

NONFICTION –FIRST PLACE

The Year Was 1996

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The year was 1996, a time when every suburban four-year-old female's desire was to have a pony. She would watch movies about beautiful horses riding into the sunset, have pony-themed birthday parties, and sit on Santa's lap and demand a pony. I am not this little girl whom I am describing; she is a symbol of the time period, one I contradicted.

I wanted a dog. I wanted a dog more than anything in the world, more than I wanted Cinderella's dress, more than I wanted to be Simba from The Lion King, more than I wanted to never have to eat vegetables again. I wanted a dog. I watched movies about dogs and their adventures, I had dog-themed birthday parties, and I sat on Santa's lap and demanded a dog. I went to animal shelters and pet stores and looked at the dogs, wanting each and every one of them to be my new little brother and best friend.

Then, one day, the thrill of my life knocked on the door. But it didn't come forth without a proper introduction; my mom said, "Today, some people are coming over to show us a dog. His name is Sam." Oh. My. God. This was it! My chance! I could *actually* get a dog today! I was positive that this was the greatest moment of my life, greater than my graduation day would be, greater than my wedding would be, greater than the birth of my children would be. Nothing would ever equal this- I knew it!

Three people walked through the door with an adorable little ball of fur attached to a leash they were holding. He was no bigger than a breadbox and covered in long brown fur. The ears sticking out of his head were erect triangles and his nose was a shiny black circle. He was the cutest thing I had ever seen in my life. I turned to my mom. "I want him!"

My four-year-old cuteness sent off waves of persuasion, and next thing I knew, Sammy was mine.

The year was 1996, a time when every suburban four-year-old girl knew a suburban four-year-old boy whom she wanted to marry when she grew up. They were best friends, probably because their parents were best friends. They played together every day by the big tree at preschool recess, they told each other they loved each other, and they bought each other Christmas presents.

My boy was Jack. He had hair the color of fall leaves, glasses as thick as a double cheeseburger, and freckles polka-dotting his face. I drew black crayon pictures on yellow construction paper of Jack and me at our wedding and handy-tacked them all over the walls in my house. That Christmas, I wrapped Jack's present and Scotch-taped a wrapped candy cane to the top of it. Placing it under the Christmas tree, I left it there to wait for Christmas to arrive.

But it didn't have to wait long. Walking past the tree, I noticed that the candy cane was missing from the top of the present. Someone had already enjoyed it, and Christmas hadn't even come yet! As I wondered where the candy cane had gone, Sammy waddled into the room. I called my mom downstairs, wanting to know where Jack's candy cane went. If I couldn't have my present before Christmas, nobody could!

My mom made a keen observation. The fur outlining Sam's mouth was sticky. Quite sticky. And stuck to it were tiny little white shavings. Tiny little white shavings with hints of red. Tiny little white shavings with hints of red that smelled like peppermint...

I found this to be hilarious. I went to the kitchen to get Jack a new candy cane, attached it to his present, and thought about that day's funny event.

Later, I settled down with a binder, a stack of printer paper, and a pencil. I set to work, recalling

the day's episode, writing it down using grammar that would cause any English teacher to go into immediate cardiac arrest and drawing pictures that would make Michelangelo turn over in his grave. But as I fastened the illustrated pages into the binder, I sure was proud of it.

The year was 1996, and I wrote my first story.