Autoethnographic Literary Nonfiction: How Sookie Saved My Life

Description

The AutoEthnographer

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AUTHORâ??S MEMO

Sookie was never meant to be my support dog. The subject of this autoethnographic literary nonfiction, I rescued her when I was 17 years old from horrendous conditions. I like to joke that she was the one who picked me as an owner because the minute I met her, she wanted to go home with us and tried to jump into our car. It was by far the best decision I have ever made to rescue her.

I started to feel very sick when I was 16 and for most of my teen and adult life, I was completely disabled and bed-ridden. Sookie learned, all by herself to become my support dog. I took her to all my doctorâ??s appointments and surgeries, which did require a lot of hotel stays and traveling. Sookie was with me every step of the way, during my treatment. From personal experiences with Lyme and with Sookie, I have come to realize many different aspects of life, including the true meaning of life and the people in your life that matter. In retrospect, I have learned a lot from Sookie, including how to become a better human being. Many people in my life turned a blind eye to my illness, and as a child I realized who was really my family in my life: Sookie and my mom.

Sookie never left my side. I owe my life to this dog who has saved me more times than I can count. Without her, I would not be alive, let alone attending graduate school. Without her, I would have not been able to accomplish my goals to become a successful novelist.

Through personal experiences, I was able to understand the beauty of life, the meaning of life and being a better human being. Sookie was able to give me that opportunity to live again and understand life from her point of view.

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I grew up in a small town in North Carolina around sweet tea, banana bread pudding, and Krispy Kreme donuts. We enjoyed nature, hiking, debutantes, spending breezy fall afternoons at the state fair and of course, constantly hearing about the debate between Duke and the North Carolina Tarheels rivalry.

Nearly two decades ago, I was seven years old; my dream was to become a veterinarian and go to Duke University. My parents had just bought their first house, and for me personally, the world was my oyster. My first home was in the suburbs of North Carolina, a beautiful red brick two-story house, with two concrete columns at the entryway and baby blue shutters. Right in front of the driveway, my mom meticulously planted vibrant cherry red poinsettias that forever bloomed. Those very poinsettias represented for me a symbol of thriving life, happiness and enduring love inside of our home.

At this time, I had no idea about what was harboring inside my small body and propagating like that very plant planted in our driveway. By the time I had hit puberty, life had fundamentally changed for me. I was once an ambitious student from North Carolina who was admittedly, a chatty and precocious social butterfly.

Suddenly, I became a very withdrawn, unhappy and sick child. I had a rather difficult time attending school and even comprehending what was being taught. I immediately started home schooling, not too soon after the dizziness, fatigue and the stomach pain set in. Rather quickly, after a year, a tidal wave of horror set in for me and my family as my illness started to rapidly accelerate. As a result, I could barely walk, talk, eat or stand up and started to have hundreds of grand mal seizures per day.

Suffice to say, my studies were on the back burner and I had to focus on my treatment for Chronic Lyme Disease. This illness is not something I would wish on my worst enemy. Lyme is an insidious, debilitating and petrifying illness. If one survives Lyme, it changes you for life. It definitely changed me and my outlook on life. I had to restructure my life and understand the meaning of patience, curb my emotions and try to not be so stubborn and resolute. Even the slightest bit of stress, can cause oneâ??s Lyme Disease to exacerbate. Hence, along with treatment, our actions very much dictate our willingness to get better.

My mother, who also fought through Chronic Lyme Disease, was my champion through all my fighting and helped me every step of the way. It turns out, I was never bitten by a tick but contracted Lyme Disease from my mom at birth. Essentially, I was born with Lyme. Sadly, anyone who has chronic Lyme

knows the constant battle with receiving proper treatment and we know all too well the repetitive nightmare of being misdiagnosed, going through useless surgeries and being ignored. Still to this day, there are people who do not believe that Chronic Lyme exists or that it can be transferred from mother to child.

> A beautiful Cairn Terrier and Chihuahua that became my best friend, Sookie is my therapy dog and guardian angel. She has large inquisitive brown eyes, large typical Chihuahua ears, blonde wired hair and barely weighs more than seven pounds.

After I turned 17, I felt truly withdrawn from life and alone. With no friends and no real sense of normalcy in my life, my mom decided to get me a dog. What is rather funny is that I do not remember much of my life being sick; days blended into one like a hazy mirage. However, I remember every single detail of adopting Sookie.

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I had first seen Sookie listed on a local news site. Later the next day, my mom helped me into the car and off we went. I remember feeling like a walking zombie. My stomach muscles were in agony and I could not sit up anymore so I laid down in the front passenger seat of our car. I recall bringing my favorite, large, beige, Aztec scarf that I used as blanket while my mom and I drove for hours into rural North Carolina to meet Sookie. What felt like years, finally felt like minutes as I waited in anticipation to see her.

Once I met Sookie, I was appalled at the state of her. She was starving, emaciated and had fleas all over her. Her yellow nails looked as though they had never been clipped. Sookie, however, who should have been completely lethargic, acted like everything was fine. She started to wag her tail and was completely attentive. When my mom laid her upside down in her arms, Sookie stared at us with her chocolate doe like big brown eyes.

My mom and I went back to our car to discuss the situation. I was unsure about getting her until I saw her in the window of the car right next to ours. She ran to the window and started to wag her tail with sprightly vigor and hopped up and down. She also looked as if her eyes were smiling and as if she was beckoning me to get her. At that moment, I did not feel any pain and gathered up the strength to figure out a way to get her to the groomer and pick some items up at PetSmart before we brought her home.

We wrapped her in some towels and as my mom gave her to me to hold her, she practically leapt into our car. I was afraid she would be too depressed to leave her last owner. However, at that moment, Sookie never looked more jovial and she calmly laid upside down staring into my eyes. I decided then to name her Sookie, from the main character in *True Blood*.

> When I had my first seizure, Sookie was ready to help me out of it. She was like a nurse on triage duty. The next several times I had a seizure or fainted, she would run down the hall to the other side of our home to call my mom by barking and scratching her bedroom door and leading her back to me.

From the time we drove home to when she went to bed with me, she continuously watched me. At first, I thought she was just curious about me, however, she has never stopped watching me. At night, I would catch her awake and intently watching me from a corner. It was not until a year later that I realized why she had been staring so intently. When I had my first seizure, Sookie was ready to help me out of it. She was like a nurse on triage duty. The next several times I had a seizure or fainted, she would run down the hall to the other side of our home to call my mom by barking and scratching her bedroom door and leading her back to me.

After a year, Sookie trained herself to be my therapy dog. She never left the side of my bed and only left when she needed to go to the bathroom. She kept me company each and every morning and every night. During every seizure, through all the pain and all the crying she always stayed beside me and gave me numerous hugs, kisses and held my hand with her paw or placed her paw on my forehead. As anyone with Chronic Lyme knows, treatment requires one to get a million times worse before one gets better. I had to travel to different states in my momâ??s car, stay in many hotels and Sookie was always there watching over me.

To this day, I am still vexed about the way she was treated for 2-3 years of her life before she met me. I am so glad that I brought her home that day. We both experienced so many adventures, as well as endured countless trials and tribulations together. Sookie has been all over the east coast and has seen so many sites on her car rides. She has stayed in luxury hotels such as The Ritz-Carlton and has met many people in her life. After several years of treatment, I was able to go to college. Since my mom and I moved right across from my college, I was able to walk Sookie up to the fountain that I sat at every day in college. When I decided to finish my undergraduate degree online, she was still with me every day as I attended classes and finally obtained my degree.

Sookie is and always will be my guardian angel. As I started to get better, she helped me walk again and enjoy all that the tropics had to offer when I moved to Naples, Florida. She gave me the courage to find my purpose again in life, be myself and enjoy the beauty of life. She taught me what true love is, what it means to be a better human being and the most important lesson of all: to never give up and to harness the power of hope. Having hope in oneâ??s life can do amazing things; it can turn tides, it can change peopleâ??s lives and through times of incredible darkness there can always be a beacon of light.

Sookie, a rural dog from a farm in North Carolina, was the most gleeful dog I ever saw walking through a path of tropical palm trees and watching kids play in their bathing suits as she listened to the gurgling of a stream. I remember the day she saw a tropical lizard rush past us on a cobblestone sidewalk. When she turned behind her and saw that there was as much light in my eyes as there was in hers, that I was walking without any pain and laughing at her playing with the lizard, I saw contentment and the purest form of relief in her incandescent brown eyes.

SOOKIE

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