

(Free) Gizelle's Bucket List: My Life with a Very Large Dog

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Lauren Fern Watt

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Lauren Fern Watt : Gizelle's Bucket List: My Life with a Very Large Dog before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Gizelle's Bucket List: My Life with a Very Large Dog:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. I cried... of course I cried, but I cried for about 40 pages. By Cortney Why I picked this one up: (Knowing I would cry) Because I grew up with English Mastiffs. I grew up at dog shows, veterinary clinics, raising and eventually selectively breeding them. Our male was ranked one of the top 100 mastiffs in the United States. Our puppies were potty trained before they left our house, and they ALWAYS smelled like baby wipes. I remember the beautiful blue eyes of the puppies the day they opened their little eyes, and I remember them being so top heavy that when they started to push themselves up, they would topple over bc their

heads weighted too much. And that puppy breath!

The playful, epic adventure of a 160-pound English Mastiff and the twentysomething girl who grew up alongside her Marley Me for a whole new generation. Lauren Watt took her 160-pound English Mastiff to college so of course after graduation, Gizelle followed Lauren to her first, tiny apartment in New York. Because Gizelle wasn't just a dog; she was a roommate, sister, confidante, dining companion, and everything in between. Together, Gizelle and Lauren went through boyfriends, first jobs, a mother's struggle with addiction, and the ups and downs of becoming an adult in the big city. But when Gizelle got sick and Lauren realized her best friend might not be such a constant after all, she designed an epic bucket list to make the absolute most of the time they had left. Bursting with charm, this unique, coming-of-age story of a girl making her way through life is a testament to the special way pets inspire us to live better, love better, and appreciate the simple pleasures. Gizelle's Bucket List is the humorous, poignant lesson our pets teach us: to embrace adventure, love unconditionally, and grow into the people we want to be.

"An inspirational, uplifting experience that will leave you feeling that anything is possible. For anyone who has had a pet; who has loved and lost; who has hoped for the future, this is an enchanting story of an unlikely journey that will stay with you for a long time." ELLE UK "For anyone who's ever owned and lost a dog, this account holds familiar strains of sadness, comfort, and hope." Booklist "As much a story about growing up as about letting go of things that cannot be changed, Watt's book is also a reminder of the profound healing connection that can exist between humans and the pets they love. A tender, heartfelt story." Kirkus "An extraordinary book wonderfully moving, beautifully written, and sure to resonate with anyone lucky enough to have loved an animal who changed her life. This one will earn a permanent spot in your library and in your heart." Gwen Cooper, New York Times bestselling author of HOMERS ODYSSEY: A Fearless Feline Tale, or How I Learned about Love and Life with a Blind Wonder Cat "Gizelle's Bucket List is a story that will be loved by anyone who has ever loved a dog. Lauren Fern Watt poignantly captures the unique joy and heartbreak of sharing one's life with a great dog and how such a dog's love and loyalty can carry us through life's moments big and small." Teresa Rhyne, New York Times bestselling author of THE DOG LIVED (AND SO WILL I) "Gizelle's Bucket List explores the unique bond and complete integration of spirit that can occur between a human and a dog and make us better than who we were. Told with humor and compassion, this book will also move you to tears." Larry Levin, New York Times bestselling author of OOGY: The Dog Only a Family Could Love "There are a thousand ways to say good-bye to someone who has stolen your heart. Gizelle's Bucket List is one of the best: sad and funny, wise and uplifting." Ted Kerasote, nationally bestselling author of MERLES DOOR: Lessons from a Freethinking Dog "Gizelle, big-bodied, big-spirited, inconveniently big at times is a big-hearted mastiff in declining health who uses a bucket list tour, a loving gift from her human (the author), to quietly wiggle a return gift into Lauren's own big heart." Steve Wolf, author of COMETS TALE: How the Dog I Rescued Saved My Life About the Author Lauren Watt was born in Dallas, Texas, and grew up in the suburbs of Nashville, Tennessee. After college, she moved to a tiny New York apartment with her 160-pound English Mastiff, Gizelle. Her first book, Gizelle's Bucket List, has been translated into eleven languages and optioned for film. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Gizelle's Bucket List We promised ourselves we were just going to look. Mom and I were sitting in the parking lot of CVS on Franklin Road. It was 10 a.m. and humid already in Brentwood, the suburb of Nashville where I grew up. The windshield faced a line of trees and we were facedown in the The Tennessean classifieds, shopping in our favorite section. The puppy section. We had no business browsing in the puppy section that day. Back home we already had two dogs, Yoda and Bertha, not to mention a slew of other critters and this other unsolvable family problem I doubted the new puppy would know how to fix. Lab? I suggested, biting into my everything bagel. Mom shook her head, mouth full, too. She gave me a thumb up in the air. Bigger! Coonhound? Ehh. She thought it over. Isn't a coonhound UT's mascot or something, sweetie? She was right. The droopy-eared, jowly coonhound was the mascot of the Vols, the football team at the University of Tennessee where I'd be starting as a transfer sophomore in the fall. Would purchasing the mascot be a little too smells-like-team-spirit for the new girl on campus? Having the same thought, our eyes met and we both smiled. Ever since I'd come home this summer, Mom had developed a new hankering for facetime in the mornings, suggesting a Starbucks/Bruegger's bakery hit-and-run a few times a week: bagels to go and some super-sugary coffee thing. Then we'd park the car in an empty parking lot somewhere just a few miles from a proper kitchen table in our own house, this way we could talk. Just the two of us. And in my mother's case, our talks usually consisted of her apologizing and reminding me she was totally 100 percent fine. Then she would look down at her lap, waiting for my usual: Its okay. Its fine! I believe you. And then we would move on even though it wasn't okay, and I wasn't sure what I believed anymore. My mom was my best friend; of course I wanted to believe her. She wrote me notes in my lunchbox until I graduated high school (sometimes including glitter confetti), told us mermaids were real, bought my little sister, Erisy, and me clothes we didn't need. Don't tell Daddy, she'd whisper in her soft, high, lilting voice (the same voice she passed on to me), before hurrying us to our rooms with shopping bags. She approached all things as if they were supposed to be fun, and if there wasn't anything exciting about some detail of life, she'd create it. And on this particular Saturday morning, Mom's face lit up with puppy fever.

We were sitting in our parked car. Stopped. But it felt like we were in motion. My Frappuccino was sweating in its cup holder, the wheels in Moms head were spinning, no doubt wondering what she could do to make up for last night. She turned her head and looked at me. Know what I wanna do today? She leaned in and smiled. We need to get another puppy. She took a sip of her Grande coffee. I really want to get you a big dog. Were big-dog girls. Youre such a big-dog girl, sweetie. I didnt even know what it meant to be a big-dog girl, and I didnt care. I placed my bagel on the dashboard, left the Frappuccino melting, and ran into the CVS to fetch the newspaper. We spread the classifieds across the front of the car, draping the grayish-white pages over our laps and onto the dashboard. German shepherd? Active and sporty, that would be nice. But would a shepherd get along well with our other dogs? We had to consider Yoda and Bertha. Goldendoodle? Beautiful dogs, but we were thinking, like, a big big dog. Great Pyrenees... Oh! Definitely big, but would that be too much fur? Boxer? We knew boxers intimately, had loved and lost two when I was younger. And just as we were about to call the number on an ad for a husky/lab mix, Mom slammed her finger down onto the newspaper, crinkling it further into her lap. ENGLISH MASTIFF PUPPIES! Theres this saying in the mastiff world, What the lion is to the cat, the mastiff is to the dog. Mastiffs are powerful, gentle, and known for their loyalty. They also happen to be known as the largest dog breed on earth. One Old English mastiff with the name of Aicama Zorba set the record for worlds biggest dog at nearly 350 pounds. Thats the size of a small donkey. So its no wonder ancient Greeks and Romans used the mastiff as a war dog. The mastiffs even fought in the Colosseum, next to the gladiators. Mom put the phone on speaker as it rang. I was so excited I was practically holding my breath, hoping someone would pick up. Hello? A woman answered. She sounded very Southern. The word hello sounded like yellow. Mom asked if they had a girl. Yes. She asked if they had a brindle. Yes. Then Mom asked if we could come look (look) at the puppies today. Yes. Like, right now? Yes. So against all reason and good judgment we hopped on I-65 to look. Our home had always been something of a zoo. Growing up, my brother, sister, and I had every kind of pet a childs heart could desire: furry ones, feathery ones, slimy ones, ones with shells, even one that went oink. If there is an animal-loving gene, I inherited it from my mother. Apparently, when I was little, I would run to the sidewalk after it rained and rescue worms by putting them back in the soil so they didnt dry up. This may sound extreme, but I had nothing on my mothers history with animals. When Mom was a girl (she tells me) she ordered crocodiles from a catalog and put them in her fathers bathtub. Can we order crocodiles? I used to beg. No, sweetie. Its actually not very nice to the crocodiles. I didnt know better then. I dont think its much of an exaggeration to say my mother had been bringing home animals for over fifty years. Mostly without asking. Thats actually how wed gotten our two dogs, Yoda and Bertha on a whim, from the newspaper. Yoda was our Chihuahua at the time. My older brother, Tripp, referred to her as the rat. Sure, she was not much bigger than a guinea pig, and only had five teeth, but I loved her. Yodas principal canine companion was Bertha, our English bulldog, who looked more like a beached elephant seal mixed with a pig. She had a funny pink tail that curled into her bum like a cinnamon roll, so my brother, sister, and I named it the Cinnabum. At some point she got the nickname Fatty, and that nickname never went away. Fatty preferred not to exercise, had the worst table manners, and snored loudly enough to wake the neighbors. Still, on summer evenings over the sound of the cricket wings chirping from the forest of our backyard, I was known to sit and gaze at Bertha, and sing You Are So Beautiful to her. Fatty was Dads favorite. You know the couple who gets pregnant, believing somehow that having a baby will save their marriage? This may have been Moms thinking in us getting a third dog that day. A new dog is a fresh start! Its starting over. So here we were again, starting over... Two hours later we turned off the exit in Sparta and drove up a long dirt road to a little white house. There was a deep bark booming from the backyard. A woman opened the screen door. Yall here for mastiff puppies? You can come round this way, she said, pointing around to the back. We followed her to the rear of the house, that deep bark getting closer. A long string of deep, sharp woofs with pauses between each one. I started to wonder if this was a good idea after all. I felt a twinge of anger at having been convinced to come on this possibly ridiculous trip. Did Mom really think she could just slap a Band-Aid over her messy slurring drunkenness from last night with a puppy? A puppy is a huge decision. A family decision. Shouldnt we talk to Dad about this? A wave of guilt washed over me as I imagined my parents ignoring each other even more because Mom and I had brought home another animal. We entered the yard and Mom clenched my hand with excitement. The barking grew louder. Oh, thats just Dozer! The woman swatted a fly from her face, Dont mind her barkin; shes gentle as butter. But this was unlike any bark Id heard. It was big and loud and ominous, as if she knew we had arrived. My stomach sank. We walked farther until we reached a little pen made of chicken wire. Theres two boys an two girls left, the woman told us. Inside the pen was a tangle of four adorable mastiff puppies. Their heads were the size of big grapefruits and their coats were streaked with splotchy black stripes. Underneath the stripes, two were chocolate brown, and the other two were shaded a little lighter, closer to the color of sand. The dark coloring on their faces created the appearance of black masks, and one had a little white patch on her chest. They trotted through the grass with round bellies and thick tails and pawed at each other playfully. I lifted my legs one by one over the wire, sat in the grass, and tried to relax. Mom joined, legs crossed next to me, and as the puppies climbed all over us, Moms mouth broke into a huge smile. We pianoed our hands under their bellies and let them chew on our shoelaces. Mom buried her nose into their backs, kissing their heads and telling each one it was the cutest thing shed ever seen. I took a deep breath. Slowly, I felt myself softening toward my mother. Maybe this adventure wasnt such a

terrible idea after all. The grass was dry like hay but sprinkled with yellow dandelions. When I close my eyes and remember that day, I can see them. Yellow dandelions and a brindle puppy. My puppy. The lady bent over to pick up the puppy, turning it on its back to check for its parts. Here, this ones a girl, she confirmed, and plopped her in my lap. I held her out in front of me with my hands under her armpits. Her skin was too big for her body so it draped over my fingers, and to me this one was so obviously a girl, I couldnt believe the woman had to check. I stared into her eyes and she stared right back. Her wrinkled black forehead and downturned eyes gave her a concerned expression, making her look a tiny bit sad, but I knew she wasnt, because her tail was wagging. She was prettier than a Gerbera daisy. The puppy reached out her wrinkly neck and nibbled my nose. She did this gently delicate and deliberate so her sharp teeth didnt even hurt. Mom squeezed my knee. Lauren. Oh my gosh. We have to get this puppy! Isnt she incredible? Do you want her? She searched my face for a response. Dozer was still barking, and from the corner of my eye I could see her behind a metal gate ten or so yards away. Her head was as big as Darth Vaders, and when she barked, frothy slobber flew from her mouth and globbed on the fence. I held the puppys warm body to my face and she licked my cheek. That peculiar smell of puppy breath was enough to unzip me. All I wanted was to say yes. Mom, I love her. This was true. But there was a part of me that wanted to say, Lets think about this. Still, I knew if we didnt leave with this precious puppy today, I would never see her again. My mothers eyes were lit with desperation. I want you to have her, honey. It would make me so happy to get her for you. Let me get her for you. I didnt really understand my familys dynamics back then, and, frankly, at that point, puppy in lap, who even cared if I was being manipulated? I could have called and asked Dad, but Dad would tell me that impulsive pet buying from the newspaper didnt sound like the best idea. (Rightly so, please dont buy puppies impulsively like this. Also, please consider adopting.) The warm puppy nibbled my nose again and licked my eye, and then licked me again on the mouth. So I swallowed my worries back down and shut the door to the part of my brain that was saying Think of the consequences! Yes! Lets get her! Mom gave the woman \$150 cash, then quickly drove to a gas station ATM to take out another \$250, and then wrote a check for \$300 (we paid for a lot of impulse purchases in this way). I tossed my new friend over my shoulder, thanked the woman very much, gave one last look over to Dozer, and we drove back to Brentwood, one large family member bigger. What should we name her? Mom asked when we were back in the car. I wanted her name to be something sweet and girly, not like the tractor name theyd given her mom. Shes such a little lady, a princess, I said, squeezing her to my face. What about Please-Dad-dont-get-rid-of-me? my mother laughed, reaching her hand over to pet the puppys ears. The puppy felt so right in my lap. I looked down at her and couldnt believe this was real. Years later, Id recognize this look as the way a few of my friends gazed at their shiny engagement rings, like they are about to start their lives, like their adventures were about to begin. Thats how Id felt with the dog in my lap, looking into her marble eyes traced by tiny eyelashes. I felt as though Id fallen under a spell, enchanted. Wait a minute. Enchanted. (I may or may not have watched this Disney musical a million times.) Giselle. Mom! What about Giselle? Like the princess in Enchanted? Giselle had such a fun ring to it, and based on a lovable naive character it seemed a fit for this innocent puppy. Yes! Thats it. Love that! Mom cheered. We decided to spell it with a z for a little extra spunk. Hi, Gizelle, hi, girl! I cooed, cradling her in my arms like a doll. (A heftier, pug-sized doll with longer legs.) But what are we telling Dad? I worried, fondling Gizelles extra neck skin in my hand. Though I knew when it came to this new puppy, he wouldnt be mad. Dad was the most patient person I knew. So hed probably end up nodding his head, as if to say, Of course they brought home another animal, and then hed end up taking care of said animal like he always did, with a minor silent grudge. But hed get over it. Still, Mom wanted to come up with something that would smooth Dad over, just in case. Something that would lessen the shock of a new puppy. (The new puppy that just happens to be the biggest breed in the world.) So we came up with a plan. We pulled up the long driveway to our brick house on the hill. As I headed inside, Dad was in the living room practicing his golf swing in front of the TV. As planned, I greeted him and explained that I rescued a puppy from a place I knew nearby called Noahs Ark Animal Hospital. I told him her adoption was free, and that I was only fostering her until they found her another home. I couldnt just leave her there to die! I couldnt believe I had been so lucky to rescue her just in time! What. A. Miracle! Dad studied me with a puzzled look, club still in hand. Usually, Dad would hand me the nine iron and say, Cmon, lets see that backswing of yours, Fernie. Its really looking great this year! But he didnt do that. Not today. Instead, he stared down at the size of the huge paws of the puppy cradled in my arms as I worked to pose Gizelle so her adorable head and heart-melting eyes were working for maximum effect. He looked at me again. He didnt channel an angry, No. We have two dogs and a fish and Mom brings home too many pets. Take her back where she came from at once! like a lot of my friends parents would say, and he didnt go the whole, Yes, lets foster her until she gets a fur-ever home! Way to give back, Fernie! route. He just said, Okay, drawing out the ay sound at the end, almost like he was asking a question. And when he squinted his eyes and opened his mouth to say something else, I jumped in. We arent keeping her for long! Once I started lying to Dad, I couldnt stop. For a brief second, I could hear a faint voice inside whispering, Psst! Stop! But I told that girl to shut up, that we are meant to have this puppy, and that I will do everything I can to make it work.