

# Pets: Some Strange, Some Remarkable, All Wonderful

I have had quite a few pets over my lifetime...and everyone has been special.



**DOC.** My first pet was Doc, a fox terrier, given to me by our family doctor, Doc Thomas. Doc Thomas was a special man, making house calls, giving advice, serving as family therapist and occasionally treating his patients for accidents and disease. Doc Thomas, that's what we always called him, even came to our rural home (five miles from his office in Findlay, OH) to see our new power mower...and I got to show it off by mowing for him! One day, after getting permission from my parents, he delivered a new fox terrier puppy to our farm. I was only about four or five, but I remember that day as if it was yesterday. The new puppy could have only one name, and that was Doc, and he

became my constant companion. Doc went everywhere I went...even sleeping in my bedroom. His over protectiveness of me led to his death some years later. Every time my friends and I would wrestle, Doc would become upset and try to bite them. In the early years, he would mainly growl and nip, but as he became older he would attack any person giving me a hard time. My father became concerned about this and I did my best to never wrestle with friends if Doc was nearby.

One day a friend of my parents stopped by, and after playing a while, their son and I started to wrestle. Doc, seeing the larger boy on top of me, bit him so bad that the boy had to have stitches in his leg and arm. The next day, my father told me to say goodbye to Doc, as he had to be put to sleep for harming others. I pleaded to no avail, and as a matter of respect, my father took Doc to the veterinary to be euthemized, rather than shooting him as was the case with most farm animals that had to be put down.

My father asked me to go along and I held Doc as the Vet gave him his deadly shot. It was a tough lesson, one that was repeated a number of times with various farm animals I loved, that had to die because of disease or injury. Life on a farm isn't for the faint at heart, but for the most part, at least for a young boy, the lessons about life and death came early and often. Doc was a great dog and I have always felt some guilt that my poor behavior caused his death. I guess Doc's death taught me to be more respectful of animals and I hope this has translated to my general respect for all life.

**PAL.** At the same time I had Doc as my daily companion, I had a pony, or I should say my sister, Alice, and I had a pony. My Dad's first employer, Mr. Marseletti, from Cleveland, "gave" Pal, a rather large paint-colored pony, to my father for my sister and me. When Dad and Mom were first married, Dad didn't want to be a farmer, farming for his father-in-law, my grandfather, so he and Mom moved to Cleveland where Dad worked for a company that dug ditches at construction sites.

Dad drove a ditching machine and they lived in Garfield Heights, a suburb of Cleveland. After several years of the city life, both Mom and Dad longed for the rural life and they moved back to the farm in Findlay. My grandfather owned three farms, was growing older, and needed my father to help him do the farming. My parents lived on the family farm the remainder of their lives. Mr. Marseletti loved to hunt rabbits and pheasants, and brought several of his friends to our farm each fall during hunting season.

They wore fancy hunting outfits and drove a big, new, black Cadillac each year. They parked it by our barn and spent one whole day shooting rabbits and pheasants. While they were out in the fields, I would look inside this fancy car and just imagine what it might be like to own a car like that beauty. I knew I never would have a car like that! After hunting, they would always give me some type of gift, a ball or a toy, and they would give my father a bottle of wine. This was the only alcohol to ever enter our house, and my father kept it in the refrigerator (Port wine) and had a sip of it after dinner once a week until it was all gone. It usually took him a

month or so to finish the wine, and my mother was very glad to have those evil spirits out of our house. We didn't believe in "drinking" but this was a special gift from a respected friend and it just couldn't be thrown away! One fall, Mr. Marseletti arrived with a trailer behind his car and I assumed they had brought a horse, as some hunters did during the hunting season. In stead, they had brought a pony to leave at our farm for our use. Mr. Marseletti never gave us Pal, and during his yearly visits, talked about picking him up and taking him back to Cleveland for his grandkids.

I got so I hated hunting season for fear that Mr. M. would return with a trailer and get Pal. As the years went by, Pal became more and more Alice's and my pony. But it was NEVER ours. When I was about ten, Pal died one winter day, and I can remember Dad Calling Mr. Marseletti to tell him of Pal's death. This is another lesson I learned early...one of ownership and the fear of losing something that was 'yours.'" I have been very careful in my life to not hold "ownership" over someone's head. Pal and I spent lots of time in the farm fields of Findlay...he was a good, stubborn, friend and I learned a lot about animals from him.

**JET.** A few weeks after Pal died, Mom and Dad and I went to this farm where they raised Shetland ponies to see about acquiring a new pony. They had lots of ponies, but two selections immediately got our attention. First, was a team of dapple-gray Shetland ponies. We already had five or six buggies, which could be readily adapted to a team, but my parents, not having lots of extra money to spend, steered me towards picking the other choice, a jet-black Shetland pony.

Since I wanted to be a pilot, and since the pony was JET Black, I named him Jet. Jet was a great friend...and he was mine. From the time I was eight or nine, until I had to do the evening chores myself, I road Jet nearly every day, even in the winter. When my folks were doing evening chores in the winter, milking and feeding the animals, I would saddle up Jet and “ride the range, ” like my hero, Gene Autry. In the summer, I would spend hours every day riding everywhere, usually with my best friend, Bobby, my second cousin, who spent the summer with his grandparents, my aunt and uncle.

My parents “farmed with” my Uncle Delph and Aunt Harriet, sharing equipment and their labor. While they worked, Bobby and I rode our ponies. We nearly always wore our six-shooters and our cowboy shirts and hats. He was Roy Rogers and I was Gene Autry. We would ride back to the creek (the crick to us) and swim in the one-foot high water. We would pack a lunch and spend a whole afternoon in the woods. It was a great life for two young boys. When Bobby was about ten years old, his folks took him to the doctor to see if he needed glasses, as he complained about headaches.

He had never mention this to me and my only thought was that we wouldn't be able to ride that day. From the doctor's office they took him to the hospital for tests and from there to a hospital in Toledo, forty miles away, for surgery. This all happened in several days. My Mother sitting on the side of my bed awakened me the following morning after Bobby went for surgery, and she told me that Bobby had died as they were trying to remove a tumor from his head. I turned

over and cried for a long time. I had seen lots of animals die, but this was my best friend, daily companion and pony-buddy! He was Roy Rogers. The only fight we had ever had was over who was the best cowboy, Roy or Gene, and now he was gone.

A strange thing happened at the funeral. My Aunt Harriet, whom I adored, started crying when she saw me enter the church...and didn't say anything to me. Aunt Harriet was a great woman in my eyes...she played football with Bobby and me, she encouraged us to write plays on rainy days, and then listened to every work of them, no matter how bad they were, she had us write songs, which we always sang as we were cracking up in laughter and she was always there with milk and cookies when we returned from one of our riding adventures.

To not have her run up and hug me seemed strange. And stranger still...she almost never spoke to me again the rest of my life! She would try to...and then start to cry. It was a hard thing for a little boy to understand, but my Mom said when Aunt Harriet saw me all she could think of was Bobby and it made her sad. Years later as a psychologist, I realized that Aunt Harriet was very depressed and this depression intensified when she saw me. Never the less, she was a great person in my life and I will always think of her with a smile and great fondness.

As I reread this section, I noticed it wasn't about Jet at all, but about Bobby and Aunt Harriet! Pets have a way of connecting folks together. Without Jet, Bobby, Aunt Harriet

and me would have never been as connected...a connection, which greatly impacted each of our lives. One day after a hard ride, Jet drank lots of water that I had not noticed was still in his stall. He foundered and his feet became very sore. Our veterinarian offered to take him to his facility and cure him by having him stand in warm mud for a few months. It did cure him and our Vet gave Jet, with our permission, to a family with small children, who could not afford a pony. I never rode him again, and at sixteen was getting too old for a pony, but I did drive by Jet's new home and saw him giving rides to his new owners. Jet was a great pony!

**Terry.** After Doc's death, we got a new fox terrier named, Terry. I guess this was when I started naming all of my pet people names. Terry was a great friend and from the age of around twelve, was always by my side, whether I was doing chores, playing ball or riding my pony. We were buddies! He slept by my bed, ate breakfast lunch and dinner with me when I was home and was waiting for me when the school bus brought me home.

He was a feisty dog and would frequently come back to the house with scratches and cuts from a recent encounter with a ground hog. He would dive right into a ground hog hole and back proudly out with a bloody nose. He caught rats and chased cats and occasionally cars. We didn't have a lot of traffic on the road in front of our house, but one day, a car hit Terry, and his hind legs were paralyzed. The Vet thought it might be a temporary paralysis, and because he was such a valued member of our family, we decided to nurse him back

to health. At first, we wrapped his hind legs with a padded material so his skin would not be scraped as he ran around the yard. We finally came up with the idea of wheels, and constructed a little platform with three castors, so he could run around unimpeded. It worked great on sidewalks and in the house, but when he would try to run through the field or through a fence, there was big trouble.

As his health declined, we decided to have him euthanized. Just about the time that all the turmoil with Terry was occurring, Ruth, my neighbor girl dropped by with her girl friend soliciting pies for a bake sale. I hadn't seen Ruth in several years and it was really fun talking to her. I agreed to donate two pies, even though my parents were visiting Yellowstone National Park (the second vacation in their lives) with Uncle Delph and Aunt Harriet.

My sister, who was keeping her eye on her sixteen-year old brother while they were gone, didn't like the pie baking promise, but baked two for me any ways. I took them to the bake sale and Ruth and I decided to have a date on the following Sunday night. That started what has become a fifty-six year relationship that has never waned. The reason I am telling this about Ruth is that she later told me that she was so appalled by seeing a paralyzed dog on castors that she wondered whether to go out with me! I am glad she did! Over the years, Ruth has spent lots of time trying to extend the lives of certain pets, and every time that happens, we talk about Terry and his wheels.

**Other Animal Friends.** On farms, you rarely name chickens or pigs or steers because you know they will be sold or used for food. You are respectful of them, but rarely give them names. As one young author once said, after realizing that he had just eaten his pet chicken, “Never fall in love with a chicken!” and that is good advice. Other animals are there for work and are not considered pets although one gets very close to them. I grew up with two working horses, Bill and Bob, and my uncle’s huge horse, Ted.

When I was about five I rode on the backs of Bill and Bob as my father cultivated corn and beans. At the time, around 1940, our tractor still had metal wheels and these wheels would destroy any corn or beans they ran over...so we cultivated with horses. I would ride until I started feeling sleepy and then Dad would put me under a tree with my toys to waste away the hours until it was time to go to the house. I would play until falling asleep in some cool grass. To this day I still imagine being in cool grass watching the clouds pass overhead when my mind is racing and I am trying to go to sleep.

It works nearly every time. Ted was a huge farm horse, weighing over a ton. He was so big; he could never be teamed up with another horse because of the disparity of each horse’s pulling power. One time, Ted had some type of problem with his breathing and the Vet was called. The Vet said Ted had a tumor on his esophagus and would need to have it removed. As we all sat around watching, the Vet held a rag, saturated with ether, over Ted’s nose until he slowly sank to the ground anesthetized. It was fascinating to watch

but little did I know that I would be having the same anesthetizing procedure performed on me the following week to have my tonsils removed. The family joke which has been repeated too many times to count is that the surgeon had to give me more ether to put me to sleep than the Vet had to use to put Ted to sleep. Those in attendance (my sister and parents) told me, and everyone else who would listen, that I just kept talking and the doctor just kept adding more ether to the mask to put me out. Anyway, it makes a good story, Glenn, fifty pounds, requiring more ether than Ted, two thousand plus pounds. I think my family was just trying to tell me I talked too much!

**Marvin.** Marvin, a black cockapoo, was probably our all time favorite pet. Ruth and I were at Marvin Kaplan's house for party one evening when Mike Chrinn told us about this dog who had wandered onto their farm and that they were not able to find the owner. Ruth said she would like to see the dog, without our children being present, and Mike said he would work something out. The next morning, a Saturday, our doorbell rang and when we answered the door, this curly haired black dog bounded into our home. All four kids pounced on him and Ruth and I knew we had a new pet. When we were coming up with a name for him, we were all suggesting names and when Jon said Marvin, Ruth and I said yes. We wondered how Marv Kaplan would feel but when we told him, he said that it would be fine to name our new dog after him, but that he had always thought of himself as "a Golden Retriever!"

There are lots of wonderful stories about Marvin. When we first got him, he would try to get out of any door that was opened and then the kids would have to chase him. Of course, Marvin loved this. Over the first few months this got old, and Jon, under whose bed Marvin slept, would simply come down the stairs and let him out. I didn't like this at first, but Marvin would leave and return in about fifteen minutes and bark at the door. This went on several years without any consequences. One day, Ruth and I decided to take a walk on campus, about four blocks away from our Wilson Avenue home and in so doing passed Palchos's donut shop.

As we passed we heard shouts of, "Hi Marvin" and returned to find out the story. It seems that every morning for several years, Marvin would arrive at Palcho's, bark and some one would throw him a donut. He would eat the donut and leave. He never wanted a second donut and wouldn't go inside. Everyone knew his name because his collar had his name and phone number, but no one ever bother to call us. This practice continued nearly every morning until we moved to Twin Lakes some years later.

In other times of the day when Marvin would get loose, we always knew where to find him. He loved to go on campus, where pretty co-eds would give him lots of attention. He favored the Music and Speech Building South entrance, which has a large covered area next to the door. We would occasionally get a call about Marvin, when some co-eds had taken him to their room, but usually he was just pal-ing around with budding actresses and actors. On one rainy day, after I returned from work, Ruth said Marvin had been gone

for several hours and that I should look for him as she was fixing dinner. I drove to the Music and Speech building and there was Marvin. At the time, I was driving a Mercedes and when I opened the door and Marvin raced out and jumped in, the students applauded and one shouted, "Marvin has it better than we do...we're waiting for a bus and he rides in a Mercedes!"

I would be remiss if I didn't tell a story about Marvin which occurred in 1980. Marvin, after his arrival in our home, became our third son Jon's dog. They were the closest and Marvin slept under his bed every night. In the beginning it was because of Jon that Marvin was freed every morning to go to the donut shop. When Jon joined the Marines, Marvin continued to sleep under Jon's bed every night, month after month. We couldn't coax him to go somewhere else.

Under some very tragic circumstances, Jon died in June of 1980 while still in the Marines. We were devastated as you might imagine, but muddled through a funeral with the support of our family and friends. When everyone had left after the funeral, Ruth and I went to bed. After a few moments we heard something and it was Marvin coming into our room and sliding under our bed, where he slept until his own death. It was as if he knew Jon would never be coming back.

Ruth and I don't believe in anthropomorphizing animals, but this story almost makes a believer out of us.

When our new house was being built in 1985, we had to rent a condo because we had sold our house and the owners

wanted immediate possession. The condo was in The Pines in Twin Lakes, only a thousand yards from our new home. We would walk over there each day after work to check on the progress being made. Marvin still wanted out each morning and he got into the habit of running over to the new house. We worried about him as he had to cross the busy Diagonal Road but he insisted on making the trip each day and would stay until the workers left for home.

They told us that each day after lunch he would take a nap under a big oak tree half way between our house and the lake. Sadly, he had a stroke one month before we were to move in and died several days later. We buried him in the spot where he took his naps. When a landscape architect came to our home the following spring to suggest plantings and flower bed locations, she pointed to the spot where Marvin took his naps and said, "That would be the perfect place for a perennial bed. Ruth and I looked at one another, and being old Monopoly players, said almost in unison, "Marvin's Garden," and that has been its name since that day. We purchased a cemetery type marker, which identifies Marvin's grave and the name of our memorial garden.

## **Wilbur**

After Marvin died we didn't get another pet for twelve years. That was partly because we were nearing retirement and planned to travel a lot and partly because losing our son Jon, and a pet, can be so painful. Losing a pet reminded us of our larger loss and we weren't ready to go through all of that again. But one day, Ruth came home with an "outdoor" cat.

She purchased a little house for him to stay in on our back porch and said he would never be permitted inside our home. This pronouncement lasted about a week when she felt he might be getting cold in the September cool evening and brought him into our Ravine Room. The next night he was in the house, where he has stayed ever since. In keeping with our idea that Pets desire people names since they are around us so much, we named him Wilbur.

At first this little kitty was very friendly, crawling on our laps to be petted, but when he was about six months old announced that he didn't need us, except for food and shelter, and would henceforth not be petted or held. He slept on the foot of our bed and pawed at the door when he wanted to go out, and in, and I guess you could say "had us trained" just about right. As a psychologist, I decided that I could reverse his behavior and set about "training him" to get on my lap on command. I bought treats to train him and that lasted a month or so. But finally, I found the magic training device. I bought a cat brush and every time I tap it on the end table next to my chair, he comes to be brushed. He loves it and will stay on my lap for half an hour, going "now over here, now under my chin." Ruth pointed out that getting brushed for thirty minutes may mean that Wilbur has trained me and not the other way around...but I maintain I have conditioned him to want to be brushed.

## **Conclusion**

We have had other pets...Adam, Clyde, Tawny (his registered name) and Corcheto (Jill named him!) but my

favorites are the ones I have told you about. Other members of our family will have to write their own stories. Adam ran away, Clyde was a baying beagle and we returned him to the breeder, Tawnee was a Dachshund who killed any cat who got near him, and Corcheto was Jill's cat and just disappeared one day (we didn't have Tawny at the time so don't jump to conclusions). Oh yes, we had snakes and rabbits and gerbils and fish and turtles and birds and even rented a pony one winter, but I am sticking with the favorites I have already mentioned.

I went to several funerals recently and the minister, or other speaker, mentioned what the deceased might say if they were there. I don't like the idea of someone guessing what I might say at my own funeral, so when I got home, I wrote ten things I want said at my funeral. I posted the first five on my web site under the title "You have to come to hear the rest," meaning I am saving the best five until that last day, you know, save the best for last. One of the first five is about pets and I would like to conclude this story with it....

Dogs and cats don't want to be named Bowser or Puffy. They hang around with people all the time and having names like that sets them apart. Dogs and cats want to be named Harold or Maude or Anita or Wilfong. For the love of heaven, respect your pets and stop giving them silly names like Doddles or Boopsie. Just think how much better place this world might be if more people had dogs named Marvin and cats named Wilbur.

There is a downside of giving people names to pets...our children, Spot, Fido and Rover really resented this!

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