

Dog Tales

I was about five years old when Old Timer came to live with us. I suppose one of my older brothers named her. She was a well-fed dog, or quite possibly it was her long hair that made her seem so plump. She was part collie and her hair was such a mix of color that it appeared she had a permanent saddle on her back. I imagine if someone had tried to sit on that saddle of hair, she would have just sat down out of pure laziness. Old Timer's name was quite fitting because I never knew of her to be playful like a pup. She was more like a content, gentle animal that was unnoticeably, always around in the background. When I was out in the neighborhood playing with friends she was present, but not particularly doing any thing. I was fond of Old Timer.

A few years later, another dog was added to the family. She was another less than purebred, a part Dachshund, named Ginger. Ginger was officially my older brother Ricky's dog. I don't know that being his dog particularly meant any thing because Daddy was the one who got stuck with feeding the dogs. Ricky particularly enjoyed lying on the couch with Ginger and would sing a few lines of a country song in her ear getting especially loud in one part to get a reaction out of her. I guess that made him think she was responding affectionately to his singing.

It was a time when people either didn't have fences or when they did, kids did not shut gates. There was no such thing as a "leash law." And, with dogs running loose, you could count on a nice litter of pups in the spring. Puppies sure were fun to dress in doll clothes. Puppies make the best babies; they are quite entertaining, especially when they don't like their new clothes and try to paw them off. More so, when they discover that they have a tail wagging behind them and runs in circles chasing it.

One particular spring Old Timer and Ginger had puppies about the same time. One momma and her puppies were kept in the backyard, while the other was in the garage, though with the gate open, neither was contained to their box. One dog had more puppies than she had "spaces" to nurse them. The other had "space" to spare. So, it seemed a logical thing to do would be to just give one of the pups to the other momma. That did not work out too well for the extra pup. Her momma came around and snuffed the life out of her. I won't mention names of who did what to "protect the innocent." Well, to be honest, I can't just can't remember. (It's such a tragic story, I'm sure I've buried it somewhere.)

It wouldn't be long before we had an abundance of wobbly puppies walking every where. One time my mother was attempting to pull the car into the garage and a puppy was in the way. I got out of the car, moved the puppy out of the way, and Mother drove on in. But the puppy didn't stay where I moved it, and that was another one who didn't survive to adulthood!

Then there was the season when Daddy practiced euthanasia by taking a gasoline soaked rag and had an entire newly born litter inhale gasoline fumes. He wasn't of a generation that used the services of a veterinarian. Or, maybe he was just practicing without a license. When Old Timer had something awful wrong with her, flies settled on her and maggots began to feed on the dead tissue. Daddy left the house with Old Timer in the car and returned home his 22-gauge shotgun in hand, without Old Timer. When it was Ginger's turn she just got bloated. Daddy gave her some good old Castor oil to treat her ailments. I think she just lucked out and went in her sleep.

Some years later my younger brother got him a dog to call his own. He named his dog "Serge". I think it was short for Sergeant. I suppose the dog's name was a product of sorts from Kenny having grown up with GI Joe as a role model and the continual threat of the Vietnam draft for our two older brothers. I recall introducing on older brother's pet mouse to Serge. He didn't sniff the mouse in my hand, he bit it breaking its back, and that was the end of that pet. (Come to think of it, I probably should have learned something from the puppy in the garage incident.)

Now the worst tale of all is my dog, Grendel. I was about seventeen when I brought this wire-haired terrier (mix of course) puppy home. She had coarse, black hair with the exception of three white paws and a white marking just under her chin that looked like milk she had just lapped from a bowl. The other dogs had been “outside” dogs, but Grendel was my dog. Her first nights she spent whining for her momma from a makeshift bed in my bathtub. But we soon bonded and she forgot Momma.

Grendel was inquisitive, playful, loved everybody. I had a decorative mirror on my wall and when Grendel was on my bed she could see into the mirror. She was quite humorous as she pranced and admired her own reflection. Most dogs don’t even notice the “other” dog in the mirror.

I had a job and was expected to feed, care and pay for Grendel’s expenses. On an income of one dollar per hour (minimum wage) it took a few paychecks to have the money for immunizations. Grendel began to do some strange things, such as, wake up during the night, run around on the bed and foam at the mouth. When I took her to the vet she walked leaning against the wall for support. The doctor kept her at the clinic and she got worse. She had distemper. I believe she got it from either the immunization or another dog, while at the clinic for her shots. After several days in the dog hospital the vet called and said she had died. He asked if I would like for him to “dispose” of her body. Instead, I sent my boyfriend to get the body so that I could give her a proper burial in our backyard. If it wasn’t heart wrenching enough that my precious Grendel had suffered and died, the vet had placed her body in an empty canned dog food box! I cried over her stiff body and then buried her in a cowboy boot box in our backyard.

Sometime later I went to pay my respects at her burial plot only to discover it had been disturbed. I neatly cared for the grave and placed some rocks on the area. Upon another visit I was horrified to discover the thief had been back. I reburied Grendel’s remains and as I was walking across the yard to go back into the house, my eyes caught the horrific sight of a small dog skull with maggots all over it. I found an empty dog food can and scooped the skull into it and then threw it into the trash dumpster in the alley. As I was heading back into the house I began to recall those creepy movies where the body was buried without the head and the corpse can’t rest until its body has been reunited with the head. So I traipsed back to the alley to retrieve my beloved Grendel’s skull, dug up her remains, and reburied her for the third time. When I saw Kenny, I told him that Serge had been digging up my dog. He responded, “I wondered why she’s had such bad breath lately.”

I just want to know if dogs really do go to heaven. And if they do, will they get new bodies? I sure hope so for Grendel’s sake!