

MITZI, NAPPY AND CHARLIE

By Fred Hobbs

Unlike many kids, I never had one particular pet that could be classified as an all time favorite. Two canines and a fowl were at least temporary companions in my childhood, though.

Mitzi came first. She was a spitz, a beautiful white dog with an easy-going temperament. She didn't come into my life; I came into hers. Mitzi was an integral part of our family before I was born. We moved around frequently in those days of the early 1930s and Mitzi moved with us. When I was two years old, my young widowed Mother gave into pressure from her siblings to return from Colorado to her native Arkansas. Mitzi was along on the trip with my sister and three brothers. Quite a trip in the 1929 Buick my mother had learned to drive just shortly before my father died.

One year of unsolicited advice from relatives and the hot, humid climate of southern Arkansas, and Mother packed us up in the Buick and headed back to the mountains of Colorado. Even though I was just short of three, I was partly responsible for the fact that we almost lost Mitzi on that trip. We had stopped at a roadside filling station somewhere in rural Oklahoma for a bottle of pop and to let Mitzi "do her thing." While Mother was rounding up everybody, I was sitting in the front passenger seat and began fiddling with the key ring dangling from the ignition switch. The keys fell to the floor and skittered under the seat. A flurry of excitement and maybe a little panic ensued in the hunt for the keys. Finally they were retrieved and we resumed our journey. About 50 miles up the road my oldest brother discovered that Mitzi was not among us.

Mother turned the Buick around and returned to find the dog waiting patiently by the gas pumps. She was with us for years until her unfortunate encounter in the Colorado mountains, a tangle with a skunk. Mitzi was about 14 years old and in poor health. Baths didn't quite remove the smell and by necessity she was not welcomed in or on the bed or by very many hugs. To add to her discomfort, a German Shepherd puppy we named Napoleon (shortened to Nappy) had recently joined the family. The combination of Mitzi's failing health, the presence of a new rival for her affection and the lack of close contact with her humans proved fatal. The veterinarian said, more than any one cause, she may have died just from a broken heart.

Nappy was a great dog for the mountains in Evergreen where we lived. On this particular day, Nappy and I were observing the construction of a new cabin nearby. The carpenter on the job apparently didn't like dogs and perhaps wasn't crazy about inquisitive kids. Being a curious animal, Nappy approached the construction site. The man yelled at Nappy to get away and unexpectedly and, at least in my view, unnecessarily threw a hammer at the dog. It missed the target. Nappy didn't lunge at the frightened carpenter, but bared his teeth and slowly circled around him getting closer and closer. I ran up and put my arms around Nappy and he slowly retreated much to the relief of the hapless artisan. I am convinced that Nappy had an innate sense of right and wrong and thought I might be in danger.

In another childhood episode involving a pet, my brothers had given me two live baby chicks, colored for Easter, one blue, the other, orange. The blue chick met an early death for some reason, but the orange one grew full size, turned white and learned to follow me around outside our mountain cabin.

Gradually I became attached to it and named it Charlie. Nappy seemed to sense that Charlie was “off limits” for his canine instincts to attack and consume. But, it turned out the chicken had more to worry about than a dog. (That is, if chickens worry about anything.)

One day, my brothers invited me to go with them on some errands downtown. Upon my return, at dinnertime we sat down to a very tasty dinner. My brothers kept asking how I liked the fried chicken. I said it was great, like all of my Mother’s cooking. She had bought chicken at the store many times, so it never dawned on me that this bird was special.

Finally, while enjoying fresh apple pie for dessert, the big brothers just had to ask, “Where’s Charlie?” They proceeded to inform me that part of him was in my tummy.

This might seem to have been a cruel trick, but though momentarily suffering a twinge of regret, I had to admit that Charley’s drumstick was mighty tasty!