

Telling Tail Tales

Love Again for Animals

By Upasana Halder



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I still remember the first time that I fell in love with animals. When I used to live in Tokyo, Japan, I got a cat for my fourth birthday. However, it was not a real cat. It was just a toy cat that acted like a real one. Even though the cat was a toy, I immediately became obsessed with it.

Every day, I would spend hours playing with my toy cat as if it were real. I would pretend to feed, cuddle, and even sleep with it. I loved whenever the cat said, "Meow." I thought that it was the cutest thing ever! I even found the dogs amusing in Japan. Whenever I used to go to any restaurant, I noticed that fluffy and chubby dogs with pigtails used to eat food there, and when I went to the park to play with my friends, watching the owners play with their dogs made me think of what I could do if I had a dog. I would always see myself playing with them and giving them different hairstyles! I desperately dreamt of a real pet that would be my companion for the rest of my life.

After I moved back to India from Japan, I still longed for a pet and would beg my parents to buy me one. However, they would always deny my request because they said that I was not responsible enough, which was true at that time. I still had fun with animals despite my anger towards my parents! Whenever I visited my grandparents' house during summer vacation, I always took care of the many goldfish in their house. Watching the goldfish swim and eat their food never bored me. I loved feeding the cats that lived in my grandparents' neighborhood, as well. Since my uncle, who was also my grandparents' neighbor, took care of the starving cats that lived in the street, I had many opportunities to watch them grow and feed them fish. Since my family and I love eating fish, we would always give these cats a whole variety of fish to enjoy, and watching them eat definitely made my day. Sometimes, the cats even came into my grandparent's house, and I played with them for a few minutes before my grandmother forced them to leave the house. I had such an amazing time with these animals, and my love for them continued to grow.

When I was five years old, I moved back to India. At first, it was weird moving back because I had gotten so used to the environment in Japan. One time, I remember going to a nearby marketplace with my mother, and as we were going from one stall to another, I noticed a parrot that looked like it was injured! Immediately after seeing the parrot, I screamed and told my mom that we should save the parrot by bringing it to the veterinarian. My mother and I took the feeble parrot to the clinic just in time, and it was saved! I was really excited and proud of myself because I saved somebody's life. Seeing the parrot getting stronger and stronger and then flying again over a span of a few weeks made me so happy. It was also a coincidence because when my dad was younger, he too saved a parrot, but after his parrot got better, my dad actually kept him in his house as a pet!

I had fun interacting with the different animals that I have seen up until that point. However, my desire for wanting and loving animals was soon cut short.

When I was walking back home from a school bus stop in India, a vicious street dog that was randomly roaming around suddenly attacked me. I remember running as fast as I possibly could away from the dog, but the dog was not that far away from me and was catching up to me. I thought that I was going to die and get eaten by the dog, but luckily, I could escape and enter my apartment complex. That was one of the most terrifying experiences of my life. I cannot imagine how traumatizing it must have been for seven year-old me! Since that horrific incident, I have been scared of dogs and even cats, two animals that I used to love from a very young age because I always had a fear of being attacked and dying.

After almost getting attacked by that dog, I started to constantly have nightmares, and whenever I came close to one of my friends' pets, I was so scared that I would start screaming, and I would run away. People used to make fun of me for being extremely scared of cute animals, but I simply ignored what everyone thought of me.

The animals that I saw in India were much terrifying than those I had seen when living in Japan, so when I moved to the US, I was anxious about being attacked from out of nowhere. The longer I have been in the US, the more I started to overcome my deepest fears and rediscovered my love for animals. In the beginning, I was still hesitant about being in contact with other animals, but after moving to the Bay Area, I discovered more animals that I immediately fell in love with. When I was invited to my friend's birthday party, I got to meet a hamster for the first time, and I loved how small and adorable it was! Even a dog in my friend's neighborhood suddenly ran up to me and started to lick me. Honestly, it was kind of scary for me, but I still enjoyed it very much. This event led me to start liking animals just as I did when I was little.

Now, I have realized how much joy and happiness animals bring into the lives of other people. They are such great companions who are so fun to be around! I am glad that I have overcome my fear of animals because I really want an animal who understands me and can be my best friend. Although I don't have a pet animal yet because it is hard to manage a pet in an apartment, I enjoy seeing my cousin's hamster, Django, on FaceTime occasionally. Even seeing cute videos and images of pets, such as guinea pigs, that my friends send me makes me really happy, and I hope that my love for animals still stays strong throughout the rest of my life. I would really like to go to an animal shelter and meet all the animals there at some time. I am crossing my fingers to hopefully get a dog or cat in the future.



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