is a fairly small price to pay for the companionship that follows, so prepare

your wallet beforehand and spoil your fur baby with whatever treatments and precautionary measures you need to take.

Connection and Bonds

It may happen in an instant or over time that you will build a connection with your fur baby. As your interaction deepens, you share activities, playtime, walks, and even quiet moments on the couch. These experiences are going to cultivate trust and love.

The first time we went out together, it brought waves of sheer joy. Our hearts were racing with excitement, solidifying our love for one another. And these are the memories I will cherish forever.

Growth and Changes

With growth, you'll witness change, and each stage will bring its own set of behaviors and nuances that you will have to navigate.

Although, it's crucial to understand these changes and respond to them with grace. There will be ups and downs, moments where you will feel frustrated, and even moments when you will feel sad, especially when your fur baby is going through health issues or anything that diminishes their light.

The key is to be open to these experiences. As your fur baby transitions from puppyhood to adolescence, you will experience a surge of energy and independence. This is the time when your boundaries are tested, and your pet may temporarily forget their training, which you will have to reinforce time and time again.

Know that this is normal behavior for dogs, and as frustrating as it can be when they hit their teenage stage and become cranky, remain patient.

Keep your training consistent and redirect their energy towards constructive activities. You can even engage in obedience classes that are beneficial for everyone, strengthening bonds and helping them focus.

When the adult stage strikes, the personality becomes a lot more defined. That is when training has reached a reliable point, and even in moments of mischief, you can sit back and trust your parenting.

Each time your adult fur baby decides to do something that you don't approve of, you can instruct them, and they will follow. Although, moments like these are often met with the element of surprise and mixed with laughter.

This phase will require you to take on greater responsibility for your fur baby, such as providing regular exercise for mental stimulation and maintaining a routine that prevents boredom.

A variety of activities can be planned, such as puzzle toys or taking your dog to a playdate.

Health Check-ins

As your dog gracefully ages, their body will no longer be the same, and their energy levels will shift, but their heart does not change and remains full of love.

This stage requires pet owners to be keen about their dog's health needs and understand the symptoms of different health concerns.

Notice any subtle signs of aging, which can vary from slower movements to opting for cozy spots and occasional stiffness in the limbs. These all indicate that your pet requires extra care and nurturing.

Keeping up with the vet and making routine visits will become more crucial than ever. It provides guidance on dietary adjustments and exercise modifications that can be added to the lifestyle.

What's even more crucial is to maintain a quality of life, such as having a soft bed, taking joint

supplements, and regular, gentle exercises that can make a world of difference.

Remember to add mentally stimulating activities, even at the older stage, such as the use of toys and challenges. Engaging in activities no matter the age is beneficial for maintaining the bond and ensuring joy.

End of Life Care & Grief

Eventually, a day comes when all has to leave this world. It is a painful reality that none of us can prepare for, no matter how equipped we think we are.

This inevitable phase can make the journey more bearable for the pet and the owner.

As the health declines, emotional preparation is the key. It ensures that you stay in the right frame of mind to look after your pet's needs, making sure they are well-cared for.

Prioritize their comfort over your feelings, knowing that the love you share deserves to be honored till the end of times.

Grief can be an overwhelming stage to cross by, and knowing that you are not alone is crucial. Share memories with friends and family, consider creating a memorial, sharing your story to celebrate the life that was shared and lived together. Do not shy away

from expressing, as that is what your pet would have wanted you to do. Finding ways to memorialize can aid in your healing journey. One of the few ways to do that is by planting a tree in your pet's honor, whether you create a special spot in the garden or even commission a piece of art that reflects the time shared.

No doubt, life with a dog is a journey that is rich with love and memories. Each stage brings unique challenges and joys, and it's up to you to embrace them fully. As you navigate your lifecycle, remember to cherish each moment. Whether it's playful antics or the quiet moments of companionship in the senior years, all are precious.

Keep creating enduring memories, as the connection serves as a testament to life's beauty. It serves as a reminder to cherish each day as a gift. Revel in the moments and realize that every happy bark and wag of the tail is a sign of their appreciation for this life together.

What Makes it All Worth It

The journey is the greatest manifestation of unconditional love, even though it may seem to be full of ups and downs.

Though the journey may not always seem easy, the benefits far exceed the difficulties.

As I ponder over the experiences of being a pet parent, I find myself reasoning that even at moments of heartache, the richness of my bond with Buster has shaped my life in ways I would have never imagined otherwise.

One thing that swept me off my feet with our furry friends is the boundless devotion they have to offer us. From the moment they enter our lives, they give us their whole hearts. No matter how long your day has been or what difficulties you are going through, their eagerness holds the power to heal and comfort you.

Their warmth of a snuggle after a long day of work and the joy in their eyes when they see you hold immense power. It instantly brightens your mood.

This love is a reminder of what it means to be present and cherish the small joys in life. Of course, there will be days filled with grief and heavy on the heart. Love of pets can then become a balm that calms the soul and shows this world the values of empathy, patience, and value of companionship. Every moment you spend with your pet is a chance to create memories full of silly antics and their attempt to

discover the world. These experiences are like stories that your heart carries even long after they have left.

Looking back at these memories brings a smile in difficult times, and your heart swells with warmth. These memories help to counterbalance the inevitable grief that comes with losing them.

Pet parenthood is rife with life lessons that extend beyond companionship. The responsibility of caring for another life requires discipline and commitment. From feeding them to grooming and training them, cultivates a sense of duty.

These lessons mirror a broader life skill. For instance, the patience you need to train a puppy translates into other areas of life, which can help us navigate challenges calmly.

The experience of nurturing a pet fosters emotional intelligence and empathy, teaching us to be more in tune with others and their needs and love, whether an animal or human being.

The bond between a pet owner and their pet is a testament to resilience. Pets face their own health challenges, and the period that requires care can be a difficult experience. Yet, it is also a meaningful lesson in vulnerability and strength. Supporting one's pet through sickness or the trials of old age forces us into

a confrontation with our fears, and the weakness of life, and in the depth of the experience in such understanding lies a more profound understanding of love and loss.

Being a pet parent also transforms our daily lives. Other than health and fitness, these routines actually contribute to building a sense of routine or purpose. Evening walks, meals, and playtime become the anchors of our day, creating a rhythm to life that can improve all-around well-being. These routines teach people how to spend more time outside, exercise regularly, and socialize in order to promote healthier lifestyles.

It does not end with the loss of a beloved pet. The love felt did not fade away; it transformed into something else. So many pet parents find, after grieving, there is a deep desire to open their hearts once more. Every new pet gives them a new start and another chance to relive their experiences, both sweet and frustrating, of being a pet parent.

A new pet could be the most precious way to honor the memories of those you lost. The amount of love that one pet inspires in us can cause us to rescue another needing love-compassion, care, and so forth. Every pet has its personality and story to tell, and this allows for yet new adventures and opportunities to connect. Being a pet parent is an extraordinary

journey that will contain joy, challenge, love, and grief. While heartaches are a given, all of this reminds one of the great love that exists. The memories we create, the lessons we learn, and the emotional growth make every moment worthwhile.

In the end, the bond we share with our pets fills up our lives in ways immeasurable. There will be laughter, snuggles, exciting adventures, and much more that will become part of us.

My Thoughts

As I turn to the last page of my dog's memoir, a mix of emotions brings a bittersweet smile to my face. Some of the painful memories have slowly faded, giving way to the precious nostalgia of our adventures together. Writing about Buster turned out to be the best form of therapy. A daily dose of love and laughter that helped heal even the deepest wounds.



Our story has become more than words on paper. It's a love letter to the goofy tail wags, the late-night

cuddles, and the wild escapades that only a dog can lead you into. I have learned that when putting myself inside this story, healing it in a way has made me not just come out of it but be a beacon of inspiration for anyone who's ever loved and lost a four-legged friend.

Closing the book with a touch so gentle, I can feel the warmth of Christmas. The journey wasn't just about Buster and me; it became a ticket to a world where the connection between all living beings is as accurate as the fur on a dog's back. There are many 'Busters' out there just waiting to be loved, and they are ready to dish out the purest form of love right back to anyone willing to take them home.

Because in the nurturing embrace of a loving household, these furry buddies radiate their true brilliance, their playful antics and tender gestures serving as poignant reminders of love's profound influence.

Pet parenthood changed me, teaching me to love more deeply. In this great work of life, we are all artists and I'm determined to paint it the colors of love, kindness, and a little dog hair mixed in.

I hope 'My Little Love' becomes a source of inspiration, fostering love within each of us.

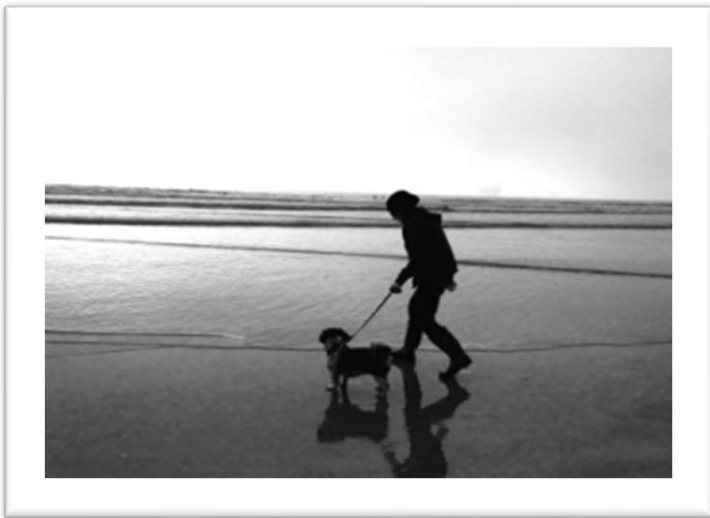
"Because even though life is short, love is everlasting."

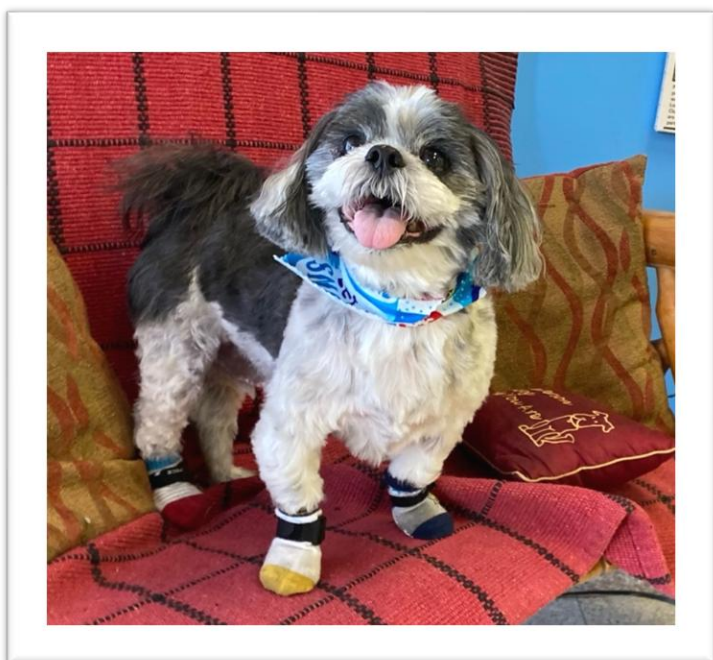
- Jude Laurén

End Note

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

–1 Corinthians (13:4–8), The Holy Bible





Buster Laurén – 2008-2021

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I am extremely thankful to everyone who contributed to the completion of this book. Your contributions and support have transformed my dream into a reality.

My Little Love *Animated Version for Kids*

Please scan the QR code to experience and enjoy the animated rendition of the book.



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