

Every Kid Growing up Deserves a Dog

Our lovely zoo lady, and certainly one of the best writers ever to brighten my English classes, Cathy Diekman, wrote a column Feb. 1st about Her aging dog, Peter. Cathy brilliantly details the stages marking Peter's decline, a progression we now see in our beloved Yorkie, Jake – more naps, and a general slowing down

I asked my wife Audrey, the veterinarian's daughter, and lover of "All Creatures Great and Small" if she liked it. She answered, "Yes, and it brought tears to my eyes." I was glad because Cathy's column touched me too.

Jake is not like either our Teri-Poo, Peeta, or our first Yorkie, Toby. Jake has long legs for a Yorkie, and could nearly catch those cottontails he once flew off the patio to chase.

Toby, didn't have a prayer trying to catch one of our B-line bunnies. And now Jake, at about 70 in human years, when it's below zero, finds his paws too frozen to walk and Audrey has to carry him in after failed bunny chases. Most days now, he just barely makes it up the patio steps after a quick whiz..

One thing Jake hasn't lost is a "bull dog bark;" like the one in the old rock song "Stagger Lee." It still strikes terror into strangers, mail men and sneaky squirrels.

Cathy's mention of the various zoo critters her dog Peter inter-acted with reminded me of cold springs on our home farm, when my dad would bring in baby piglets, keeping them in a big crate, with rags in the bottom and a heat lamp suspended above them.

We kids had fun nursing them with a baby's bottle of warm milk. Little pigs have a clean, wholesome, smell, as did the baby kittens we'd find up in our hay mow by following the mother cat up to her lair. We visited them often, from just

born, with their eyes still shut, to their later great, leaping playfulness. As adults they learned to sit for me to squirt milk into their mouths at milking time.

Human babies smell good too-in fresh diapers.

I've often pondered the amazing attraction most kids have for their dogs and the almost telepathic communication they share. I think the smart dogs become sign readers. I know Jake hates Sunday mornings. He knows we won't be home from church for 2 or 3 hours, so he slumps down in one of his more hidden beds just before we leave.

At our return, he's waiting at the door, expecting one of us is carrying chicken from the Pizza Ranch or Chinese morsels from *Beyond*. He knows all the signs – and wonders.

Back on the farm, our German Shepherd, Friday, and our little black faux – Cocker spaniel, Prince, always knew when I was about to set out across the pasture and down our lane toward the Boise de Sioux with shotgun or 22 on a hunt. I loved having Friday along because he stayed close, making shots at pheasants easy, but Prince often ranged out too far, spooking the game out of range.

I remember looking back and seeing Prince hugging the ground, where I'd commanded him to stay, but each time I looked back, he'd have crept closer, hoping I'd let him into the hunt – which always did. I didn't have the heart to leave him home, and he knew that.

But none of those hunts would have been memorable, without Friday, and Prince too. A true hunt deserves a dog.

When King Lear goes mad, “shut out a' door” in a howling storm, his “howl” for comfort includes “my little dogs, Tray, Blanche and Sweetheart.” I

think they reminded him of the warm fireplace ambiance he knew, back in his castle when he was “every inch a king.”

Truly dogs, with their faithfulness, and forgiving hearts, have earned our love and respect. I’m sure we’ll see many in Heaven.

Gene Pinkney for The Daily News 25-02-09-