



How a Little Black Dog Helped Me Through the Break-Up from Hell

I had a dog-sized hole in my heart after my partner and I split and he got to keep Rufus. But another little dog helped me through.



Rich Kane | Sep 27th 2013

I hate dogs. *Hate* 'em.

Dogs are evil eating machines that need to be eliminated from the face of the Earth and any other Earthlike surface.

I used to know this because when I was 4, a pair of vicious canine carnivores wedged themselves underneath my grandpa's backyard fence in Minneapolis and chased after me — a sweet, delicious snack, despite my lack of teriyaki sauce — before I found a gate I could lock myself behind and summarily pee myself from sheer terror. I pretty much avoided anything furry after that. Rest in peace, Aunt Gladys, but your untweezered facial hair gave me post-traumatic stress disorder.

This went on until a visit to my uncle's farm a few years later, when I was introduced to a cute little German Shepherd puppy. He was playful and affectionate and tried to hump my 8-year-old leg. I liked him. A year later, I returned and found that the cute little puppy was now a full-grown adult with bloodlust in his eyes. This time, he tried to rip my entrails out. But hey, at least I was still delicious!

Then, nearly 30 years later, came Rufus.

My dog fears had lifted by then. I had a new enemy, cats, which I'm allergic to. (And have I mentioned that cats are evil, watery-eye-inducing machines that need to be

eliminated from the face of the Earth and any other Earthlike surface?) My partner and I had long planned on adopting a rescued dog from a local animal shelter. We even settled on Rufus as a name a year before we started seriously looking. He liked the moniker because it sounded vaguely like a bark; I liked it because it reminded me of '70s R&B act Rufus & Chaka Khan. *Tell me something good, tell me thatcha like it, yeeaahhhh ...*

The way the adoption process at the shelter worked, if there was a particular dog you were interested in bringing home, you had to show up on the day and time it became available. If more than one person wanted the same dog, numbers were drawn from a plastic bowl, with the winner getting first crack.

At first, we had our eye on a poofy white four-legged cottonball that seemed purposely bred for maximum clickage on Cute Overload. I showed up at the appointed hour (the boyfriend had school) and found about nine other people lined up, all hoping to take the living, breathing, crapping Furby home.

I drew number two, but I could see that the winners, a family, were easily going to bond with the very popular pooch. I slinked away, casually peering into other cages, when I

noticed a sort of Golden Retriever-ish/Australian Shepherd-y dog with slightly matted back fur and — *heart skip!* — an adorably droopy left ear.



There were no hordes of people lined up for this one; he was there for the taking. I rang the boyfriend, we met later at the shelter, and we instantly became family. Our Rufus fantasy had become Rufus reality.

As an added bonus, Rufus leaned forward whenever he peed — no worries about him ever lifting a leg on our *Sopranos* DVDs.

Rufus was smart, and great with people and kids. He didn't do well at dog parks, so we took him to empty school playgrounds where he could run around and chase Frisbees. He loved going after the wild bunnies in our condo complex, and probably could have prepared a lovely hasenpfeffer for us if he only had opposable thumbs. We even taught him to sing — and by “singing,” I mean a tuneless howl not dissimilar to what comes out of Justin Bieber's piehole.

Because of my cat allergies, I was concerned that I might have the same reaction to Rufus, and if that were the case, then we might have to return him to the shelter. So my partner and I made a deal: I'd pay the adoption fee, and he'd put the registration under his name. No problem. After all, we loved each other, and we were going to be a couple for the rest of our lives!

Until three years later, when we were no longer in love, and I couldn't get away from the personal baggage he liked to throw around fast enough. We broke up, I moved out — but what would happen to Rufus?

I was screwed — I had never got around to putting my name on the registration. At first, my ex was diplomatic and said he wanted me to still be in Rufus' life, and that we could make arrangements for frequent visits. That, however, only lasted until I landed a job that paid me \$20,000 more a year than the one I had when we were together, and he saw how much happier my life had become now that he was longer in it.

So he did what spiteful people do, going all global thermonuclear war on me by cutting Rufus out of my life forever.

Yep. He was like that.

I consulted an attorney, who confirmed what I suspected — that California law considers dogs to be property, not children. Without my name on the registration, there would be no custody battle.

Tears? Only a medium-sized reservoir's worth. Mere hours after realizing I would never see Rufus — my dog, the one I picked out by myself — again, I found myself moping down the aisles of the same animal shelter we brought him home from three years earlier.

I was not planning on getting a new dog. Instead, I was searching for comfort, wanting to be consoled by a furry, empathic face.

A small black dog caught my grieving eye. She looked up at me through the cold steel bars of her pen. I put my hand up to her nose. She licked it.

Well, hi there, friend.

I took her for a walk on the shelter grounds. She seemed happy, for a dog found abandoned on the mean streets of Orange County just days earlier. At one point, I sat

down on a bench and, without prodding, she jumped up on my lap and stuck her tongue in my mouth.

At that point, I knew I wasn't going home alone. She was even on sale — \$45, no Groupon required!

I wasn't sure what to call her that first week, so while we got to know each other, her name was pretty much Hey You. Then one day, she was doing something she shouldn't have been doing when I reflexively yelped "Rufus!"

She stopped and looked at me, as if to say "Yeah, dude, keep calling me that, I like that. Now take me outside, I have some asses to snort."

This Rufus, Rufus 2.0, is different from the original edition, of course. She loves the dog park, for one thing. The first Rufus loved to play fetch, but his sequel hasn't quite figured it out. No endearingly droopy ear on her — but she does have pretty chocolate-chip-spotted paws everyone talks about. She's endured several moves and apartments, can't wait to meet other dogs, and only fears the occasional hairdryer and sneezy person. She's ... my baby.



But I still think about the first Rufus every now and then. He'd be about 8 in human years now, and I'm glad I have plenty of photos and videos of my boy, through which he'll live forever.

About a month ago, I met up with a guy who had dated my ex after I did, and it was fun to compare notes — what was good, what was bad, what was learned, what was best forgotten.

He got to know Rufus pretty well during that time, and was able to give me an update — Rufus is doing fine, he said. Ultimately, Rufus is the part of the relationship he misses most, just like I do.

But I have a new furry kid to look after now — she's the best dog in the world! Man ... who couldn't love dogs?

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