



Compawionship

Vakayla Davies

My phobia began in third grade. We had just moved to a new neighborhood—Westbrook, house thirty-six. The first couple of weeks we were there, all the kids in the neighborhood would play outside together. The neighborhood was shaped like a lollipop; my house sat in the circular part—the best part. It was the widest, so it was perfect for running around, riding our bikes, and playing foursquare. There were no sidewalks, so we had to play in the street. Being in the circle meant we could easily see cars coming, allowing us to move out of the way without stopping our game.

The fun lasted until some not-so-kind

people, with an even not-so-kinder pit bull, moved into house thirty-seven. It was an outside dog, so it was always running around. Once the pit bull took over, we stopped playing outside. He owned the lollipop, liked to hang out close to home, and chased everyone who walked past. When he ran after me, it was out of anger, not playfulness like other dogs I had encountered before him. Every morning when we were getting in the car for school, my dad had to patrol with a baseball bat to keep us safe. The pit bull lingered nearby, ready to pounce on any unfortunate soul who crossed its path.

Eventually, reports flooded animal





control, but they never got followed up on. The dog continued to torment our street for about two weeks. Our concerns were finally heard when the mailman and the pit crossed paths. The epic showdown resulted in a government worker in critical condition and a sleeping dog. I wasn't supposed to know why the pit disappeared, but I heard the grown-ups talking. It was the first time I realized that an animal, especially a dog, could cause death, and it stuck with me.

My fear of animals made me unsympathetic. I was so afraid that I turned it into hate. It was embarrassing to be afraid of animals in a world full of people who loved them but hating them made it my choice. Whenever an animal would die on screen, I acted like I didn't care. When we read *Old*

Yeller in fifth grade, I protested and incessantly complained that we had to read a stupid book about a stupid mutt. I even went so far as to pretend that the dog deserved to die: "All he did was cause problems for Travis and his family; they would be better off without him." I didn't really mean it; I was just projecting my fears onto those around me, which wasn't fair.

Every time I was invited to a new place, my first question was, "Do you have a pet?" If they did, I'd ask them to put the pet away, or I wouldn't go at all. But people never wanted to; they acted like it was the most inhumane thing they'd ever heard in their lives. They thought it was preposterous to lock up a member of their family in its own home for a stranger. And I didn't get it either. I thought they were dramatic and delusional. How could they

love a creature that isn't capable of love and is always a moment away from violence?

As I got older, my hatred turned into jealousy. I desperately wanted companionship. Despite all the people around me, I felt so alone. It felt like nobody cared about me, nobody was listening to what I had to say, and I had no shoulder to lean on when I needed it most. It made me question my previous opinion: maybe an emotional support animal was what I

needed. I begged and begged and begged for a cat. Since it was the opposite of the species that started it all, I felt it was the safest choice. I was still scared of them, but to a reasonable extent. My family shot down the idea. They all wanted

a dog—of course—but didn't get one because of me. I let go of the cat idea by reminding myself that animals are animals; I wouldn't find what I need in a pet. And then, I met Rosie.

She was a surprise. My mom went to the shelter after work on a whim, and when she saw little Rosie helpless and scared, she felt compelled to bring her home. When my mom came home, the security system beeped, and I ran out of my room to greet her like I did

any other day.

"Close your eyes; I have a surprise for you," she said, full of anticipation.

I closed my eyes without knowing what exactly to expect. I kind of just assumed it

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might be clothes or maybe a vacuum because I'd been complaining about sweeping the carpet since ours broke.

"Open your eyes."

That's when I saw her. A small kitten with a black back and a white tummy. Her white feet juxtaposed with her black legs made it appear as though she was wearing socks. She looked so harmless and gentle. It was the cutest animal I'd ever seen, and I was already in love with her. My mom handed her to me, and the kitten hesitantly sat in my arms. She looked so scared, and I just knew I had to take good care of her.

"So, what are you going to name her?" my mom asked.

I looked at her, and it just came to me.

"Rosie."

The name felt right, as though it had already belonged to her before we took her in.

My bliss didn't last long; she jumped out of my arms and hid under the closest piece of furniture. She hid for a long time. Every time I came into the room, she darted under something new. It made me a little sad. I begged for a cat, and when I finally got one, she consistently avoided me. I assumed she was like any other animal: a waste of time.

Until one day. I was sitting on the couch watching my comfort show because I was feeling down. I was going through a dark phase and felt lonelier than I ever had. Rosie came out from under the couch and jumped on it for the first time. She walked up to me, lay on my thighs, and purred. I reached my hand down to pet her, and for once, she didn't run. She just lay there, purring. It was like she knew I needed her.



Vakala & Rosie.
Courtesy of Vakayala Davies.



Vakayla & Rosie. Courtesy of Vakayala Davies.

From that moment on, I had a soft spot for cats. Over the year we've been together, Rosie has proved to me that she genuinely does love me, despite what I thought about animals before. I finally had someone who I knew cared about me, listened to what I had to say, and let me hold her when I needed her most. The relationship I have with my cat—a "stupid" animal—has shown me that any creature can be family.

My fear of animals beyond cats has

been alleviated because of this experience. Even the pit bull who traumatized me, I feel pity for now. He wasn't a murderous dog; he was neglected, raised without love to learn right from wrong. I haven't asked anyone to put away their pet at my expense since. I realize that pets are a part of the family, and it's their home too. Now I'm still pretty afraid of most animals, but I'm able to look past my prejudice and see them not as an evil thing but as a benevolent creature, just as important as I am.



About The Author



Vakayla Davies is a
sophomore
majoring
in Social
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She is passionate
about helping others and making a positive impact. She aspires to create meaningful change through her studies and future career. Vakayla met Rosie, her pet, while entering her senior year of high school. Having Rosie has deepened her love for animals and positively influenced her mental health.

