

The Last Goodbye

If you've seen the Disney movie *101 Dalmations*, perhaps you will recall the cat, Sgt. Tibbs. He is a loyal cat and always does his duty, answering to his superiors when needed. Tibbs also has a talent for marching. He sticks out one leg almost parallel to the floor every time he takes a step, and holds his head high. It appears as though he's proud of his calling to carry the mantle of Sgt., and his march is his evident signature.

My sister Kristen named her dog Tibbs after this character. He "marches" identically to the way Sgt. Tibbs did in the movie. Additionally, he acts like a cat. When he sits he tries to stick out his chest and show off his mane about his neck. He always demands respect from others and is very bitter if he is touched, just like a cat. We often make jokes and laugh at his fanciful behavior, but he holds his head high and disregards the mockery thrown at him. He seems to possess human characteristics and even as quirky and strange as he is, Tibbs is the best pet our family has ever had.

Tibbs is a toy poodle. Now, we were never integrated into the tradition of giving dogs special and ridiculous looking haircuts with balls of fur trimmed down their legs and fluffy hair prancing all over their body. We treated him like a normal house dog and gave respect. Thus, Tibbs became accustomed to be treated like a human being. However, throughout my childhood, I teased him a lot. He entertained me with his growling and barking as I poked him many times in the ribs. He developed distrust towards me; whenever I was in the room, he fled to a nearby superior for protection such as my sister or mother.

Although I was somewhat of an annoyance to him, I also enjoyed playing with him. I used to take him outside to run around the lawn. He would chase me down and try to tackle me by jumping onto the back of my legs. I could tell he enjoyed it because he and I ran around the yard many times and he always expressed excitement as he ran.

As I grew older, Tibbs and I began to have a better relationship. I would sometimes catch him in the act of following me around the house. He began to trust me and hope that I would help him when

he was hungry or needed to be let outside. He loved to have someone pet him. When I would scratch him after several minutes, he would claw me on my hand or arm begging for more massages. He would also tilt his head back to expose more areas of his neck that he wanted to be scratched. It made me smile every time and I would concede to his wishes.

Kristen taught Tibbs how to kiss. Putting her nose close to his she would ask, "Kisses?" He responded by sticking out his tongue and licking her nose. It was a sign of utmost love and trust. He would never do it to anyone else in the family, but whenever I tried to receive kisses from him, he would lick my face too. It made me happy to feel at the same level of respect as my sister.

When Kristen moved away from the home, Tibbs went with her. Ever since that separation, I only saw Tibbs every once in a while when I visited my sister. But every time he saw me, he would rush to me and jump up, wagging his tail. He would show his teeth in a friendly way and I knew that that was his way of smiling. He always greeted me in that manner. I could tell that he missed me and wished to see me more from this behavior, and when I would see him act like that, it made me miss him more too.

I'll never forget the day I saw him for the first time in two years. I served a mission for that period of time and hadn't seen my family. When I returned home, I was overwhelmed with joy to see my family again, but I had missed Tibbs the most. When I walked into my sister's house, I saw Tibbs laying down on the couch in the living room. He looked up and his eyes met mine. Instantly, he jumped from his position and ran to me, greeting me in his regular fashion with the most energetic excitement I had seen from his countenance. He had recognized me. Even after two years, I could tell that the mutual feeling of best friends still existed.

Unfortunately, I learned that Tibbs' health had deteriorated while I was absent for two years. He had lost his hearing and most of his eyesight. Arthritis consumed his leg joints and back making his walk difficult and painful. I couldn't imagine how hard it was for him to live like that, but I always tried to comfort him. He showed love and appreciation by staying by my side when he was alone with me and

continually giving kisses. He also learned to control his territory, but would allow me to be in it when I showed friendship and love.

His health became a serious concern for Kristen. She would cry when he acted abnormal with his stance or when he would cry out in pain from occasional seizures. He eventually lost most of his teeth and his bladder, resulting in an excess of random urinations. She always said that when Tibbs felt ready to go, he would tell her.

About three months ago, my parents and I spent one weekend at Kristen's house to visit and attend a family reunion. It was a good weekend full of happy activities, and I got to see Tibbs again. When the time came to leave, my sister and her husband were at work and my parents were putting things in the car. I was left in the house for a few moments to rally up remaining forgotten items. To keep Tibbs in the kitchen, I set up a gate so he wouldn't wander around the house and ruin furniture or the carpets. I walked over to him to say goodbye. He was curled up in a ball, sleeping on a cushion with his snout tucked in his hind leg. I knelt down to pet him on his back and he awoke. As he looked up at me, I said, "Goodbye Tibbs. I love you and I'll miss you." Stroking his back I continued, "I know it's been hard for you to bear all of this and Kristen says that you will let her know when it was time to pass on. I just want you to know that you have my permission to tell her. I don't want you to suffer anymore."

My eyes started to tear up and I whimpered. The thought that that would be the last time I could see him had suddenly occurred to me. I then patted him on the head and kissed his neck then said, "I want you to know that you are a good dog. Good dog." His eyes stared into mine and I felt a sense appreciation coming from him. I said goodbye once again, walked away, and didn't look back. I felt his gaze upon me with longing eyes; he didn't want to be left alone. Even though he was deaf, I somehow knew that he heard what I had said. My admiration and love for him was amplified in that moment and as I spoke to him, I felt his love in return.

About a month later, he was put to sleep. His condition had worsened and he refused to move. It was difficult for Kristen to let him go. Before he left, she put her nose up to his, and he gave her one last kiss goodbye.

My relationship with Tibbs was a great one full of love, friendship and joy. I knew that he trusted me through his actions of attachment and I trusted him to be someone who could always be my friend. I regret not being perfect to him in my early years, but I hope that my maturity and relationship with him in my later years will redeem myself in his eyes. I truly was attached to him and loved him as a member of our family, and I know that he felt the same towards me.

I don't quite understand why humans can develop such affection for animals and vice versa. I also don't understand how a relationship with a pet can become an emotional journey. Moreover, I don't understand how human dependency can be placed so strongly on an animal. These dependencies can be emotional, physical, mental and perhaps even spiritual. It's remarkable how attached humans and animals can become. I may never understand these things, but I do understand the impact of a farewell. I hadn't ever thought that I could feel the way I did when I gave my farewell to Tibbs. I'll never forget that moment, and I am very grateful that he and I gave our last goodbye to each other.