

Committing to a dog after cancer

By Steven Petrow, *New York Times*

Leap Year Day, 1986: I drove up to a ramshackle house in Berkeley to pick out my first dog. It was a month before my two-year cancer anniversary, at which point I would be considered “cured,” and I was ready to make a commitment – to life, longevity and a puppy.

In a local paper I had seen an ad for a litter of cocker spaniels; among the nine pups I watched the runt get trampled over and pushed aside from the kibble. Too small for the forces stacked against her, but determined to stay in the game, the little female struck a chord in me. “That’s my dog,” I said as I paid two Benjamins for her. I know it sounds treacly, but it truly was “puppy love” at first sight.

It didn’t matter a bit to me that she was fully accredited by the American Kennel Club (which I figure is akin to being a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution). I was much more enthralled by her political lineage. Her “mother” and “father” had joined many Vietnam-era protests. Soon enough, this little dog would make her debut in San Francisco’s Gay and Lesbian Freedom Day Parade.

For 13 years, “Billie” was the four-legged love of my life. She was fearless: On hot days, she would leap into our backyard pool and then paddle to the steps, climb out, and do it all over again. She was peripatetic: Over her lifetime she obtained elite status on United, having flown miles and miles in the airline’s friendly skies. And she was smart: able to open doors with a single paw.

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