

Angel Animals and Autistics: A Love Affair

Nick Dubin



My canine friends have taught me how to love ... and how to receive love in return.

A few weeks ago, an angel came into my life. I don't mean the kind of angel with wings playing a harp in heaven all day long. I mean an angel with four legs and a pointy tail who follows me everywhere I go. I mean the kind of angel who picked me to be a lifetime companion. I'm talking about none other than my cockapoo, Sadie.

If you're on the autism spectrum, you've probably noticed you have an unusually close relationship with animals. Some would even call it a kinship. Famous spectrum authors like Liane Holiday Willey, Temple Grandin, Dawn Price Hughes and Jerry Newport have all expressed kinship with certain animals. When Jerry and his wife Mary Meinel joined their two families of birds upon marriage, they were a family of 13 (11 birds, 2 adults). Temple's interest in cattle and her keen insight into the psychology of cows, pigs, bison and antelope resulted in her almost singlehandedly creating a much more humane way of handling these animals before slaughter. McDonalds, Burger King and Swift – they all use systems designed by Temple. Temple has written extensively about the nature of animal behavior and postulates that the autistic mind (particularly savants) and the animal mind function in a similar capacity, as was beautifully illustrated in her book, *Animals in Translation*. Liane's heart belongs to Equus ferus caballus (horses) while Dawn is a well known primatologist who felt an early kinship with gorillas. For her, being in the company of gorillas was an escape from the social isolation she experienced as a result of her Asperger Syndrome. I can relate; can you too?

My first dog (Samantha) was a beautiful Lhasa Apso, terrier mix....the kind of dog that a Hollywood Studio would have loved to acquire for the movies. She had beautiful silky

fur and a regal way about her. When she walked into a room, it was almost like she demanded your undivided attention simply due to her majestic beauty. I used to constantly get stopped when walking her by people who would tell me she belonged in the movies. Samantha was my best friend in middle school. I would come home on certain days I had been bullied all day long and there she'd be, waiting for me. I would wrap my body around her soft fur (sometimes in tears) and she would offer me such a consoling and healing energy that I believe if it weren't for that, I would not have made it through high school. Sam could sense my moods like no one else. If she sensed I was sad, she'd immediately jump up into my bed and start kissing me. When I went away to college and would come home every weekend, she'd be there for me. In fact, she could almost always sense that I was coming home, about 10 or 15 minutes before I actually arrived. She was my rock; the one being in the universe who I knew could provide me with the comfort, love and support I needed to get through tough times. I was devastated when her precious life came to an end.

Since then, two more angels have entered my life. Bailey (my parents' dog) and my little Sadie. Just when I thought the current dog couldn't give me any more love than the previous one did, I'm proven wrong. My canine friends have taught me how to love, how to look beyond myself and take responsibility for the life of another creature, and how to receive love in return. I've learned just as much, if not more, from my dogs than from any human I've ever met. And I think it's fair to say that my best friends in life, thus far, have been these loving and loveable creatures.


It is very rare that I meet someone on the spectrum who doesn't like animals. Truth be told,

most autistics and animals get along very well with each other. Why is that? The first reason is that I believe we both know how to offer each other unconditional love. Autistics tend to judge people based on whether that person has earned their respect, not based on outer appearances or political motives. Animals are the same way. Autistics and animals are both extremely sensitive to sensory stimuli. They both communicate in a very “direct” way. Autistics usually don’t beat around the bush when communicating with other people and animals don’t either when communicating with their human owners.

If you are thinking of getting a pet, I’d encourage you to follow

through with it. Not only do numerous studies indicate you’ll live longer, have a better quality of life and experience fewer episodes of depression, you’ll spend part of your life with a companion who’ll love you for who you are on a daily basis. This can be particularly comforting if you plan on remaining single and living by yourself. Your new best friend will be there through thick and thin and help see you through the rough times as well as help you celebrate the good times. What more could you ask for in a friend?

Check back next issue to learn more about the process of adopting an animal, what that entails and things to consider along the way. 🐾



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