

*“...My first encounter with Buddy was at a festive New Years Eve party: I was dressed in my best outfit purchased specifically for this occasion while enjoying a delicious, freshly-mixed cocktail of vodka, cranberry and lots of ice. While involved in typical party conversation, I was not really focusing on anything else in the room around me, nor did I think it was necessary. I have to admit I did see him out of the corner of my eye, but it was just too late. I didn't think he would actually do it, but there it was-that look in his eye and all too satisfying smirk on his face. There was absolutely nothing I could do. I tried to move out of the way, but it all happened way too fast. I went from standing up enjoying a drink and remarkable conversation, to having my mid-section pummeled by this giant ball of fur. He already had my free hand in his mouth pulling me down, tail wagging one hundred miles per hour and I was now wearing my delicious drink on my brand new clothes. Before I could gain my composure, Buddy was already off to the next victim...”*

*-- (co-worker, upon first meeting Buddy)*

There is a time in everyone's life where they have been emotionally inspired or amazed by something that was completely unexpected or even considered impossible. Sometimes it is so touching, that they want to share their experience with the world and tell their story.

This particular story is about a precious heart along with a free-spirited little boy who owns that heart. This little boy has expressive brown eyes, a beautiful smile, and golden brown coat that he never takes off. He also has a huge pinkish-brown nose and four very fast legs. His name is Buddy. He answers to that...when he wants to.

### ***Chapter 1-Summer of '99***

*Each plan in life is derived from a single idea. Some ideas start in the least expected of places during the least likely of times. When an idea snowballs and takes on a life of its own; that is when it becomes a reality.*



I guess you can say it all started when I was working at a sunglass manufacturer as an Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) Specialist. (This is just a fancy title for someone who monitors the electronic transactions between the manufacturer and retail stores). This was a fun job, one where you did not need to dress up in uncomfortable business attire, the salary was not great, but it was respectable. The people were fun, the bosses were decent, the office was clean and for the most part, it was a fairly good job. It was here where I met my husband, Michael; we began dating approximately two years after I started my employment there (in the summer of 1999). It was the typical story of two goofy twenty-something year olds with the same wise-ass mentality, sharing many of the same principles, views on life and in Michael's words (or pick-up line), we were both half-orphans. He had lost his Mom to breast cancer while he was at the tender age of four. I had lost my Dad shortly after I had turned nine from a job-related illness.

In the year 2000, after working at this company for three years, I decided to make a drastic change and start looking for a new occupation. Although I loved the job and the line of work I was in, there were rumors circulating that our office was in the midst of closing down and I figured I had better be prepared and search for something just in case.

After reading the classifieds and modifying my resumé and cover letter over fifty times, I got a job working as a semi-producer (if there is such a thing) for a popular local news station's weekend program. Even though the decision was a bit scary at first, I had reluctantly given my resignation letter to my previous employer, said my good-bye's and started my journey on my new career path.

After just four short months, as I started to get acclimated and understand all aspects of the job including the software, technology, procedures, office politics, etc., I found out that *this* job was closing its doors as well! Needless to say, I was beginning to get a bit of a complex. I noticed a pattern and figured this time I should do a little more intense research before moving on to my next area of employment. Subsequent to sitting at my computer and looking through tons of ads, I finally sent my resumé to what I felt was going to be a decent and stable employer. I looked them up on the Internet, thoroughly read their website and thought I had plenty of detail to support my belief. They had been in business for over twenty years, had offices scattered around the country and I did not see any red flags. After interviewing with half of the people in the technology department and multiple visits to their office, I was finally offered the job and was scheduled to start a little later that summer. It was about time!

It was during these various job transitions that Michael and I were growing a bit closer in our relationship and discussing the possibility of living together. I was still residing at my mother's house, however, and he had owned his own home.

After some lengthy conversation, we also started toying with the idea of adopting a dog, more specifically a golden retriever, as we both loved their friendly, amusing temperament, but would just take quick browses through puppy stores and basically walk out. We were, after all, only toying with the idea. We were not even living together yet.

During that same time period, at my new job, a co-worker of mine was making conversation and coincidentally asked me if I knew anyone who wanted a dog. I wanted to raise my hand, jump up and down and scream out "Um, yea, me!" I somehow refrained from doing that, but instead tried to act sort of cool and disinterested without too much enthusiasm. Of course, I couldn't leave without asking *some* information about the dog. The questions that followed and their relative answers should tell the entire story. "What kind of dog is it?" "Ah, how old?" "Hmm, why are they getting rid of it?" "Boy or girl?" "Does it bite?" "Is it housebroken?" "Hey...what is the dog's name?"

He was not really too sure of the specifics at that precise point in time, and probably did not realize he was talking to an obsessed dog fanatic, but he said he would speak to his friend and find out more detailed information for me. He did give me a brief synopsis regarding his first encounter with Buddy at a party his friends had thrown, (described in the quote at the beginning of this book).

I got a surge of excitement about the idea and then quickly calmed myself down, went back to my desk, tried to keep my mind focused on work and really did not think much more of it until I went home later that evening.

That night, during dinner, I spoke to my future husband and mentioned the conversation that I had with my co-worker, with no real intention of going to meet this dog. I did, however,

have my co-worker's phone number just in case. I did not really think we would entertain the idea as we already had so much going on in our lives already.

"Why not?" we decided. Let's just find out more about him. There is no harm in just finding out some information, is there? So, after we cleaned the dishes and put them in their allotted places in the cupboard, we called him that same night. He was actually going to be visiting this same friend's house anyway and figured we would probably be able to get all of the answers that we needed about the dog. We were still just in the research stage and had no real plans of adopting. A dog could live as long as eighteen years (or longer in rare occasions), and is definitely a strong commitment. We just were not entirely sure if we were ready for the long-haul responsibility of taking care of something for years to come.

We called anyhow, just out of curiosity and asked all of the relevant questions. We found out it was a purebred golden retriever. Coincidentally, this was just the breed we were seeking. Both my cousin and a friend of ours owned this type of puppy and we absolutely loved it. From both parties, we knew that the breed seemed to be best known for their well-behaved and friendly temperament, in addition to their beautiful, golden coat and communicative eyes. This particular one was about a year and a half years old; male. He was up to date on his shots, neutered, housebroken and did not bite. "His name...is Buddy."

Buddy. We had to see him. Even just to play with him for a little while. Why would anyone give him up? There has got to be something else going on. This was really too good to be true. No one in their right mind would just voluntarily give up a beautiful, young golden retriever. We made plans to go see him over the upcoming weekend.

That Sunday we woke up early as we normally did, stopped for some breakfast at the town diner down the block and made our way to the dog owner's home in Long Island to meet the infamous pup. We pulled up to a beautiful, large Victorian house with a circular driveway on a tree-lined cul-de-sac. Two young children happily answered the door and their mom trailed promptly behind them. We introduced ourselves and explained that we were there to meet the pup. The mother seemed friendly enough as she led us down the stairs to the secluded basement where we would soon find out was Buddy's only room. As we descended, we immediately noticed Buddy in the corner by himself quietly minding his own business and chewing on his rawhide bone. That is, until he perked his ears up, looked toward the stairs with his adorable eyes and noticed us walking toward him.

Have you ever been in the ocean when the waves were so high you could not keep afloat and it seemed like every time you caught your breath...another wave came to knock you over? If so, this is the best way I could describe Buddy's first reaction to us.

With his rawhide bone in his mouth, he started barking as he saw us, ran to us and jumped on us like he never saw people before. For those of you who know that golden retriever smile, it was broader than I have ever seen. He would keep tossing the bone up in the air a little bit, not quite letting go, but not quite wanting to hold it. He was indecisive about whether he should keep his bone or bark...so balancing the bone between his teeth, he did both. He was absolutely overjoyed.

We still could not understand why these people were getting rid of this bundle of love. His tail was wagging a million miles an hour and was just completely in his element. All this dog wanted to do was love and be loved. It was written all over his furry face. He was absolutely beautiful. He got this tone in his voice that was not quite a cry, not truly a bark, but it was something in between. With his bone in his mouth, he uttered a noise I had never heard before, which would soon become known as his trademark "Buddy" bark. To describe it would

be somewhat ridiculous, and I am certain spell check will not like it, but I will certainly give it a whirl. It went somewhat like “a woo woo woo woوو woوووووووو,” the last carrying a somewhat higher, more intense, uneven pitch than the others.

As the owner struggled to control Buddy, she clumsily attached his chewed up leather leash to his collar and started to give us some background on him. She explained that they tried to surrender him to Golden Retriever Rescue, but there was an extremely long waiting list for that and there was no room yet there for Buddy. She was already his second...and then third owner. His first owner gave him up because he was way too big for a small apartment. The current owners had also then given him up to someone who promptly returned him a day later claiming they could not handle him and “good luck!”

If we did take him, we would essentially be his fourth owners. “If” being the operative word. If we did not take him, they were going to put him in a shelter. They did do the right thing by trying to find him a good home but unfortunately, had no luck in doing so. He was getting too difficult to manage and they were ready to be done with him. It was the usual sad unwanted puppy dog story; his time was essentially running out. Different shelters follow different rules, but there are some kill shelters that give the dog a certain period of time until they get adopted. If they go over that time period, they are put to sleep. There are just too many stray dogs and not enough facilities or financial means to accommodate all of them.

We, of course, needed to find out what the catch was. He must bite and they are just not telling us. Or maybe he has some medical condition in which they just did not feel like disclosing to us. He looked healthy and seemed like a normal, yet overly energetic year and half old pup. He did not appear to be vicious, though some dogs tend to show their vicious tendencies under different circumstances.

We asked some more specific questions, such as how he was with kids, dogs, men, women, etc. To all questions, she answered pretty much the same thing. “He was fine, never had a vicious episode, just a bit hyper.” We asked how he was on walks and in the car to which she answered that she did not know as they never really got the chance to take him for either. He was let out in their backyard, but did not get to run around at all because it was not fenced in. He was basically walked back there on a leash to do his business and then put back in the lonely, dark basement. After questioning her on the personality of this dog and wondering what his main issue was for a few minutes, we were still not seeing the entire picture, so we pressed on a little more to reveal the unsolved mystery. He was definitely an excitable dog, but we figured it was just because he was happy to see new people.

She simply explained they were giving him up because her and her husband worked long hours. It was difficult to entertain this dog after a long work day. Also, he chews a lot and jumps a lot. “He jumps on the kids. He jumps on company. He knows his commands, but does not obey them. He eats things that he should not be eating.” They came across him eating the children’s building blocks and crayons and they were not really sure what else. He was a little wild and a lot out of control so they had him on medication to calm him down...sort of like a puppy Prozac. He was a year and a half, still more or less a puppy. It was all starting to come together. A puppy locked in the basement for twelve hours each day without any chance to run free has unreleased energy. Hmm, wouldn’t you act the same way?

We were there long enough to take notice in their futile attempt at training techniques. When he jumped, they gave him a treat to get him down. When he mouthed us or anything else, they gave him a treat to remove his mouth. We noticed an immediate pattern. The owners did what they thought was right in getting Buddy to behave. What they did not count on was that

this dog was highly intelligent and realized just what to do to get a treat. Knowing this, he did the things he got rewarded for doing; good or bad.

Many unsuspecting owners might have done the same thing. It is a common mistake and it happens all too often. You really can't fault someone if they are not used to dealing with a really smart dog. (At least that's what I keep telling myself)! The problem is that with an intelligent dog, they easily learn how to manipulate any situation to get what they want. The hard truth is that your dog is the way it is because you actually trained it to be that way. Most people can't accept this fact, but it is true. If you have a dog since it was a puppy, you are the only master, aside from its birth mother, that the dog has ever known.

This was unquestionably the case with Buddy. Buddy got treats whenever he wanted, and he also associated doing these bad behaviors with getting his treats! He was not necessarily a "bad" dog. He was just doing what he learned and what he interpreted in his little intelligent mind to be "good" things.

After a few more enjoyable moments of sitting on the cold floor with this charming, playful pup, we thanked the couple for allowing us to visit with Buddy and went on our way. Covered in dog hair and a good portion of doggy drool, we walked up the stairs and out of the house into the frigid December air. Buddy was still jumping on and clinging to us on our way out. We could still hear his desperate barking as the door closed behind us. I was thinking "No way." There was no way we would be able to accommodate the needs of this crazy, disobedient dog. I was already onto my next thought of what to do for the remainder of the day, not even thinking that adopting him was a remote possibility.

When we reached the bottom of the driveway, I playfully posed the question to Michael. I really just wanted to gauge his reaction and wholeheartedly expected him to laugh. "So, what do you think?" His answer, however, was the complete opposite of what I was expecting. "Absolutely, let's adopt him."

When I heard his response, I sort of got a bit lightheaded and automatically started to have a little lack of confidence in my dog training ability. To say I was stunned is an understatement. I was never predicting that to be his answer and still kind of just looked at Michael to try and read him and see if he was serious. Why was he even joking like this? I love all dogs, regardless of breed but Michael had never owned a dog. I thought **this** one would be a complete turn off. I envisioned Michael's "starter dog" to be somewhat calm, well behaved and easy to manage. Instead, his reply was "Let's call them first thing tomorrow and say we will take him."

While I was, of course, absolutely thrilled with the idea, I still had my doubts that I would personally be able to handle such a crazed animal. Growing up, we had many family dogs, but I was the youngest in the family and never really spent time training them. They just sort of always seemed trained. I usually just spent time playing with them. I never really questioned it. This would be my first real test at responsibility. We would have to figure out how to train him. He would not just "magically" be trained. Was I up for the proposed challenge? Was Michael?

Still in awe, and feeling mixed emotions of both joy and trepidation, I made the phone call once we got home and with a little shakiness in my voice said that we would happily adopt Buddy. We made our plans to pick him up on Thursday evening after work. I could not figure out why, but I was nervous all week and could not wait to get him. I felt like I was expecting a baby, albeit an eighty pound baby with lots of fur, but a baby nonetheless. I was also extremely happy. I don't think I slept all week!

I remember stopping at a local pet store prior to getting him and walked up and down the aisles in sort of a cosmic daze. Not really knowing what he liked, I picked up a small bag of food, a variety of treats, stuffed animals and various squeaky toys of different shapes and sizes. I really could not concentrate all week in anticipation of adopting this crazed pup.

We cleaned the entire house and doggy-proofed it the best that we could. We had it all meticulously planned out. Michael, his niece and I were going to take two cars. Michael would drive his home with the crate and all of Buddy's belongings. Michael's niece and I were to drive home with Buddy. We would then have a few quality hours during the night to spend with him. What do they say about the best thought out plans?

### ***Chapter 2-Thursday December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2000.***

*The shortest day of the year. The official Winter Solstice. The longest drive home. The day Michael and I officially became insane.*



We arrived at the house and the actual owners were surprisingly not home but one of their relatives was there waiting for us. She was very kind and gave us all of Buddy's toys, food, treats, his blanket and his crate at no charge. She went over his feeding schedule with us as well as the commands that he knew. She showed us his veterinary papers proving he was up to date on all of his shots and gave us some other papers, including the name of his breeder, his first owner, the toys he likes and other random information. This dog probably cost them close to \$1,000 (if not more) as he was from a breeder, but yet they were giving him to us for free, along with all of his belongings.

We asked if she would like us to wait for the owners and their kids to say goodbye to him. Her answer was pretty firm, "No, Buddy probably would not even recognize them to say goodbye." We kind of just stared at her for a minute or two in disbelief. We then caught on and got the idea. This family was just happy to be rid of him. We found it a bit disheartening that his own family would not say goodbye, even the kids, and our hearts immediately went out to him. We had said our brief goodbyes, received some hand-written instructions, a few more veterinary papers...and Buddy. I do commend them for endlessly searching for a home for him and making sure his health was not neglected in the interim. Some people have been known to dump their unwanted dog in some remote area, left by themselves to fend for food, shelter and protection, or even worse.

As we ascended the basement stairs en route to the car, Buddy did not seem to have a care that he was leaving. All of this seemed to be a good time to him...or maybe he just knew something that we did not.

I had owned many dogs growing up so I was quite used to driving with them in the car. This was not going to be any different, or at least that is what I had thought. I never really contemplated it until I actually made my first attempt to drive.

I had made it approximately fifteen feet when I was forced to stop my car right there in the middle of the road. Michael stopped next to me in his car and was curiously looking at me

trying to figure out why in the world I would just stop. That is, of course, until he noticed the eighty pound dog with his paws wrapped around my neck from the back. I simply could not move. The only choice I **had** was to stop. I could not even turn the steering wheel. Buddy was so excited he was jumping back and forth from the back seat into the front seat, onto our laps, and of course, he wrapped his two front paws around my neck giving me the biggest bear hug he could muster. Lesson learned: *Do not ever doubt the strength of golden retrievers.*