

There are many different types of love in this world. I've held them up close in the palm of my hand, I've felt them deeper than any cut or wound, the experiences finer than any grain of sand. I've even been married once (and sadly divorced too, for it was not meant to be), which means that I appreciate the value of true love.

I've lost people that I hold dear to illness and disease, leaving me heartbroken for days, death may have taken them away but the love for them does not and will never fade. I've fallen for characters in books and films time and time again without hesitation. I am a romantic at heart, a poet who embraces every aspect and facet of this emotional feeling that we choose to call love.

Yet none of these interpretations of a very complex emotional state truly compares to the love and affection given unconditionally from a pet, right from the first moment when you adopt them as one of your own to that fateful day when they grow old and you have to say goodbye.

It is something about the magnificence of their eyes and how richly evocative they are in defining the uniqueness of their character. One look from an endearingly cute creature and I'm instantly smitten.

When I continue to look into the eyes of an animal that I have taken in to nurture as a part of my immediate family, who will share key defining moments of my life, I see in their gaze a distillation of admiration, trust, friendship, and respect.

There are no agendas, false pretenses, or subtle nuances that need to be picked up on, unlike when interacting with human friends, family or acquaintances. Animals have a very clear ability to communicate their feelings and desires with the minimum amount of effort. Their love is pure, decent, and not prone to waning over time. If you look after an animal, its love will be eternal.

I've had the privilege of caring for cats, birds, dogs, guinea pigs, hamsters, fish, and bunny rabbits as pets. All of them have had their own particular quirks and behaviors that could be both entertaining, as well as frustrating at times (curiosity can be oh-so-fun but oh-so-destructive), yet that is all part of their intrinsic and infinite charm. When we want, need, or crave a friend, they are always there for us, through thick and thin, they never judge and are a sympathetic ear to lean on.

When I was going through the end of my marriage and felt like my partner no longer cared about me, I would come home and could still feel the passion in the room exuding from my excited dog, who couldn't wait to see me, despite the distant, disdainful demeanour of my spouse. My dog and I spent many fond evenings together exchanging smiles and cuddling my sadness away – the world was a far more bearable place because of her wonderful attitude toward me. We shared a bond that could never be broken.

I also distinctly remember the warmth of sentiment from my cat Aristides (we called him that because I am part Greek). He used to be so determined to rub his face against mine after hours apart when I returned from work, it wasn't enough for me to bend down to him. He had to get up to my level and would jump up onto my back. Despite the pain that this caused (and unintentional hilarity to my other family members), I still remember dearly the devotion that he was trying to express to me when he was doing this so many years ago. I miss him dearly. He resonates in my heart and I still feel that there are echoes of him, purring in my soul to this very day.

I honestly believe that in the fullness of time, I would like to experience caring for a whole gamut of other animals, literally anything that is fluffy and can be kept as a pet. Even the bigger ones too like horses, kangaroos, and elephants. However, I would never have spiders or in particular snakes

because I'm too afraid that one day I might end up as their lunch. I often joke that Indiana Jones is my spirit animal and I take after the character in exactly this way.

Charles Dickens once said – “What greater gift than the love of a cat.”

I think Charles was right but his statement is not completely true. I am going to go one further and say “What greater gift than the love of a pet.”

Unconditional to the very end.