

Chapter 3 - THEODORE

How can the man imagine Ed as being so irascible, perturbable, prickly, eruptive, fractious, huffish, cantankerous and contentious, when much of Ed came from the man's close friend Larry, a bright, perceptive, gentle, considerate person. He suffered greatly as a result of military service in World War I. and is buried in a choice spot in Arlington Cemetery that he personally selected because of its shade tree and unparalleled view of Washington. This selection privilege is denied most veterans of later wars, which have so grossly over-populated the place. RIP space is now so limited that many vets can no longer be caught dead there.

When the man was a wee lad, his teachers repeatedly tried to cure him of writing left-handed. A result of their well-intentioned efforts was that he could no longer tell left from right without checking the location of his heart. This led to Larry's favorable first impression, when they met. Larry's right arm was paralyzed, so without hesitation the boy offered to shake hands left-handed, a gesture which the adults thought was unusually considerate for one so young.

Thus began a long friendship which lasted until Larry died in the '40s. They lived about four blocks apart in northwest Baltimore, and spent many evenings talking, playing chess, and walking. His improved ability to walk and to ignore disabilities was a triumph of spirit and mind, and he actively confronted pain and discomfort through self-imposed stress, such as wearing lightweight clothes in extremely cold weather, without the slightest evidence of discomfort.

In the '30s, he had recovered sufficiently to circumnavigate the world aboard unscheduled freighters, a dangerous undertaking for a person who was lame, partly paralyzed, and without a protective layer of bone over his brain. He returned with wonderful descriptions of exotic, distant places, which, in those simplistic, isolationist times, were tremendously exciting and fascinating.

There are occasions when the man, from the vantage point of his 1999 garb, takes a critical look at how Larry influenced his life. Positive influences included this love of travel, and his good-natured, humorous assessment of the human comedy - the fragility of "landed gentry" and their less fortunate fellow citizens. Larry, undoubtedly, found it tempting to agree with and accept the cynical, sardonic attitudes of H. L. Mencken, that exuberant critic of American life as it was in the confused '30s.

Now, almost seventy years later, the man longs for a peacetime clarion call to motivate and guide our bumbling society in new and exciting directions.

Larry had given most of his life and future ambitions to the military, and had a respect for the military establishment that influenced his young friend. After Pearl Harbor, the nation was united to an extent never again equaled. The "common man," from the urban middle classes, from the farms, from the slums and even the prisons, were one and all led to believe that whole-hearted participation in the

war effort was a certified admission ticket to a great classless American society, that was now waiting in the wings. These hopes, ambitions, expectations now lie in ruins, in this ominous fading year of the twentieth century, with bombs bursting in air, and upon, innocent people.

"And now, Ed, if you'll be patient a while longer, this is a good time to mention some interesting linkages associated with Larry. He frequently joined the man's family when they relaxed on the front porch and kept an eye on their neighbors. He shared everyone's excitement when a jockey named Charle (Chick) Lang returned to his home across the street, after riding "Reigh-Count" to victory in the 1928 Kentucky Derby. Larry loved children and enjoyed watching the Beesley children play hide-go-seek in their yard next door to the Lang's.

"He laughed heartily when the little girl shouted, 'I see Jay-a-Cup, I see Jay-a-Cup!' Later, grown up Jacob Beesley was a crew member on the B-29 Bomber, Inola Gay, which dropped the first atom bomb, the justification of which is still vigorously debated."

Ed, mollified to hear he can claim Larry as a worthy antecedent, avoids profanity. "What in the name of Mirza Ali Muhammad has this got to do with Theodore?"

The man replies, "It's as simple as ABC. On humanitarian grounds, Atomic Bombs stink and are morally indefensible, but so is every horror given divine approval in times of war. This strange morality now receives widespread global acceptance as a way to protect human rights!

"Some say, the Japanese surrender was imminent, but even a few days' delay in ending WWII might have changed history, and ever so slightly, the twists, turns and blips in the man's life. Then, there might never have been a trip on a Skidoo, or a Theodore too. So you see, Ed, the very essence of this story, including your imaginary existence, depends on linkages."

The readers undoubtedly appreciate Ed's efforts to get the narrative told, over, and done with, but the man is made of more procrastinative stuff. Sans guidance system, he is now in a metagalactic orbit that would put NASA to shame. "Let me see, let me see, what words will best describe that (only occasional, highly improbable) noble relationship that may infrequently exist between a man or woman, and a dog?" asks the man. "Boon companion? Brother? Sister? Comrade? Escort? Fellow traveler? Guard? Guide? Kindred Spirit? Sidekick? How about 'bestfrienddog'? Achieved through bonding, assimilation, blending, linking, melding, yoking?"



The man's relationship with bestfrienddog Theodore was achieved through bonding, assimilation, blending, linking, melding and yoking

"I must confess," continues the man, "the other day, when I tried to explain bestfrienddog and Theodore in particular, to the kind of person I used to admire - sensible, realistic, practical, pragmatic, good credit rating, successful - his eyes avoided mine. It was apparent he wished to change the subject, and finally did. Global warming seemed safer, but he beat a hasty retreat when I warned him that mankind may soon end with a gasp, if we continue to increase worldwide production and the number of consumers, and exhaust the byproducts into the (so conveniently located) atmosphere, which economists estimate is our most cost-effective aerodynamic sewer."

This one-sided conversation, in which an almost urgent disinterest was shown, had a profound discouraging effect on the man. He began to wonder how many other people had been amused by his dedication to a dog, and had laughed at him behind their hands, while admiring Theodore.

Thrown into a blue funk, he recalled past events. "Maybe I should have listened to that gold-mining-feller's advice, in 1992, near Dawson City, and gone to Costa Rica to get me a woman, like he did, and have a real live woman to live with, like he did. Out there in the boondocks, that couple lived in a fourteen-foot Trillium trailer, just like mine, for gawd's sakes. He offered me a chance to work in his gold mine, but it was still snowbound in June, and I wasn't prepared to wait. Besides, I didn't trust his motives, especially those which concerned the Costa Rican woman's future."

And so, the man recalls, he and Dora left the Klondike, and imagined banners flying from the Jeep. One had that strange device, 'Excelsior!', the other, 'Wildegeest!' He later admitted with lingering regret that he thought of Longfellow's words:

*'O stay ,' the maiden said, 'and rest
Thy weary head upon this breast!
A tear stood in his bright blue eye,
But still he answered with a sigh,
EXCELSIOR!"*

Suffused with righteousness and poetry, the man heard himself say, "My eyes aren't blue, they're kinda gray, so north on Highway 5, we'll make our way." The turnoff to Route 5 bore a sign that the ferry to Inuvik was not in service because the Mackenzie River was frozen. That evening, after a day of magnificent scenery, they crossed the Arctic Circle and camped.

Again heading north, the trees disappeared and the terrain turned to tundra, soon obliterated by snow and wind. Finally, they reached the monument that marked the beginning of the Northwest Territory, with the Jeep appropriately covered with snow and ice. He recalled the poem's warnings. *"Try not the pass!" the old man said. "Dark lowers the tempest overhead. The roaring torrent is deep and wide! "and loud that clarion voice replied, "Excelsior!"*

Brave words, but the craven man turned southward, slipping, sliding, and mouthing Daniel Emmett's famous rebel song, 'Dixie' (1860), *"Oh, I wish I were in the land of cotton."*

More appropriate to the locale was a sign by the road which said, "Hunters! Please Don't Leave Your Guts within 50 Meters of the Roadway."

The man's life has involved many obligations which these recent travels have not completely eliminated. He avoids involvements that might get out of hand, and is especially fearful about what might happen to Theodore if they are separated. Money must be earmarked for medical care and special foods to protect the dog's health, and a suitable person must be found to accept him on as a partner. He must never be downgraded to pet, or housedog.







With that exception, man and dog do not waste time mooning over what's over the horizon. As they say in coastal Carolina, "Them two's as happy as clams!" The man takes such pleasure in Theodore's personality and beauty - a radiant creature, beautiful in color, shape, size, and with brown eyes that focus on people's faces. His noble stance, head shifting about 15 degrees at a time, one direction, then the other, in search of everybody, everything that merits personal attention. Walking or racing, he's irresistible to most strangers, who are likely to comment, "He's so gorgeous, so happy, so self-assured; he's more like an overgrown puppy!"

When Theodore beams in on Newfoundlanders, they are likely to exclaim, "Why he's just a great big sook!" *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* (1990: University of Toronto Press), defines *sook* (2) as a babyish child. Without doubt, the boy's a charmer, a nose-browner, a clown. He adds to the effect by rolling over and kicking his legs in the air, by shoving himself along sideways, or imitating a bear skin rug - lying full length, neck arched, legs stretched out, fore and aft, and searching faces for signs of approval.

At age five and a half, Theodore weighs 88 pounds, and measures 60 inches from the tip of his nose to the end of his tail. To show his disapproval of such niceties as setting the table for company, he can reach to the center of the table, scoop up paper napkins, and shred them over the floor.

Outdoors, his movements are light, airy, fluid, as if his body moves on ball bearings and the finest shock absorbers. He streaks through underbrush, seemingly without blinking an eye. On the coldest days, alongside open water, pond, muddy hole in the tuckamore, he dives in and enjoys a few moments of relaxation. He's in love with almost everyone, and greets them with his rippling, wagging body language turned full on. But he avoids certain people, and when that occurs, the man abides by his judgment and is on guard.

Theodore thinks it's his due to have as many human and dog friends as possible, but he doesn't allow the man the same privilege. People are amazed at his jealous behavior when the man stops to talk to them. Theodore will then snatch the leash, push it against him, and make it clear that he is not to loiter. At times he has become violent, with leaps in the air and teeth clicking. A terrified onlooker asked, "Is that really your dog?" An honest reply would have been, "No! I'll never own him, and don't intend to try."

For fifty years, the man had one dog after another that he thought he owned, until he met Theodore. There was "Honey," a female Chesapeake Bay Retriever, so-named because big strong fishermen on the Eastern Shore of Maryland frequently called each other "Honey." She was his sailing partner on the schooner, "*Scotia Lady*," and served as an overboard motor to tow him ashore in his dinghy. Later, enroute to North Carolina, she gave birth to one male puppy, half Labrador Retriever, who became a housedog when matrimony landed the man and dog ashore.

A year later, a big German shepherd, named "Cherry," after Cherry Point Marine Air Station, was debriefed following active duty in China during WWII, and came into the man's possession. When bred with another thoroughbred, she bore nine puppies, including "Corny," who later caused much trouble by biting perfectly innocent people. Nevertheless, he became an important pipe-smoking character in the man's tru'lyin' stories, and was reported to be a field-grade commissioned officer in the Army of the United States, capable of astounding deeds, and responsible only to the President.

"Yea, Aye, Oui, Si, Da, Yes Sir/Ma'am indeed, most assuredly, precisely, naturellement, Hear Hear!" sarcasms Ed. "Where is the logic in those tru'lyin' stories that the man used to dupe innocent children? It's possible that Corny qualified for an Army commission, since his Mom was a decorated veteran and had some pull at the Pentagon, but look at that picture of him scuba diving alongside a whale! He is supposed to have gotten there after hang-gliding from Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina! Anyone who claims his dog hang-glides is a certified liar, and where did he get the scuba diving equipment after they dropped into the ocean?"

"Oh, cut out the iambic pentameter," replies the man. "You haven't examined the pictures in the right order. Here's a picture of my travel kit, viewed through a microscope. It clearly explains how our diverse and frequent emergency needs

were met. The small size of the travel kit and contents is explained by the word *Miniaturization*."



A watch was needed to keep track of time in places as far apart as North Carolina and the red spot on Jupiter, and even more important was his Travel Kit, hidden under a zipper sewn into his skin. When the zipper is opened, aided by a microscope, you see just a few of the many items that saved man and dog in the course of their amazing travels, including a Chemcraft Set, Big Pills, Little Pills, parachute, outboard motor, rifle, bicycle, Time Machine, combination underwater & space helmets, chain saw, television set.

"Oh no, you don't get off that easy," smirks Ed. "That's just something you copied from the movie, *Fabulous Voyage*, about miniaturizing a submarine with doctors aboard and injecting them into a man's circulatory system for an on-site physical."

"You're wrong, Ed," replies the man. "My story was told many years before the movie. The complex technology of *"Miniaturization"* and *"Maximization"* began when the man, who was only a wee laddie at the time, invented *"Small"* and *"Big"* Pills in his secret laboratory, and produced a giant grasshopper which so impressed President Warren Harding that a secure telephone was installed between the Oval Office and the boy's laboratory.

"Now Ed, since you have questioned my veracity, not to mention the completely factual details of what occurred when the man and Corny went hang-gliding, I must again delay Theodore's story to tell you about when they fell into the Atlantic Ocean and were swallowed by a Whale:



"Teddy and Corny went to Kill Devil for the hang-gliding and were blown out to sea. When they finally landed in the ocean they were swallowed by a whale. After a hearty meal of plankton and shrimp, they climbed back into the whale's mouth and found it to be an unusual whale - WITH TEETH! This was fortunate

because one tooth had a large cavity, which they converted into comfortable living quarters. Teddy had Corny deploy a fish net across the whale's mouth , which caught a bountiful seafood diet. But then the whale had a toothache and asked them to fix it. Ted mixed ground oyster shells with cement from his travel kit, and filled the cavity. The whale was so thankful that he brought them back to their Ocean, NC dock, at high tide."

The man usually had Corny with him while he worked in a laboratory supported by a major fish plant operator (a man with certified Scotch temper). One fateful day, Corny creamed the owner's beloved dog, and caused the gentleman to roll over on his back, scream profanities, and furiously kick both legs at the aggressive dog. Corny was forever banished from the plant premises.

Over the years, there were numerous dogs, including Grendel, who loved to join the grandchildren in listening to tru'lyin' tales. Then there was Dora, whose patient acceptance of that rough and tumble puppy, Theodore, during her final days, was very much an act of love.



Theodore relaxes on the man's bed, and admires diamond-shaped mixed media collage called, "Theodore's Newfoundland Friends"

A skilled carpenter was required to keep enlarging the pup's "den" which soon occupied one-quarter of the man's bedroom. It consisted of private hideout, a play pen, and a poop area covered with newspapers. The need for the latter soon disappeared since he was frequently allowed outside, and quickly learned

to control his bladder and bowels. He learned quickly because he preferred the newspapers dry and sanitary for his shredder games.

The man's cot, another product of the carpenter's art, was designed to hold a 72" x 30" x 3" foam plastic pad supported by a plywood panel. It was essentially a bunk, similar to those used on his boat, campers, and cabin. Dora slept on a pad near his cot. Theodore's first mission, when released from his sleeping quarters, was to maul Dora. When Dora was very sick, the man did not realize it until he noticed that Theodore was avoiding her completely, aware that the fun and games were over.

The pup proved a "tough nut to crack," and the man wondered if they could ever achieve an amiable friendship. When he tried to use a leash on Theodore, the reaction was violent, but now he accepts the leash as a sociable way to walk together.

Before Theodore's first departure for Newfoundland, he attended obedience school. Donnie, an experienced trainer, judged the dog to be unusually intelligent and trainable, and his "master," a disaster. There was nothing he could do with a man who was convinced that training would convert his free-spirited dog into a walking robot, that would only heel, truckle, and fawn.

Now that Theodore is over five, with behavior patterns and physical prowess firmly in place, the man is satisfied with his decision to let nature instead of dominance take its course. It's a happy coincidence that Newfoundlanders call Theodore a "sook" since the man's deceased brother, Sydney, when they were very young, was called "Sookie." Their parents' families came from Eastern Europe, and the word is virtually unknown there, and in the United States, so how did this happen?

While the man retains some of the pragmatic (sensible, realistic, practical) attitudes of his earlier life, he now has a thin skin when confronted with the pragmatism of others and is ready to launch a tirade against anyone who minimizes the importance of a bestfrienddog. "OK! OK! Go ahead and sneer if I accept Theodore for the role of 'Little Brother' as a substitute for other kinds of companionship. If you haven't faced an urgent need to avoid loneliness and develop a new lifestyle, then you'd better reserve judgment until faced with the same problem. Just be tolerant when I say, in my case at least, that my survival and happy new life was achieved mostly with the help of two dogs - Dora and Theodore."

The man thinks he should look for human characteristics in people, not dogs. He respects a dog's nature as a unique entity, too good for humans to tamper with. He relies on the goodness and sanity of a Golden Retriever's natural instincts, and has seldom been disappointed.

Their relationship rests on affection, respect, kindness, sharing, playing, and regularity, as it applies to good nutrition, exercise, healthy living.

"Will the real Theodore please stand up? Come out from under that computer desk, Theo. Don't look so guilty."

The leg space under the middle drawer of the old fashioned desk is Theodore's refuge when there is lightning and thunder, or simply a place to be sociable when the man is working. He's there now, one paw placed possessively over the man's right shoe, and a comfort and an inspiration as this narrative is being written.

"It's only 0800 hours, and we have just returned from the beach where we go every morning, regardless of weather, but usually hoping to see the sun emerge out on the wintry ocean horizon, or blaze its way out of the eastward beach, in the spring, when our departure for Canada is imminent. This morning, as usual, Theodore went his separate way, intent on deciphering the scents left by people and dogs who had trespassed his special domain. However, he kept a watchful eye on where I was walking, and was soon at my side, begging me to throw a stick or shell into the surf, for him to retrieve."

The dog has acquired some of the man's fears. He loves the ocean, but doesn't venture far from shore. One danger is the siren-call of the porpoises. Does he think they are seagoing dogs? One day he tried to join them, but screams and shouts brought him back.

On another occasion, their skiff and Theodore's barking attracted a school of cavorting porpoises. One jumped high in the air, almost touching the side, while the terrified dog dived for the bottom of the boat.

Theodore is quiet and relaxed most of the day, while the man is busy cleaning house, or busy with projects. Amazingly, he is waiting at the door if the man thinks of going somewhere in the van. He follows every detail of their domestic life and appears in the kitchen, begging for a handout, if something he likes, such as cheese, has been taken from the refrigerator.

Towards evening, when the man wearily drops into a chair to relax, Theodore decides it's playtime. He cavorts around the room with a towel in his mouth and then jabs it into the man's side, or he insistently pokes a ball into the man's hands, begging to play a retriever's favorite game.

Well, dear readers, you'll soon hear more about Theodore's special lifestyle and his bestfrienddog relationship with the man. Please watch for future attractions, especially the next one, where Theodore visits Donnie the dog trainer.

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