

# Lilo

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Few things hurt as much as loss, maybe abandonment. Few things ruin your week faster than being called home to put your beloved childhood dog down. You get a call as you leave class saying the vets don't exactly know what's wrong, but you probably should come home. Then right before you hang up you hear, "it's not looking good."

The day we went and picked Lilo up was exciting and happy. We drove to a shelter without telling anybody else in the family and adopted her. My dad came home and asked Mom, "Michelle, who is this?" with a stern tone, looking straight at our new black lab-pointer mix. My dad had already made it clear that we were not going to have a dog. My mom decided we were and went to pick up Lilo from the shelter without telling my dad.

"It's Lilo, Dad! She's our new dog!" I exclaimed, and with that she became part of the family.

I drove home and parked in the driveway; I stayed there for a few minutes to prepare myself and ultimately reminisce over my dog. One winter, years back when there was a heavy snow, I put a harness on Lilo and rigged it to the bike trailer my dad would use to pull the kids before they could ride a bike. She would actually pull my little brothers through the snow in the trailer! That being said, she would only do it if I was running in front of her. You could see our neighbors watching the dog sled shitshow out their windows and laughing.

Lilo was such a happy dog, willing to pull a trailer full of brothers, or remain happy and loving as I sorted out who my real father actually was. At ten years old I learned that my "Uncle Chris" was actually my biological father. My step dad has raised me for nearly my entire life, but I knew he wasn't my biological father. The week I learned that "Uncle Chris" was my biological father, I was angry, bitter, sad, and I felt abandoned. Lilo stayed by my side letting me pet her and snuggle her, cheering me up with her happiness. She helped pull me through my feelings of abandonment with her love and loyalty.

Once I arrived home after the drive, I walked inside and saw Lilo on the family room floor in front of the TV being petted by my brothers. I sat down by her, scratching her in a spot that would drive her crazy, and she lifted her head and wagged her tail. This wasn't so much a reassuring gesture, as I could see she was obviously weak and not herself. That's the thing about having a dog, learning about their mannerisms, their personality, and being able to tell something wasn't right. "What's wrong with her?" I asked.

"We don't know much more than that her liver is not doing what it's supposed to," my mom replied. Lilo had been completely fine and healthy on Monday, then on Tuesday it was obvious that something was wrong and Mom took her to the vet.

On Thursday night, we went to the vet who danced around saying that it would be best to put her down. We figured we'll take one more day and love on Lilo and say goodbye. Then we would put her down. The next day we all woke up and spent the morning trying to make Lilo happy. We tried to get her to wag her tail, but she became increasingly inactive, and her skin seemed to yellow at an increasing pace.

My dad, who never seemed to give the dogs much attention, was so broken up by the fact she wasn't getting better. I had no idea the bonding Lilo and my dad had gone through over her ten years in our family. When my dad worked from home she would sit with him in his office all day. When it came out my mom had an affair, Lilo comforted my dad, slept near him, and she was always happy to see him. She would greet him at the door every day. When the affair came out, I

took all the guns out of the house. My mom was so upset that I took the guns away she threatened to press federal theft charges against me. My response was to load Lilo up in the truck and we went for a long ride. Lilo provided me with a calming presence in that time of conflict and tension and made me think it was all going to work out. The thought of losing her as a family member was difficult and brought tears to every eye in the house, even Dad.

My mom sobbed over the idea of losing Lilo. The dog had grown alongside all of her children. The dog practically was her fourth child. All the happiness she had caused and all the anger as well had permanently made its mark. Years ago when Mom was trying to make homemade bread, Lilo would sneak to the counter and grab the bread and run. We would find the bread pan in some corner of the house, but only the top part of the bread would be eaten. Perhaps the funniest thing Lilo ever did to Mom was grab a baguette she had just bought from the store and walk upstairs, jump in Mom's bed, and eat half the baguette. But that's just it, she only ate half. She left all the messy crumbs and the other half of the bread in the bed for my mom to find later that night. That was a memory we tried to laugh about driving home from the vet after putting Lilo down.

By the time I made it back home on Wednesday evening, Lilo could barely walk. She couldn't lie down, she would just let herself fall over. It was painful to see, and for her final hours I would support her as she tried to walk and gently lay her on the ground. Lilo was the family dog, but from a very early time it was clear she was my dog that the rest of the family enjoyed. I was the one who took care of her, fed her, picked up her poop in the back yard, walked her, and she slept in my room with me. It was hard leaving her when it was time to go to school. Every time I came home for a holiday or visit she would jump up and knock me off my feet. She would be so excited that she would shake. She wouldn't leave my side for the rest of the night. My mom would text me after I left that Lilo was walking around the house looking for me.

My dog went through everything with me. Growing up there was plenty of family drama, but she was always happy and loving. She would jump on the bed to console me as I cried. She was with me through injuries, bringing my spirits up. She never seemed to want more than love and the occasional dollop of peanut butter from me. She was with me through my first breakups. She was with me whenever I needed her. Just ready to love me. She was always a happy dog, wanting nothing more than her family.

Sitting on the cold tile at the vet's office next to Lilo brought forth agonizing grief and sorrow. I had brought one of my blankets to put her on. We all sniffled as the vet shaved some hair off her back leg and began the first injection of whatever it was that was going to kill my best friend. Then a minute or two later, Lilo had fallen asleep. The vet followed with a second injection that freed Lilo from her failed liver. My dog was gone. Not in any more discomfort, but she was gone. I am never going to pet her again, let her jump up on the bed, or take her for a car ride again. Lilo was a great dog.

The night before we put her down, she was miserable. The yellow from jaundice had crept its way into her eyes, she tried to get off the bed while I was asleep but fell off with a thud and panicked scratching of claws. She vomited all over the floor, and it was obvious she was at the end of the road. The following morning I woke up and went to the bathroom that shares a wall with my room. In front of the bathroom there is a rug which Lilo would almost always go lie down on until I was done using the bathroom. I never knew why she did it, but it was always pleasant to be greeted by my girl, Lilo. Well, that morning I woke up and went to the bathroom, and thirty seconds later I could hear her claws scraping the floor as she tried to get up. I yelled at her to stop, but she kept trying, slipping on her vomit and falling. By the time I was able to get to her, she had somehow made it to that rug and lifted her head. I lost it. My dog had made an excruciating effort just to lie on that rug and wait for me like she always had.

A few hours later, I picked her up and took her to the car. She rode on my lap and enjoyed being in the car. We pulled up to the vet, but instead of taking her to the front office like we always had, we drove around the back side. There's a special office in the back that's just for euthanasia. We parked and I carried her in. We cried and pet her, then the vet put

her down. My dad looked down at me and said, "You'll stay with her last, I'm so sorry." After a minute or two everyone else left, and I was alone with Lilo one last time. I choked out something about being best friends and how much I loved her, then took her collar off and left.