

FAVORITE PETS

By John S. Halbert

My daddy told me about a dog he once had back in the late-'twenties that became my favorite pet story. The dog was getting along in years and had developed some bad habits, so he and his buddies decided to unload the poor creature. In those days the standard method of signing-off on an unwanted pet was to take him up to a mountain about ten miles away and dump him out alongside the road, leaving him to fend for himself. Not sporting----in particular, for the dog---but effective. The guys loaded the dog into the back of a friend's car, drove up the mountain, and in a short while, the deed was done. The friends were so satisfied with themselves, that they stopped for ice cream on the way back. Sometime later, they returned home to be greeted at the front door by---the dog!

My first dog was a birthday present when I was ten years old. Daddy and I went to the dog pound and my selection was a tan-colored part-chihuahua-part-something-a-little-bigger female puppy. Mother suggested we name her "Ruffles," after a dog she had had when she was a kid on the farm. So, "Ruffles" the pup became.

At first, Ruffles was rather sickly, and daddy had to feed the poor puppy a mixture of raw eggs and sweet milk, a concoction supposed to heal sick dogs. It must have worked because Ruffles became a hale and hearty pooch.

Ruffles was never spayed, therefore she periodically went into heat and had to be confined to the basement. Those were trying times for all of us. I often wondered why we didn't just have her "fixed," which would have solved the problem once and for all. I guess it just wasn't done much in those days. When I got a paper route a few years later, Ruffles enjoyed riding with me on my rounds, sitting regally on the papers in the basket. We got a lot of interested looks from bystanders that way. Ruffles was with us for about eleven years, then met a sudden end in the middle of the street underneath the wheels of a car.

My next dog was also named "Ruffles." She wandered up into our country-home yard one day while my first wife and I were planting tomatoes, and took up residence with us. This Ruffles liked to ride in the car; good for a lot of double-takes from other drivers who would glance over at our car and see a dog peering over the window sill at them!

One day she failed to return home, and a search revealed her huddled underneath a neighbor's house, all bloody and shivering. At the veterinarian's office, the doctor took me aside and said, "I always hate to see this, but this puppy's been shot!" Sure enough, Ruffles was riddled with buckshot. The vet was able to patch her up, and before long she was her old self again. But I never found out who shot my dog. Another time, she tangled with a snake and came home with her face all bloody and swollen. It took another trip to the vet and snakebite serum to get Ruffles going again.

My friend Cecil and his three brothers, George, Charlie, and John, had a succession of pets. They had a terrier named, "Bullet," whom I remember as having a rather testy personality. Bullet liked to bite the postman and anyone else who came into the yard. After I learned he liked "Milk-Bone Dog Biscuits". I started keeping a supply in my pocket, and thereafter Bullet and I

got along pretty well. (Bullet was my first experience with bribery as a means to win friends and influence . . . ah---dogs)

Bullet's companion was a something-or-other-dog named "George". I guess George was part Bassett hound, or something like that. George was a rather phlegmatic creature, not given to outbursts---the opposite of Bullet. I remember George would walk up to you and flop down at your feet, no matter what you happened to be doing. George met his end in almost the same spot as Ruffles met hers: in the middle of the street in front of our house. I remember Cecil's mother coming down to look at what was left of George, and bursting into tears at the sight. She had really loved that dog.

Another pet at the Rose's house was a solid-black female cat named, "Midnight." Midnight was a positive prolific producer of kittens, as it seemed there was always a fresh litter in and around the house, although I never learned who was the father of all those offspring. Midnight's favorite spot was under the dining room table where she could watch TV. And, sadly, that's where they found her body when the Rose's house burned.

I'm not sure what kind of relationship Bullet, George, and Midnight had with the other pet at the Rose's house: "Icky the Iguana". I never learned what gender Icky was, and I never wanted to go looking. As Iguanas went, Icky was probably okay; I just don't remember having much to do with the crusty creature, except that it turned up at the oddest times. Icky must have found it highly amusing to plop down into your lap while you were eating at the dining room table. Most visitors (and, I am told, some members of the Rose household), gave Icky a wide berth when the creature was close by. Icky the Iguana also failed to survive the fire that later gutted the Rose house. I'm not sure it was ever even found in the smoldering ruins..

Probably the pet that lived the most unconventional life was that of "Nubbin", my cousin Sharman's Shetland pony. Although Nubbin officially lived at a stable outside of Florence, he spent a good deal of his time around the neighborhood pulling a scaled-down surrey, usually full of kids. Everyone liked to ride in Nubbin's buggy, and he became something of a fixture in and about that part of town. Everybody loved Nubbin, due in large part to his long hair and gentle manner. But what *REALLY* set Nubbin apart was how he got back and forth between the stable and my cousin's house. Aunt Joan had, at the time, a 1953 Studebaker four-door. With the rear seat removed and a little hay on the floorboard, Nubbin was probably the only Shetland pony in history who rode around town in the back seat of a Studebaker.