

My hound up in heaven for blog number 7

There are a number of reasons as to why I attempted to take my own life. Some of which might potentially seem more justified than others for those reading. Some of which might even seem a little more dramatic or even questionable. However, having done my own research into mental health with suicide being the main focus, so much so that I even completed a six month course on self-harm awareness and suicide prevention with Portsmouth college, to which I gained a recognised, certified qualification. I have since gained a much greater understanding on mental health, or be it suicide. I'm no professional and will never claim to know it all, however having been there myself, experienced the waves of emotion and even worn that mask of happiness to appear to others looking on that I was simply 'ok' I do have a greater understanding than many of the psychiatrists or Doctors I see regularly, to just what it actually feels like first hand to feel that the life you live is simply not worth living anymore. Feeling false to all those you see regularly, pretending all is fine when in reality it really isn't. I've been that individual that appears to all that are looking on that all is well while being the life and soul of a party or be it the fun, energetic, happy go lucky kind of person when around other individuals, as that is purely what is or has always been expected of you. To see you any different would only be questionable, awkward, weird or simply unimaginable. On completing my course to self-harm, suicide awareness and prevention, it was explained repeatedly that no two people are ever the same when dealing with their own mental health issues. Meaning that everyone should be treated as an individual when it comes to aiding them with their mental health, regardless of reasoning, background, situation or initial assumptions potentially assumed. Everyone should be treated as an individual regardless.

Something I'll never forget was when I went to see my last client of the day, having already ridden eight horses that baking hot day, arriving to my ninth feeling fine and dandy, only to be asked what was wrong with me? Purley because I didn't appear to be as energetic as normal!? Now although this was simply a question of concern, for me it actually put me in a mood, a different state of mind. Especially as I did genuinely feel ok and with no issues to report back on. It may sound a bit dramatic but until you're in that position you'll never truly know how someone's initial 'good intentions' can result in making another feel. Keeping in mind I was about to work with my ninth horse of the day, besides the fact of it being a baking hot summers day, I'd been on the go since the crack of dawn, driving here, there and everywhere and all while managing a yard, to which I knew I had to go to after finishing with my ninth client to finish off some jobs. Not to mention the constant calls and texts received from not only other clients but also friends I had building up. I also had other personal issues I was to face that no one was aware of. One of which being the realisation that my much loved companion of ten years was nearing her time to pass over. A day I had been dreading for many, many weeks. It was no surprise I didn't have that usual spring in my step.

Until you've experienced the love of a dog, that unconditional affection that comes with no judgement, holds no grudges and forever is as loyal through even the darkest of times experienced, you'll never truly know just what that one little four legged being can do for a

person. Something in my opinion no human could ever do or achieve. Saying good bye to my darling Betsy Boo was and still is something I'll never forget or even comprehend getting over. Now I've owned an array of animal's over the years, some of which have died due to nature taking its course, but for my soul mate Betsy, I've never felt heart ache like it. So much so that even as I write this blog my eyes are filled with tears ready to flow, regardless of the fact that she left my side on the 20th July 2023, a day I'll always honour in her memory.

Now just for clarification, I'm not blaming the passing of my much loved friend on my decision in attempting to take my own life but purely as a contributing factor to many other things leading up to that time when deciding for certain that I wanted to end my own life. Betsy was by my side for a solid ten years, being the most consistent and loyal companion a person could ever ask for. Not to mention the most consistent, longest relationship I had ever had. She travelled with me daily while working in London from Twickenham and Cobham, living a life within the glitz and glamour of the West End theatre industry and being a familiar face to many of the theatres. She had seen many people come and go over the years, be that the fair weather friends to the long standing friends or the very rare and random lad that would simply pop round to 'clean my pipes' out, not to mention those I fell into relationships with. She was by my side through the break ups, through the low times and the high times. She travelled everywhere with me, even when doing my skydive or when moving to Spain. She would sit happily on any horse I placed her upon for a photo, comfort me while nursing many a hangover, moved countless times to different homes for various reasons, witnessed things I dare not even begin to mention, purely for the fact of not knowing where to start! But most of all she saved me when she originally come into my life, saved me from myself and gave me a reason to live each day. In all honesty it was me who needed her more than she needed me and for that I'll be forever grateful for. But as we all know, nothing good can last forever, unfortunately.

They say a dog is a man's best friend, and that she was. If not more, an additional limb that I didn't know I needed till our paths crossed. She was by my side pretty much every day of her 10 years apart from the odd little holiday here and there. The longest time we had apart was when COVID arrived, with me being stuck in the UK and my entire life's possessions and Betsy, stuck in Spain. Five long months apart. Five long months where I didn't hear her snore, grunt, fart, bark at the TV or be covered in her fur from having a cuddle on the sofa in front of the TV. Although she was very much looked after and with regular updates given, she was missed terribly by myself, while she was preoccupied with making her very own unique impression on those that were looking after her. Making impressions on others that met her, she had down to a fine art. Although some could say she was just a dog, a pug to be exact, she was in a different league with her character and way of going. I suppose it could be referred to as me being biased, considering the fact that she was after all my very own sidekick however many would complement her with her way of going and the certain traits she held. I'll be forever grateful to those that took care of her throughout COVID, allowing her into their home and to be treated like one of their own rather than that of another dog that was purely there for boarding. And that's said with no malice to the care given to those that were in boarding as the care given to all was 10/10 having worked myself at this particular doggy grooming parlour / boarding kennels, but knowing she had those little home comforts eased the heartache I felt in her absence.

Betsy arrived into my life through pure fate. I wasn't particularly wanting or even ready for a dog at the time Betsy entered my life, however I've since come to realise that life presents itself with not only challenges but also opportunities for one reason or another, these often being at times slightly inconvenient to the path we are on. I've always said I'd get a Boston Terrier if I was to ever get a dog. A breed in which I've always been attracted to and still intend on owning at some point or another. However to receive a pug from a very good friend of mine who I'm still very much in contact with and again with Mr Hindsight on my side, Betsy Boo could not have come at a better time. For it was prior to her arrival that my own mental health was on a downward spiral, suffering with depression as well as anxiety while lacking any motivation to want to do much, despite having horses at the time to which you would think that I'd be kept busy, entertained and happy but unfortunately depression doesn't work like that. Betsy came into my life and gave me a reason to wake up every day and actually leave my house. She would travel with me daily on the train into London while working in events, making many commuters smile, some of which would even ask for photos with her. I'd spend my lunch breaks walking her through Hyde park or even through Soho, to which she attracted a lot of attention. Spending her days asleep on my desk or passed around the office for a cuddle. She soon became a well-known face on my regular train into London not to mention when needing to visit a theatre for whatever reason. Work aside and now living in Twickenham, Betsy soon became accustomed to what it took to be a good pub dog. Something of which she mastered very quickly, lapping up any attention on offer or dog treat offered from behind the bar. Betsy was just the tonic I needed, so much so that one day I completely forgot to take my daily antidepressants. With one day turning into two, then three I soon remembered that I had not been taking them and with that I binned them for good. Something that is not advised to anyone while taking any medication prescribed by their doctor. I got a stern telling off from my doctor when he soon realised I had not asked for a repeat prescription but for all I cared about was the there and then, with Betsy bringing so much joy and happiness to my life. Being depressed or even considering any thought of suicide was totally out of the question, for who would look after Betsy? She was my responsibility, my get up and go and that was that.

Betsy suffered with seizures from around the age of two. Seizures in pugs being quite common and can present themselves due to various reasons. I remember her first one being while on the sofa watching Coronation Street one evening. Or another when simply in the back of the car and driving around the M25. Her seizures had no consistency and would come and go. Sometimes months would pass before she had a seizure, if not a solid year. A horrible sight to see but one I knew how to manage. Regular vet visits would be made however, with the seizures being so sporadic, it was hard to really diagnose a solution. I was also fully aware having done my own research that once having a seizure the likelihood of another happening could take place up to two weeks after that initial seizure. So I set about making my own precautions. Eliminating certain meat for example, being told lavender can be a triggering factor, aiming to make as little change or cause her stress as much as possible to her surroundings, eliminating any chemicals used such as flea treatments or even looking into what was actually given when yearly jabs were required. But even with my own safety precautions in place, I was also fully aware that a seizure could happen due to the stress of a situation that possibly happened months prior. So when I was handed a chihuahua the size of a tennis ball to keep, although I was totally smitten I was also very concerned how another dog would impact Betsy and her way of going.

With Betsy now being eight years old and having already experienced a lot of change that year, what with returning from Spain having been away from me for seven months in total and coming into a new home environment, not to mention the atmosphere in my home changing dramatically since the departure of an ex, the thought of another dog was questionable. However, I feel it was Pickles (my Chihuahua) that actually gave Betsy a new lease of life not to mention giving her the companionship she needed when deciding that she quite simply did not want to go to work that particular day. By this point I had been self-employed for a number of years as a horse trainer, which allowed me the flexibility of being able to go home throughout the day to check on the “kids” to which was all working out fine. The pair bonded well, however Betsy was always top dog and she made sure Pickles knew his position in the pecking order.

When it came to July 2023, despite previously questioning or more so being told to call it a day by friends due her fits becoming worse, even before Pickles arrived (two years prior) and what with her becoming sometimes incontinent while having a fit, I knew in my heart that her time was coming to an end. By this point her vision was limited and she was completely deaf. When she did want to walk, which was never far, she would only return home to do her outside business indoors! Now considering Betsy was pretty much house trained from day one of me getting her, I just knew that I was prolonging the inevitable. After one particular busy day at my yard, I decided to take both Betsy and Pickles to one of the resting fields for a walk given the sunshine and before driving home. It was at that moment that I looked at her while laying on my lap, that I felt her ribs and the excess of hair that she was moulting. I had always kept Betsy lean to help with her breathing, which was regularly complimented on by our vet on how exceptional she looked given her breed, however with now on four meals a day from initially only ever having two only to feel her so slim and fragile I knew I had to repay all that she had done for me by putting her at ease, regardless of what I truly wanted. I'll never forget standing up having made that decision and teary eyed that I proceeded to walk to my car but on turning around to notice that Betsy just laid out where I was sitting with her, with Pickles sat beside her licking her face as if he was also aware of what was about to come. My heart shattered.

While in COVID and very much aware that BETSY was getting older, I had a Facebook page pop up for taxidermy. Only to later find out that the page belonged to a lady that once went to school with the friend I was staying with while stuck in the UK due to COVID. We initially exchanged some emails and it was decided that I would have Betsy sent for taxidermy once her final day had arrived. With that day in sight I emailed this lady to enquire about what I needed to do, to which she explained I would need to wrap her in a towel and place her in my freezer. However, unfortunately she was going on holiday so would not be available till the August. With this in mind and not able to see my darling Betsy suffer anymore, I called my vet to arrange for her to be put to sleep. Shocked and lost for words at the offer of sorting it the following evening, I agreed. 20th July 2023 at 7pm. I counted down the hours that day in anticipation, still not fully understanding what it was I was doing as everything seemed so quick but I knew it was for the best. Once arriving to my vet, he agreed that I was doing the best thing and could clearly see the signs of internal concern, potentially cancerous, being deaf, blind and now incontinent. I explained about the seizures and made it clear that I don't want her under any stress to bring on a seizure. He sympathised and with that gave her an injection of sedation before administering that final drug to send her on her way. Champagne was popped while her sedation kicked in however, half an hour later she was suddenly full of life and still very much fighting the sedation

given, much to the surprise of myself and my vet having arrived so limp and lifeless. With the sedation running its course and Betsy fighting it, her final injection was inserted while she laid in my arms, taking her final breath and going to sleep. I wrapped her up in a towel as informed by the lady who was going to carry out the taxidermy and placed her in my small fridge freezer while the tears flowed continuously for many days after. Being only a small fridge freezer, the freezer was out of bounds completely due to her occupying it and waiting to hear more back from the lady that had agreed to do the taxidermy.

August come and went. A message was received in the September saying she was now going through a divorce so would not be able to assist me for a little while however she could hold onto her until she was back in action and working. Having read this message and what with it now being the middle of September, I decided to do some of my own research. Something I should have done way before I put all my faith into this one woman. There were countless taxidermy professionals that all stated quite clearly that pets should never be considered for taxidermy as they won't look the same, causing more heartache. There was also something called skin slip that can happen with any animal meaning that even if I wanted her put into taxidermy she might have skin slip, meaning the taxidermy would not work. Furthermore while I was originally told it would take three months to do, many other sites stated one to two years to complete, not to mention three times the cost if not more of what I was originally quoted! So there I was with my darling Betsy in the freezer, two months after initially being put to sleep.

I'd like to take the opportunity to point out now that I have told this story on numerous occasions and I give full permission for anyone to laugh at what can only be described as a shit show of events! With knowing all of this new information found, I was quite frankly in limbo as to what I should do for I never wanted her ashes sat on a side collecting dust. Yet I didn't want to be without her, hence the idea of taxidermy. Some of which may or more so not agree with. But if you don't know me personally then having an opinion be it positive or not is irrelevant. I was doing as I was told in the hope to receive my Betsy back looking like she did but in taxidermy form. However, as time went on and having fallen through a glass door only to break my leg in the October which lead into the November meaning I was out of action completely, only to add more stress and pressure on life itself, it was not until the 2nd December 2023 that I had made the decision to have Betsy cremated. Six months after being placed in my freezer having been put to sleep.

Having arranged for a same day cremation, which basically meant I could collect her ashes on the same day as drop off and having mentioned the fact that she will be frozen following initial plans to have her put into taxidermy, not to mention being fully prepared with a large ice box to transport her, all systems were go. My freezer had not been opened since the 20th July so I was unsure on what I was fully letting myself in for, but upon opening my small freezer, it soon dawned on me that liquids turn into solids when frozen. Something I had not even considered! Removing Betsy from my freezer was no easy task, meaning I had to chisel away at the ice built up around the red towel she was wrapped in, placing one foot on the fridge freezer and pulling on the towel for just some movement was no easy task. With more chiselling and tugging, Betsy soon enough come flying out of my freezer, with the freezer now being in the middle off the

kitchen from the pure pulling on the towel and my darling Betsy frozen on the floor, unravelled from the frozen towel and to my horror, not fawn like she went in but RED from the red towel I had placed her in!!! The lady who was going to perform the taxidermy did not state what colour the towel had to be for me to even realise that the dye might fade in Betsy's coat! With the waterworks going and the pure shock of it all making me want to laugh yet feeling so awful for letting her get to that stage having put my trust into this lady who was going to put her into taxidermy, I quickly wrapped her up, looking like Clifford the big red dog and placed her in the cool box ready to take to the crematorium.

Thankfully this cool box was on wheels, so on arrival I went into the crematorium on my own with Betsy being wheeled in behind me. We were escorted to a private room where I placed the ice box on the table. I was asked if I wanted to see her to which I declined and explained again the reasoning for her being frozen through sobs of tears. I was then given a moment alone to say my final farewell, where I proceeded to cry on top of that icebox like I've never cried before. Thanking Betsy for all she had done for me and apologising for being confined to my freezer for months with no real idea on what I was doing. Looking back now, although I knew Betsy was no longer alive, in a weird sort of way, knowing she was still with me, even though in my freezer, delayed my grieving period somewhat. On looking around this room I had noticed some clay pawprints that were available to purchase should you want to purchase one of your own dogs paws. Once the lovely lady returned to take Betsy I requested if I could please have a clay pawprint made, using one of Betsy's paws, to which she replied that she would need to enquire first given her current state. Both doors were then opened and Betsy was wheeled out of the room, leaving me crying in complete devastation. Upon the return of this lovely lady she apologised and explained that unfortunately, given that Betsy is frozen she would need a few days to defrost before a paw print could be taken, while making an expression as to what Betsy looked like with her hands scrunched up in front of her face. This not only made me laugh awkwardly but cry even more and I declined the paw print, keen to have her ashes home. I was asked ever so politely a few more times which only made me laugh more while crying before leaving with my borrowed ice box and red towel.

Hours later and having decided to go all out for Christmas 2023, so much so that I purchased my first ever real Christmas tree to distract myself! Or even a Christmas tree for that matter, I returned to collect Betsy's ashes. Shaped in a tube similar to that of a pringles pot but much smaller, I placed her very delicately in my cup holder. Having decorated my Christmas tree with various ornaments, all of which were brand new and having had Betsy's urn arrive, the place I wanted her urn and a photo of her from her modelling days was just beside the Christmas tree on top of a cabinet. Ashes removed from the tube they come in and placed in the urn and picture under my arm ready to stick on display, I noticed the surface could do was a quick dusting. Having returned with some furniture polish and a duster, I lent against the Christmas tree to dust this high up surface, only to knock three glass baubles off my tree, stepping on the glass in the process which meant I didn't just drop the photo I had under my arm but also the urn that was full of Betsy's ashes, which proceeded to roll across my rug, pouring out her ashes in the process and ending up under my parrot cage!!

With glass in my foot, Betsy spread across the living room, my parrot (Feathers) saying all sorts and Pickles licking my tears I just sat on the floor in complete despair. From where I was sitting and from the position in which the photo of Betsy landed, she was looking straight at me with her boggle eyes. I just ended up simply laughing to myself, wiping away the tears. For as traumatic as that day was, from start to finish, I don't think Betsy would have been phased in the slightest, if anything it would have been quite normal. For all the sights and experiences that gorgeous little being had experienced in the ten years of being by my side, that was her finale. As crazy and as frantic as it was, she left me with a memory that I'll never be able to forget, a story I still cry over when telling others while laughing. Her picture did eventually get placed on that shelf and I swept up as much of her ashes as possibly able, even if her little urn now also contained shards of glass with my blood on and bird seed Feathers had chucked out of her food bowl along with whatever else come out of that rug, be if crumbs from a biscuit or fluffs or hair.

I'll always miss that little face and can quite honestly say that she will never be able to be replaced, taking a part of me when she finally went on.

One thing I will mention is that on one occasion and while in hospital recovering, I woke up one night, delirious and half asleep, certain that she was asleep in her usual position, wrapped up in front of me while I was in bed. I went to the toilet not giving it a second thought and gently crawled back into bed, closing my eyes to fall back asleep. Before quickly realising where I was not to mention that Betsy was no longer alive for such a thing to happen! A memory ill treasure forever.

To my Betsy Boo, I thank you. I thank you for everything and more, more than you'll ever truly know. I love you X

Betsy Boo 2013 – 2023

NMD

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