

The Orphan

By Cindy Peters

My husband Randy and I grew up in a similar home where no pets were allowed. Both of our moms were from German ancestry. They believed pets were unclean to have in a household. After all, they believed that cleanliness was next to Godliness.

One day my husband came across a small boy who had found a newborn squirrel which had fallen out of a tree. This small boy did not know how to care for the squirrel and it was not doing well. Randy was a sophomore in a high school at the time and he felt he could save the squirrel. So, the boy accepted a quarter for the squirrel and Randy became the owner.

The first thing that Randy did was name the squirrel Chippy. He began to feed Chippy with a milk-filled eyedropper. Randy and his dad built a cage made from chicken wire with a disposable cardboard floor. The weather was warm, and Randy was able to keep the cage on the porch of their home. As Chippy grew he was able to eat nuts and various seeds.

Then one dreaded day Randy was told by his father that Chippy had outgrown his cage and cruel to keep him locked up. So reluctantly Randy had to release Chippy to the wild. Fortunately, Chippy made a home in the oak tree next to their home. Randy devised a system where he would rub a piece of bark against the tree. This would be a message for Chippy to come down and play. Randy always wore a white t-shirt and blue jeans. They would play a game where Chippy would jump on Randy's back and perch on his shoulder for petting. Then Chippy would run down the front of his shirt and scurry away.

One day, Mrs. Newroth was out bent over in her garden wearing a white t-shirt. Yes, you guessed it. Chippy jumped on her back thinking it was Randy. Mrs. Newroth let out a blood curdling scream and Randy had to run to her rescue and explain the game with Chippy. Chippy was also very frightened and he did not appear for several days after that trauma.

Then there was another episode where Randy's mom Mary was taking clothes out of the clothes basket. Out jumped Chippy from the basket. Again, another scream could be heard at Chippy's expense.

Chippy was very attached to Randy and would often follow Randy's walk to school along the high wires. There were many days that Chippy would wait for school to be released and walk along the high wires while Randy walked back home.

One terrible day a horrible thunderstorm struck the city of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Lightning hit the oak tree which had been Chippy's home. The tree had been split in two and there was no sign of Chippy for several days. Then one day Randy saw Chippy on the branch of the oak tree. Randy rubbed the bark against the tree as a signal for Chippy to come down and play. The storm had frightened Chippy and his trust had been broken. He would never join Randy again in play.

Little did I know that a squirrel could become a man's best friend. When I first met Randy 45 years ago, he told me the story of Chippy. My heart melted when I first heard this story. I was

so glad to hear that at last Randy had his pet and for a time Chippy had a home and knew the love of a boy's heart.