

Chapter 2 - DORA

*"Outside of a dog, a man's best friend is a book.
Inside of a dog, it is very dark." - Groucho Marx*



*DORA'S TRAVELS : Mixed Media Collage -
Across lower part - Mexican Border-Baja California to Piedras Negras; Lower middle -
Dakotas, Grand Canyon, Meteor Crater; Left quadrant - Alaska, Yukon, N.W. Territories;
Right quadrant - Newfoundland - Labrador*

Dora was eight when her favorite person vanished. Her grief could not be measured in human terms, but it was apparent she had suffered a cruel blow.

How much did Dora understand about the nuclear family, of which she had been a part, and that it had imploded when the nucleus disappeared. The center, the core, the heart, the essence, the vital force, gone without a trace.

But not the reminders, which multiplied and pressed from every side. Their house, built slightly askew from where logic dictated, in order to spare every tree -arboreal coniferous monsters that aggressively refused to see the "wood for the trees" when it came to living near people whose simple desire was to coexist. They aggressively poked holes in the roof, expanded their girth to buckle the walls, and (bad weather permitting) bombed the asphalt shingles with tons of leaves, pine straw and cones.

This hard earned clearing of land, in this thinly populated maritime county of the 1950's, allowed these city-bred people the rare opportunity to build their marriage "from the ground up", and an unexcelled chance to devote time and energy to the raising and enjoyment of their children during their formative years.

One night, with their first two babies peacefully asleep and within safe hearing distance, they slipped down to the shore to watch an eclipse slowly erase the sparkling moonlit pathway of light across Bogue Sound, and then to listen to the surf crashing on the isolated ocean beach, only a mile away. They were silent during this entire event until she turned to him and said, "We must stay here for the rest of our lives."

Now, her wish, as it applied to her sojourn on Earth, had been granted, and the waxing moon, and its reflection on the water, was a grim reminder. He and Dora took cover in his laboratory, and stayed all night. Dora provided comfort as a living remnant of their former household.

The following day, the man was shanghaied by his children, who, appeared with all required gear packed in two duffel bags, and arrangements to send him to sea. A friend had asked his son to help sail a 40 foot sloop from Beaufort to Norfolk, and had then agreed to accept the old man as an alternate. The late March weather made it anything but a relaxing trip, but provided a healthy way to focus on something other than grief. The man kept thinking about his southbound journey over the same waters, forty-two years before.

He had sailed from Rock Hall, Maryland after canning season, and tied up in Morehead City, North Carolina, proud of his mackerel schooner, "Scotia Lady", which he claimed was a cousin of the famous fishing vessel, "Blue Nose". But its care and maintenance was beginning to wear his wallet thin.

He was kept busy patching the canvas storm and fair-weather sails; keeping ahead of the wear and tear on hundreds of feet of Manilla line; adjusting and tarring "deadeyes" to keep shrouds (standing rigging) taut; and battling invasion of shipworms into vital parts of the ship, especially the rudder post.

So much of their lives, after that, was triggered by this little ship. His urgent need for employment caused him to take a bus trip to Gloucester, Massachusetts to apply for a job. He met his future wife aboard a Greyhound bus, the night Truman was elected president.

A story, repeated ad nauseam by one of his employers, "The first time I saw this man he was rowing a skiff to my factory, and casually asked for a job. He specified that it must leave plenty of time for sailing. A few months later he admitted he needed a full time job in order to get married. His bride put up with living aboard the schooner for only one week, then they moved ashore. *Ted thought he was getting a Mate, but instead got himself a Captain! (Guffaw! Guffaw!).*"



Ed had been forgotten during this barrage of remember whens. Now he tries to lever the narrative back on track, when he shouts, "OK! OK!, already, I know you love to tell sea stories, but this chapter is supposed to be about a brave, completely mixed up canine-critter, named Dora."

"You're right", replies the man, "Let's talk about that Sunday before Labor Day, 1990. A line of cars waited to be loaded on the Portland, Maine overnight ferry to Nova Scotia. The out-of-season man and dog in the Cherokee Jeep loaded with camping gear aroused curiosity, and the question, "Isn't it late for camping, especially in Newfoundland, of all places?"

The next morning the man encountered a no-nonsense customs officer. Her pretty face and question about weapons, prompted a flip answer, "Well, I do carry a club in case I run into a bear". He was pulled over on the side, to avoid delaying those who had given sensible answers, and everything in the Jeep was unloaded on the pavement. The customs officers appeared suspicious of what this unlikely camper and his blind dog planned to do in Canada, but finally sent them on their way.

A few days later they completed the Atlantic crossing on the "Cariboo" and left the ferry in the kind of foul weather that Newfoundland likes to throw at people who intrude on her shores. Port au Basque was soon left behind as they traveled north on the coastal highway, and passed the signs that warned of winds strong enough to blow a tractor-trailer off the road.

The fog lifted, and the rest of the week provided opportunity to see rugged scenery so characteristic of the island of Newfoundland and different from the other Canadian maritime provinces. They enjoyed the wonderful provincial parks, whose charm in recent years has been damaged by privatization.

Suddenly, the "Indian summer" was replaced by rain, wind and fog. After a few days of damp bedding and meals laced with rain water, the man was beginning to long for home and hearth, when he met a persuasive, packpacking German, in need of assistance.

"How can you even think of going home without visiting Labrador, just a couple of hundred miles away?", the cagey fellow asked. Then an afterthought, "I'll miss my flight to Germany if I don't make it to Blanc Sablon to catch the coastal boat, and a connection to Quebec City ". He expressed no concern about the unreliable schedules. He'd just roll up in his sleeping bag, munch his Five Grain Muesli, and await the boat's arrival.

They boarded the Northern Princess at St. Barbe, and crossed the Strait of Belle Isle. Dora was permitted to stay in the passenger area where they met Elbert, a young electrical engineer. He had traveled by motorcycle all the way from Albany, New York to visit Labrador. On the ferry he bought a pile of Labrador sweatshirts, trashy discards from tourist season, to show he had reached his goal.

Due to a strike, the crossing had not been approved by the crew, and they insisted on leaving immediately. However, they listened to Elbert's entreaties and let him drive his motorcycle ashore and up the road, a short distance from the terminal. Elbert gunned his motorcycle at top speed off the ferry, and returned in five minutes.


During the return trip he was informed that Blanc Sablon is in Quebec Province and that he had not had time to reach the Labrador border, 3 kilometers farther

north! Elbert replied, "I'll be G- D----- if my family will ever know. As far as I'm concerned I'm bringing these shirts from Labrador."

"Well well" says Ed, "These may or may not be interesting stories, depending on the questionable tastes of readers patient enough to read thus far. Seems to me you and Dora also missed Labrador."

"It wasn't that bad", the man replies, "Because during the crossing, while Elbert stayed in the cabin buying sweatshirts, I was on the starboard side looking north and admiring the coast of the land, explorers used to say, God forgot: Beautiful and Forbidding. I was sure Dora and I would see more of Labrador and some other wonderful places, and we eventually did."

SOME OF DORA'S EXPERIENCES & WHERE

	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Ocean, NC - where she lived as a housedog2. Los Alamos - unofficial crossing Rio Grande3. Puerto, Penasco - she fell into shrimp tank4. Grand Canyon - she camped in heavy snow5. Alaska Ferry - Dora given visitation rights MAP & Numbers6. Kodiak, AK - Dora met a basking seal7. Gulkana, AK -She was trapped in glacial mud8. Eagle, AK - She drank from ice-clog Yukon R.9. Dawson City, Yukon - Dora dug in gold mine10. Dempster Hyw, - Camped above Arctic Circle11. Fort Providence NWT - Encountered buffalos12. Labrador Coast - Traveled on M/V Taverner13. Newfoundland - Camped all over the Island
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Day 2 of the year, 1991, had barely dawned, when the man parked in front of the Garner, North Carolina R/V place, stared longingly through the fence, at their selection of fold-out hardtop campers, and waited for someone to get off his/her duff, count the money clutched in his hot little hands, and "hitch him up one of them dang thangs."

Newfoundland had not completely dampened his youthful enthusiasm for primitive camping. It required a late fall storm on Hatteras Island to do that. He and Dora had their tent blown off its moorings. A barge reacted similarly and fetched up against the only bridge to the island. A few extra days was required to reach the mainland via the overloaded ferry system, but Dora and the man lived very well on their supply of eggs and Philadelphia scrapple. Some hungry Southerners who visited their tailgate, turned green around the gills when they read the ingredients label, but hunger overcame their misgivings.

In early June, they boarded the early morning ferry at North Sydney, NS, and took the longer crossing, which stayed well off the south coast of Newfoundland, and reached Argentia in the evening. They stayed in Pippy Park campgrounds, within the city limits of St. John's, and used it as a base for sorties to many points of interest.

The man was soon dissatisfied and longed for less crowded places. They followed the coastal roads northward, then westward, and again northward to Twillingate. Then it rained and rained, and hadn't slacked off when they arrived in Lewisporte. The man assured himself it wasn't love at first sight, when he saw that sweet little ship lying at the dock, but simple curiosity that propelled him to the Marine Atlantic ticket office. "Yes, its the Taverner's first sailing of the season. She's leaving tonight for Labrador. If you go, you'll be the only passenger from here, but they will pick up fisher families along the way. You have a dog? Well, go aboard and arrange something with the purser."



With the help of the crew, a warm, waterproof kennel was prepared and secured to the after deck. After persuading Dora that this was better than that damp camper, how comforting it was to stretch out on a bunk in the warm cabin, and feel the ship vibrate and come to life as she backed away from the dock and headed into Notre Dame Bay.

Later, a check on Dora revealed that two other dogs had come aboard and were being shipped to ports along the way. They were young Newfoundland dogs, gentle, and would likely weigh over 150 pounds when fully grown. They were chained to the rail and would remain there, regardless of the weather.

The man had brought along reading matter, which included a present handed to him by his daughter, Deede, when he left Annapolis, Maryland. It was a book called, "Last Places - A Journey in the North" by Lawrence Millman (Houghton Mifflin, Boston. 1990)

His first night at sea, and his attention was riveted by the description of the circuitous Viking route the author had followed, from Norway to Newfoundland, via Shetland Islands, Faeros, Iceland, Greenland, and Labrador. Millman had exposed himself directly to the physical discomforts of backpacking and exploration of remote places, in ways the man could never match. Maybe so, but the motivations that put him aboard this ship appeared to be in tune with attitudes and feelings so skillfully expressed by Millman.

There were certain similarities, that had happened in the 60's, when his fisheries work took him to foreign fishing locations. He had only seen the Shetlands from the air, but recalled his total fascination with the inhospitable terrain and desire to experience it first hand. He had conducted assignments in Norway, had flown at low altitudes to the Faeros and Iceland aboard a prop-driven Fairchild, and now in the 90's was completely captivated by Newfoundland and Labrador.

At Triton, to the west, and within the confines of Notre Dame Bay, the man first saw Gloria and Clarence, and their sons Adam and Corey come on board. They are a fisher family from Tim's Cove who still keep in touch. This movement of Newfoundland families for summer fishing on the Labrador coast had been an annual occurrence for many years. Sadly, the salmon fishery was petering out and this was almost the end of it.

Now only a few families and individual fishermen were going. A few years before, there would have been hundreds, and before that, thousands--people who had built cabins along the Labrador coast, had friends there, and looked forward to summer salmon fishing ,and some financial return for their efforts.

Severe ice conditions were evident as soon as they reached the Atlantic. An ice pack paralleled the starboard side of the ship and seemed to go on forever, accompanied by scattered icebergs. This was "iceberg alley", a powerful ocean-directed corridor that icebergs and ice-flows follow, from Greenland to the north

shores of Newfoundland, where a sampling of polar bears is sometimes landed, then on around the east coast of the Island.

At last, the man and his dog were really in Labrador: Red Bay! They were the first off the ship, with an hour or so before she was due to leave. Poor Elbert! Given time, he could have driven his motorcycle 80 kilometers on paved road to reach this place, but after that, there were no roads to accommodate motor-driven wheels. The three hundred or so inhabitants had made the place inviting to visitors, the restaurant and shops, a museum under construction, tours to Saddle Island where Basque fishermen and other Europeans landed and processed the world's largest catch of whales, in the early sixteenth century.

He and Dora returned to the pier, where he first observed the friendliness of the local people towards the visiting Newfoundlanders and the ship's crew. A kind of banter, gossip and news gathering turned out to be the norm for every Labrador port. It was impossible to feel lonely in these surroundings. Then, a whale briefly surfaced in the harbor, less than 100 yards away. The man aimed his camera, and so did Marilyn, who was waiting to board the ship. He accused her of importing a trained whale, to impress tourists.

Marilyn had completed her first year as a teacher in Nain, and was now on vacation, on her way to visit her parents at Fox Harbour. She had a collection of photographs that proved her competence, and enthusiasm for Nain, its beautiful scenery, and the predominantly Inuit student body at the school. The next day, as they were approaching Fox Harbour, the man asked if her parents would be there to meet her. She pointed to a boat heading out to sea, and said, "No, there they are, on their way to go fishing."



The week passed swiftly, as they visited scheduled and unscheduled ports, the latter arrivals quickly spotted from shore and met by a stream of boats, to receive supplies, passengers, or simply to be sociable. Ice conditions were severe, and dangerous for night travel, so the ship tied up at the large government docks, or simply anchored. The local people were welcomed aboard and filled the seats of the small "theater", drank cokes, and watched video films to all hours. The man and Dora usually spent a few hours ashore, exploring each village, even in rain, fog, or wind. There was always a generator plant, a landing field, fishing boats, and dogs not allowed to run free. In some places, dogs that could not be used in summer months were confined on small islands. Then, one night there was an outstanding display of Northern Lights.

Reggie, Francis, and two lively aunts in their eighties, came aboard at Mary's Harbour, en route to Goose Bay for a holiday. Reggie, a retired school teacher, who had been drafted for the job when he was a teenager, was a wonderful source of information. A few years later, the man and Dora stayed at their home in Mary's Harbour.

It was evident that the Taverner could not complete its scheduled run, since the ice north of Goose Bay remained unbroken. Sea borne deliveries did not reach Nain until August that year, and emergency supplies were delivered by air. The man and Theo stayed aboard for the return trip, this time occupied with picking up insulated containers of freshly caught salmon. They returned to Lewisporte two weeks later, with a long list of friends, on ship and shore, then resumed their camping for the rest of the summer.



"Now Ed," says the man, "Don't be unreasonable. I can't tell you everything at one time, there will be more later. Now I must resume the sad task of telling you about Dora's last days."

There was no indication she was ailing when, two years later, in September, the man drove his Dodge Ram, 4x4, half ton truck aboard the M/V Bond at Lewisporte, and sailed to Goose Bay, Labrador. As previously described, Dora arrived in Nain a few days later, and was taken to the home of the two school teachers, Reg and Marilyn. When the man arrived on the mail plane he found Dora happily ensconced on a blanket in their living room. Their perfect hosts served delicious meals that included caribou, Arctic char, and luxuries from their larder which had been ordered far in advance and shipped to them annually. They met most of the teaching staff during the evenings, and during school hours, took long hikes, and climbed steep trails covered with colorful vegetation for views of the meandering rockbound waterways.

The friendly Inuit children fell in love with Dora. The man felt like Pied Piper, with children following them everywhere and begging for a chance to walk the dog on her leash. These walks continued beyond town boundaries, but the parents were unconcerned.

The week flew by, and now it was time to embark on the M/V Taverner, described by her crew as a "good old girl", soon to retire.



Their receding view of Nain was through snow, all the more reason to hurry up and rig a canvas-wrapped wire cage as sleeping quarters for Dora. It was then secured to a sheltered place on the upper deck, near the stern, and immediately accepted without complaint by Dora, the experienced traveler. The ship was sometimes close enough to the massive rock coastline to observe in detail how the steep ocean swells climbed almost to the tops of high rock cliffs and coated them with white salty foam.

The man stayed on deck with Dora for most of each day, and they were the first ashore when the vessel docked at Davis Inlet, Hopedale, Postville, and Makkovik. The processing plant at the latter port was unloading a fishing vessel when the crew spotted Dora. They recognized her as belonging to Cow Head, and asked, "How in Hell did she turn up 700 miles away?"



Back in Goose Bay, they discovered that the ferry service to Newfoundland was closed for the season. The alternative was a 2000 mile drive that included the rough roads across Labrador, a ferry across the broad St. Lawrence River, and the Atlantic crossing to Port au Basque, in order to return to Cow Head. The high spot of this enforced trip was camping in central Labrador, in a spruce forest carpeted with brown and gray lichen - pristine, totally quiet, and dimly lit by a moonless sky - a mind boggling experience.

Several weeks later, when they had returned to North Carolina, Dora was invited to be the guest of honor of two 4th grade classes, while the man showed camcorder recordings of her travels. She was too sick to bring into the classrooms, so about eighty students and their teachers, captivated by her adventures, trooped outside to greet and comfort her. After that, for the next two months, every effort was made to save her, including complicated surgery. Finally, the man rushed her to the vet's office where emergency measures failed.

The man tearfully placed his head against hers, bid her farewell, and wished he could do something similar to what Andre Maurois (1885 -1967) had so vividly described in his story, "The Weigher of Souls". It was about a man who greatly loved his dog. He invented a transparent dome capable of trapping a soul, proven to be there by its glow under ultraviolet light. He trapped the dog's soul when it died, and later had his own soul placed in the same dome. Thereafter, the combined souls glowed even brighter.

There remained much satisfaction that Dora's life had been enriched by her three and one-half years of shared adventures. Dotage and physical disabilities had

been held at bay. Now a look at Dora when she was still relatively young and active.

There stands this aging 60 pound blond Golden Retriever, with overhanging ears that make her resemble somewhat, an old fashioned cradle telephone. She looks matronly, a homebody, and not very impressive withal. But then there's that wise, dog-of-the-world face, and lovely dark "womanly" eyes, slightly opalescent from nascent cataracts.

Within there's the breeding. Her ancestry, certified AKC (which perhaps explains her snobbish twisted lip, directed at the man to remind him of her superior lineage). She employs his escort services as a training exercise, since her eyes aren't what they used to be when she could spot a bird a mile away. She will need this "seeing eye man" when the going's tough.

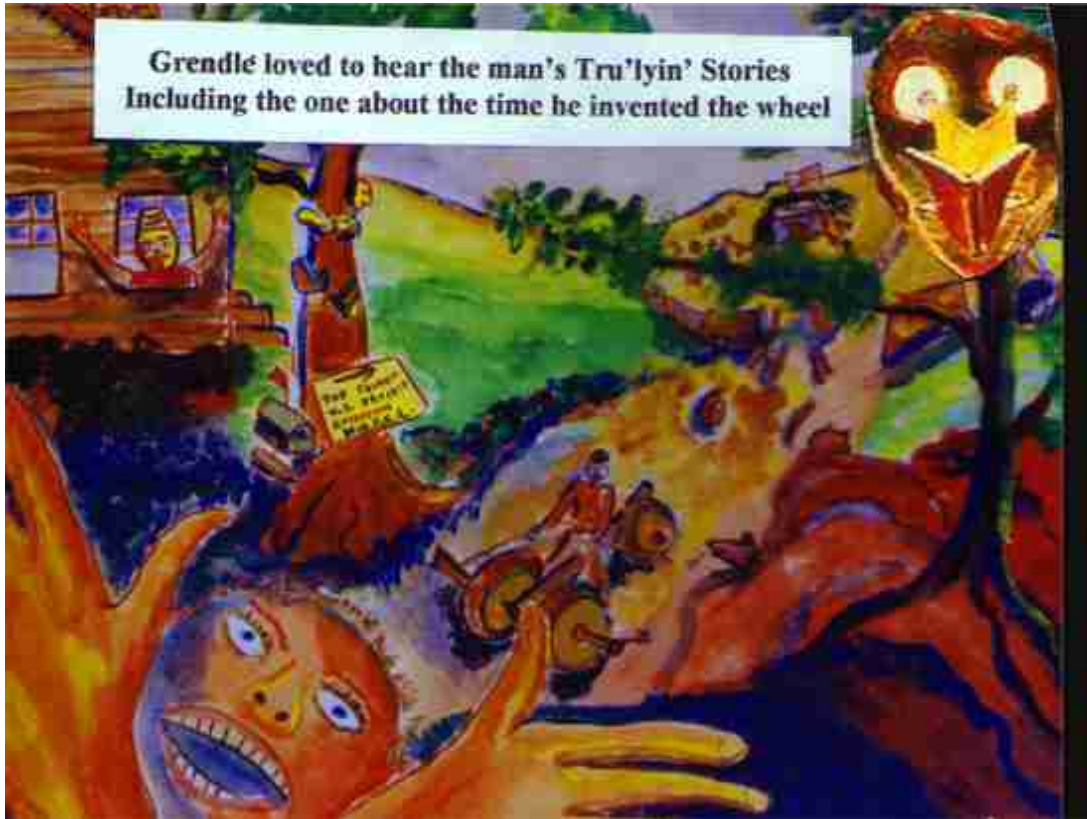
The man accepts her cavalier attitude because he knows, that however far removed, she is indeed a product of cross-breeding of superior ancestors in England during the 1860's. With the attitude of a vain woman, she seems to think she has the beautiful gold coat, aristocratic bearing, feathering, and waterproof fur that distinguishes the more fortunate members of her breed.

At six months, Dora was the picked-over, not the pick-of-the-litter. When she left the kennel her chubby, dog-eared mother seemed relieved to see her daughter leave the fold and have a respectable home and family. The man had recently lost Grendle, a large creature, part Shepherd, part Yellow Lab, and named after that legendary monster vanquished by Beowulf.

The man had made himself sick, as he mourned Grendle and longed for another dog, and here was Dora, waiting for adoption. In spite of the permanent stain on the upholstery of the new car, that she nervously planted en route, and some peculiar mannerisms, described later, Dora was welcomed into their home.

Ed's hammering on the man's elbow, "Now hold on, you poor excuse for an annalist, have you slipped your moorings? Steady as she goes, man, you were talking about Dora, and suddenly there's "Grendle", dog or monster?"

"Now calm down and listen up," replies the man, "Since you're a recent figment of my imagination how can you know everything about my past, or the stories told before you were imagined?"



So Dora's story must again be delayed while the man tells Ed about the bedtime stories he told to Grendle and two grandchildren. These were the very same tru'lyin' stories his own children had been forced to listen to a generation before. They had believed, and fought many a schoolyard brawl to prove that their father had invented the wheel:

As you may have read in your encyclopedia, children, the original buggies and autos were sleds, drawn by horses, or "gasoline engines that walked on four steel legs. I was ordered, via the secure telephone from the White House, to design an improved vehicle.

I cleared a field at the top of a hill near my father's house, removed the runners from a sled, and connected two axles. Then, I sawed blocks of wood into sets of four of each shape: squares, triangles, cones, hexagons, hexagrams, octogons, and circles, and drilled holes to slide them on the axles.

Each time I slid a set of cut out blocks on the ends of the axles, I measured how long it took for the cart to go down the hill. When I finally installed the circular blocks, the cart broke loose, ran down hill at tremendous speed, and almost ran over my father who was taking a nap on the road. And that's how I invented the wheel!

Ed looks as if he's ready to blow a fuse, and the man is wondering if Ed is made of stern enough stuff, or should he have imagined him stronger? Well, he had his

reasons for mentioning Grendle and the time-worn stories. He is counting on these tidbits from the past to show what inventiveness, initiative, and imagination can do.

The man's love for Dora is undiminished in spite of her phobias, which include her "doorway syndrome." She must always proceed, not follow, people through doorways. And there's her affection for a rubber hotdog, which may have started when her puppy-bearing capabilities were surgically eliminated, without a thought for her psyche.

Besides her adoration and predilection for a rubber hotdog and women in that order, she tolerates her companion for his services and mutual love of travel, but he must never order her about, and must speak to her in a soft falsetto voice.

Her dogged refusal to be bossed placed her in great danger once when she was young and untrained in seadogship. While under sail in the strong currents of an ocean inlet she decided to go ashore to relieve herself. She casually stepped over the side and was rapidly carried towards the ocean. The circling boat with flapping sails attracted the Coast Guard and she was rescued.

As a member of a human family with numerous cats and dogs, Dora was given the rank of the man's daughter and sister of his actual daughters and son, and aunt to the grandchildren, cats and dogs. She regarded such titles as doggerel-dew, and was thankful that when she came along the family had outgrown its desire to adopt all God's creatures, including birds, rodents, and an occasional snake. All of this family stuff seemed too sweet and sentimental for Dora's protein tastes, so she welcomed escape to faraway places.

Don't blame Dora for her restlessness. She was at that climatic age when change is needed. Eight years as a faithful housedog, while the simple pleasures of being a hunter, or having her own career passed her by. Never to have experienced the joy of retrieving and carrying a fallen bird in her velvety mouth. Never to have been a guard dog in the U. S. Marines, or a Customs Bureau drug sniffer, or even to have contributed her body for medical experiments!

But now she depends on the man, her obedient servant and traveling companion, to find adventures, interesting places, tasty meals, soft sleeping pads, and to provide seeing-eye services and protection of her meager possessions - her hotdog, rabies tag, flea collar. If he does all of these things, he can then feel free to take pictures, keep a log, and indulge in that stupid chatter with his kind, instead of the erudite barking that dogs do.

May, 1999