

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 the squirrel 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 Chipee. He began to feed Chipee 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 Chipee grew he was able to eat nuts and various seeds.

Then one dreaded day Randy was told by his father that Chipee had outgrown his cage and cruel to keep him locked up. So reluctantly Randy had to release Chipee to the wild. Fortunately, Chipee made a home with the Oak tree which was 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 Chipee to come down and play. Randy always wore a white t-shirt and blue jeans. They would play a game where Chipee would jump on Randy's back and perch on this shoulder for petting. Then Chipee 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. Chipee jumped on her back thinking it was Randy. Mrs. Newroth let out a blood curling scream and Randy had to run to her rescue and explain the game with Chipee. Chipee 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 for laundry. Out jumped Chipee from the laundry basket. Again, another blood curling scream could be heard at Chipee's expense.

Chipee was very attached to Randy. So, most days Chipee would follow Randy's walk to school along the high wires. There were many days that Chipee would wait for school to be released and walk along the high wires while Randy walked home from school.

Then one terrible day a horrible thunderstorm entered the city of Sioux Falls, SD. Lightening hit the Oak Tree which had been Chipee's home. The tree had been split in two and there was no sign of Chipee for several days. Then one day Randy saw Chipee on the branch of the Oak tree. Randy rubbed the bark against the tree as a

signal for Chipee to come down and play. The storm had frightened Chipee 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 Chipee. 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 Chipee had a home and knew the love of a boy's heart.