

Chapter 1 - THE MAN



The egotistical old coot produced this mixed media collage and named it, "Self Portrait". At least he was honest enough to show what he actually looks like (center), but then he goes on to claim he is suave, debonaire, a dedicated angler, has a powerful physique, and great legs, and is a man to have at your back on safari.

WHOA! Gentle Cyber-Surfer, there's a carefully planned sequence to what follows, intended to ease you gently, logically into accounts of mind-blowing experiences, so sneak-a-peek at pictures before context is an absolute no-no. You might decide to drop out, and with the shortage of people who can read, we can't allow that, can we?



The stars of this dog and man show are two Golden Retrievers, Dora, who died over five years ago, and her successor, Theodore. Dora's eyes were failing when she and the man embarked on their travels, so she appointed him her "Seeing Eye Man."

"Where shall we go, Dora, said the man? I must get away to some frigid place where tourists can't follow. Patagonia, perhaps, with Cape Horn about the closest land to Antarctica? Let's see what *Bowditch's American Practical Navigator* has to say about latitudes north and south of the Equator:

Buenos Aires - 34de36'S vs Newport, NC, USA - 34de41'N

Cape Horn - 55de59'S vs Nain, Labrador, Canada - 56de33'N

Road atlases show much better highways in the United States and Canada, than in Patagonia, so for now at least, it's a wise choice to go north to the same latitudes, not south."

As it turned out, Dora's travels, by truck, boat and plane, carried her farther north than Nain - to places in Alaska, and in the Canadian Yukon and Northwest Territories. A few months before she died, she traveled by Twin Otter freight plane to Nain, on the Labrador coast, the town, farthest north, that is occupied year round. The school custodian met her at the airport, and left her quite relaxed in Marilyn and Reggie's apartment, while they were busy at teaching. The man arrived later that day, thankful for pilots skillful enough to land on an airstrip carved out of a rocky "high rise" on one side, and with the sea lapping on the other. The thrill of the landing was soon forgotten as the man enjoyed the hospitality of his hosts, and the way Inuit



children played with Dora, and followed her around.

The return trip was by ship, the M/V Taverner, to Goose Bay. Then there was a two day drive on what was at that time a tortuous dirt road, through untouched lichen-carpeted forests, and alongside sparkling lakes, to Churchill Falls, and an easier gravel road to Labrador City. Dora had frequently camped in snow and ice and wilderness areas, including above the Arctic Circle, but windy, cold Labrador City, in late October, was one of the most uncomfortable experiences.



Dora introduced Theodore to his duties as the man's companion just a few months before her death. He was still a difficult, rebellious youngster in April, when he first traveled the west coast of Newfoundland, by way of Gros Morne National Park (which UNESCO has

designated a World Heritage site, and one of the world's most valued natural landscapes), and finally arrived in Cow Head.

A few years before, the man had purchased a small parcel of land near the fishing harbor. He met Todd and his father, and arranged to have them build a



wonderfully comfortable, functional cabin that has withstood every kind of wind and weather. Theodore first glimpsed their second home among snow drifts as they gingerly approached on a slippery roadway between freshly piled snow banks. The man had just filled the 30 gallon water tank installed aboard

his truck. He continued to transport water from town to his cabin for more than a month, until the pipe that supplies the harbor area finally thawed.

The travelers did not have much time to rest after their 2000 mile journey. The next morning the phone rang and the man was ordered to suit up and bring "the beast" to Todd's house. Upon arrival, they encountered the noisy revving of Skidoo and other snowmobile engines, and warm greetings from friends eager to depart for the Long Range Mountains.

These mountains are part of the Appalachian chain which ends in Newfoundland, not in Maine, as many Americans believe. This north end of the mountain chain, and the fir, spruce and birch forests in the foothills, provides a spectacular backdrop for the marshy tuckamore barrens, as seen from the Viking Highway.

The man even embarrassed Theodore, as he strutted around in his crinkly new snowsuit and critically stared at the fancy, new machine that Ross had generously provided for his use. He said, "Listen B'ys, I'm here to claim them mountains for the United States, since you B'ys only have a tiny bit of the real mountains we have down there.

Then, I'm gonna build a 4-lane highway, theme parks, hotels, and get rid of them pesky moose and caribou. So you won't be needing them Ski-doozies much longer." All they had to say was, "OK, Skipper, lead the way."

They put Theodore aboard a sled to be towed behind a Skidoo, since he still couldn't handle deep snow, but again there was a hangup. The man couldn't even steer the thing out of the yard, so Todd's teenage son was drafted to drive, with the man hanging on behind for dear life.





They were protectively kept in the middle of the column as it swiftly crossed the frozen barrens, then slowed somewhat as they followed narrow trails upward to above the tree line. By now, the man knew he'd better hold his tongue if he wanted to get home alive.

They traveled across a winterland of surpassing beauty and by afternoon arrived at a cabin, and helped themselves to

frozen caribou stew left from someone's meal. They met other people from Cow Head who commented that Theodore was the only dog they'd ever seen ride a sled instead of pulling one. Towards evening, after some harrowing downward rides, they spent the night in Harold's cabin in the woods. By then, the man had regained his "ugly-American" cool, and cooked breakfast at 5:00 A.M. while the others tried to sleep.

Newfoundlanders love their cabins, the more isolated and difficult to reach, the better. A week or so later, there was a great weekend spent with Todd and Ross's families. The man watched young children driving the skidoos, and wondered if he could ever match their skill. But there was another weekend when he and Todd drove separate machines into the mountains. In spite of



much needed assistance, he was at least able to drive about 30 miles on his own.

He's constantly amazed at Newfoundlander's physical strength and stamina, and their pure enjoyment of outdoor activities. The trek across the barrens in summer



can be boggy and difficult, but Theodore was soon equally capable of navigating in snow and bog. There was a summer weekend trip to Todd's cabin when everyone had to carry a share of the foods, beer, rum, and other necessities. The man was given a child-sized backpack, while the others carried about 60 pounds each.

A great Newfoundland dinner was promised, but

the first obstacle was that the candles had been left behind. Todd quickly put the boiled dinner on the stove, a dinner that traditionally includes salt beef, turnips, carrots, potatoes, pease pudding, and cabbage. As daylight faded, they used a makeshift candle assembled from bits and pieces of old ones, and settled down to enjoy their card game and rum.

The man kept longing for food, and around midnight located the stove back in the shadows, and discovered uncooked cabbage, piled high above the pot. Todd said, "Leave it alone, I didn't have a big enough pot," and sure enough, before daybreak, the cabbage had sagged into the pot, and the delicious dinner was wolfed down, with not a lick left for Theodore.

In spite of these occasional setbacks, Theodore by now considers Newfoundland his rightful home, and their lively friends, the scenery, rugged terrain, and joys of chasing, and dodging wildlife, a lifestyle that every dog in this world should have, but that's getting ahead of the story.



The man's expeditions in search of last places began just before Labor Day, 1990. Dora quit her job as "household pet" and accompanied the "seeker" to the west coast of Newfoundland in a Jeep crammed with food and camping gear. He was attracted to "The Island" by its name, which implies, "Fresh Start". Another incentive was its location, a comfortable 2.7 thousand miles from Florida, with its hordes of grossly overblown recreational vehicles (RV's). This pattern of out of season, counter-current travel was to be repeated and refined each succeeding year, without much planning of actual destinations, but preference for climates that would weed out tourists. An important objective was to find unusual, unrehearsed, and memorable adventures.

Soon you will meet the man's prickly friend, Ed, who will grudgingly agree that the man and Dora ended up in the right groove. Normally, Ed has no patience with man, or dog, foibles, but in this instance says, "Dora sailed with the man most of her life and survived slides overboard, lightning, squalls, groundings, and falling broken spars. Since those two found high adventure in the misadventures of sailing, then the hazardous highways will provide them with much wilder tales than any Viking saga."

Theodore can't remember a time when the man wasn't there to serve him. Before Dora died, she told the pup that the man had outlived any number of dog partners, including Corny, who you'll hear more about. For now, it can be said that he had a military upbringing, since his mother, Cherry, was a U. S. Marine guard dog, in China, during World War II.

The man's long life, many times what dogs can expect, made him appear god-like in their view, but their everyday observations and prescient sensibilities convinced them he could only qualify as di minores (L. for lesser god). Even this limited approval had to do with nothing



more than his ability to drive long distances, to prepare food, and to supply a soft pad for sleeping.

Dora's, then Theodore's independent perceptions convinced them that the man's leadership could only be accepted with 0.001 mg. of salt, and even then, must be well tempered by their superior judgement. So it became a habit to drag all fours when given orders. When the man and Theodore signed up for obedience training, the instructor failed the man and passed the dog. You would have thought that his thick-skinned ego would have been deflated by this victory of quad- over bi-ped, but he continues to strut, imitate macho, and claim he's an artist.



Aware of his back-burner appearance, he shies away from mirrors, but that didn't stop him from painting a "self portrait" that depicts him, in several poses, as suave, debonaire, a dedicated angler, powerful physique, great legs, and a man to protect your back while on safari. Theodore has arrived at a different view, "The guy's far out, a pushover, no sweat, he can be managed."

Criticize if you will, but make-believe gave the man confidence to meet and get along with total strangers. Theodore's pragmatic nature leaves no room for the philosophical. His favorite sport is rolling and tumbling in slush ice and suddenly a blast off, tooth clicking flyby, a few inches from the man's nose, to reassert his belief that he's the brother of this fake deity, entitled to sibling rivalry.

How did these digressions about dogs break into the man's story? Dora and Theodore will have more than their share in the next two chapters. The man whiles away long hours while driving, mentally reviewing past and present events, and interpreting them in terms of the future. It tickles his fancy to imagine a person who can be relied upon to critically examine what he's writing.

"I know this imaginary person, inside and out," says the man, "Since I created him from long-gone friends and mentors. I dub thee Editor, or Ed for short. Your skepticism will keep me earth-bound, since I'm duty-bound to report your remarks."

It is necessary to remind you that young children frequently have imaginary companions. The elderly could find companionship and the satisfaction of reminiscing if they could regain this childhood ability to imagine friends with whom to share memories of a departed world. Dan O'Brian, author of *Spirit of*

the Hills, describes loneliness as a dangerous enemy, the prairie at night where there is nothing to be seen, the dangers to deer, antelope, sheep, cattle, buffalo, and to humans (who are also herd animals), of being separated and losing direction.

At this point, Ed interrupts and says, "Enough of your meanderings, old man, if you aspire to being the Grandpa Moses of literature, keep your bifocals on the ball, or you'll end up with nothing but a best cellar."

"Bite your tongue", replies the man, "Or I'll synapse you back to the brain cell that imagined you. Now listen while I make this crystal clear. What you are about to hear is either a true, or tru'lyin' account of adventures that couldn't possibly happen to a dog, but did, or may have - in places nearby, or in inconvenient locations, or far away."



Since Ed questioned the man's veracity, this time he imagined that Ed could verify every detail. He and Dora were camped near Deer Lodge, Montana, and used their 4-wheel drive to explore the historic stage coach trails that the modern highway couldn't follow. The Ford Museum contained the earliest version of a recreational vehicle, and the man was suddenly *de-ja-vued* back to that summer day, in 1923, when President Warren G. Harding's death was announced by Mr. Fox of Shadeyside, Maryland, when he lowered the flag to half mast.

The Fox boarding house provided accommodations for Baltimore wives and their children, who came by way of Annapolis, and a mail boat. The authentic country atmosphere was first announced by the outhouses, and then by the absence of electricity and running water. Hearty meals, prepared from locally grown or landed provender, burdened the long communal tables. Husbands sometimes banded together to flee the hot city, and travel the bumpy, dusty roads for a weekend visit.

The man retains fond memories of the place. He had much freedom, to explore, catch crabs for the evening feast, to beg a sip of Mr. Fox's home brew, and best of all, he could wander along the beach and play with black children who lived nearby. Their ramshackle one room cabin had a tantalizing smoke odor, so he was happy to enter and share their meal. The Baltimore women would have been aghast, if they had known. Mixing with blacks wasn't done, anymore than allowing Jews to live in restricted neighborhoods. In college, Paul Robeson sang at his prom, but couldn't dance with his classmates' dates. When the man was at college, Jewish students and their classmates did not mingle at social events.



Sans computers, the man's education at age ten, had only taught him to lipread newspaper comic pages, so he was unaware of the scandal surrounding this easily misled president. That was his excuse for the help he gave the White House:

When the man was a wee slip of a boy, he had a secret laboratory under his father's house. Among his inventions was a pill that could make people and animals small, and another to make them big. The latter worked so well on a grasshopper that he was soon twice the size of the boy's dog, Corny, who later shared other exciting adventures.

The lad was apprehended by a swat team while walking the grasshopper on a leash. Because of the sensitive nature of the arrest, he was taken directly to President Harding, who immediately arranged to



have a secure telephone line run to the boy's laboratory.

Since this enlarged herbivorous orthopterous could leap high in the air with mandibles that could decapitate an enemy, and exceeded the IQ requirements, Harding wanted to integrate the insect into the armed forces. But he failed to recognize that the regulars would refuse to serve alongside of someone so different in shape, color, and sexual proclivities.

Harding, Firestone, Ford and Edison enjoyed camping together. Servants, cooks and waiters followed them to the campgrounds where they used Ford's compartmented recreational vehicle to provide chairs, tables, tablecloths, and deluxe food service. A pleasing, bucolic scene for a trusting public to admire, but a critical observer (H. L. Mencken, for example) may have wondered what other motivations were at work, beside food and friendship.

For some people, at least, those were the good old days, when our trusting population was cleverly glued together with economic, class, religious, and racial barriers firmly in place. Now it seems that the Yahoos have really screwed up the works. It's getting harder and harder for a politician to hob nob with a man with a plan, and beg a penny.

Ed says, "Well old man, enough is enough, you're becoming redundant, regressive, reflexive, and repetitive. Go tell your stories to some other imaginary person, while we read the chapter about Dora."

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