

Chapter 4 - BESTFRIENDDOG

Part 1. Theodore Visits Boyhood Friend & Confidant Donnie Hult (April 28, 1999)

Don Hult, Jr., Manager, HADNOT CREEK KENNELS, served aboard nuclear subs, U. S. Navy, is an experienced deep sea diver, and during the last fifteen years has been training dogs to obey, behave, and get along with people. Also, he trains dogs for police and rescue work, and for activities which involve detection of narcotics, explosives, cadavers.

"The man" and his dog Theodore, signed up for obedience training five years ago when Theodore was a pup. The dog received high grades, but Donnie failed the man, who ever since has tried to justify his wimpy attitude by saying he doesn't want Theodore to be subservient. So the debate goes on. Let's see what Donnie thinks about it now.





The man: "Good morning, Donnie, I guess I'm the only human who hasn't passed your obedience training course, so here I am, five years later, willing to try again to polish up the dog/man best friend relationship."

Don: "If you're sure about this special man/dog relationship, why have you come to me? You said something about Theodore's rough edges."

The man: "Correct, he's usually a living doll, but when I talk to a stranger he attacks me. Oh no, he has never hurt a living soul - except me. And if I cook dinner for company, he is likely to snatch all the paper napkins from the table, or remove them from people's laps, and rip the paper into shreds."

Don: "I've had a lot of experience with older people and their dogs, and can usually help them work out the best possible relationships. But there's nothing I can do if you cave in every time he retreats, rolls his eyes, and pretends he's sorry. I've taken Theodore to the training field and given him commands he learned five years ago. That dog's smart, he hasn't forgotten a thing!"





The man: "I must admit, he's a perfect gentleman with other people. I've even asked total strangers, including young children, to make him sit down and behave."

Don: "Well, come back five years from now, and we'll see how you make out. I can't help you, because Theodore is doing exactly what you want him to do, and that includes proving he has a mind of his own."

Part 2. Michael Roche Provides a Second Opinion



Michael Roche, Photographed with Theodore and Lex

"Bailing out the Dory"

July 7, 1996 - Dawn, taking a long walk along the deserted, but soothingly beautiful seashore of Shallow Bay beach near Cow Head, with Lex, my Airedale Terrier (ADT). A nadir in our lives. His, because of an incurable gastro-intestinal disease which, despite his five years, had robbed him of energy and enthusiasm. Mine, due to feeling his suffering. Then, we met the man and Theodore. The ADT and I stood in incredulity and bemusement at the initial display of teeth clicking, growling, body slamming and leash pulling antics of the dog towards the man who resolutely attempted to maintain some semblance of dignity in the presence of two strangers - in vain! The man resignedly explained, "He's a beastie and jealous to boot." Eventually, a rotting seal distracted both dogs.

From this inauspicious beginning, the seed of wonder grew. Our lives were steeped in "tru'lyin' stories"; of how a Greyhound bus collided with Thomas Dewey's fate; how the man's children were alphabetized as CC, DD, JJ (with a solitary Turd plopping out); how a tin boat conquered the Rio Grande; how "Winterside" could find a harmony with "Summerside"; and how Dora's cataracts never belied her inner serenity.

Above all else, the stirring clarion call of "Wildegeest!" has been deeply felt and heeded. Now, Lex is in remission. The dory is no longer sinking.

Part 3. Good Intentions, or the Work of a Deviling Gremlin?

"Sometimes I suspect that my well-planned, contiguous narrative is being thrust hither and yon by some puckish knave," opines the man. "But my flagging spirits soared when two faithful readers, Ann and Richard, who had somehow survived the twists and turns of my narrative, presented me with a wonderful photograph dedicated to 'Wildegeest!' I'm sorry that my digital reproduction is so inadequate."



"WILDEGEEST!" by Richard H. Rohlfing (1997).

"Wake up to reality, man," says Ed, "and don't let those pats on the head make you think you can now ride roughshod over your limited quota of understanding people."

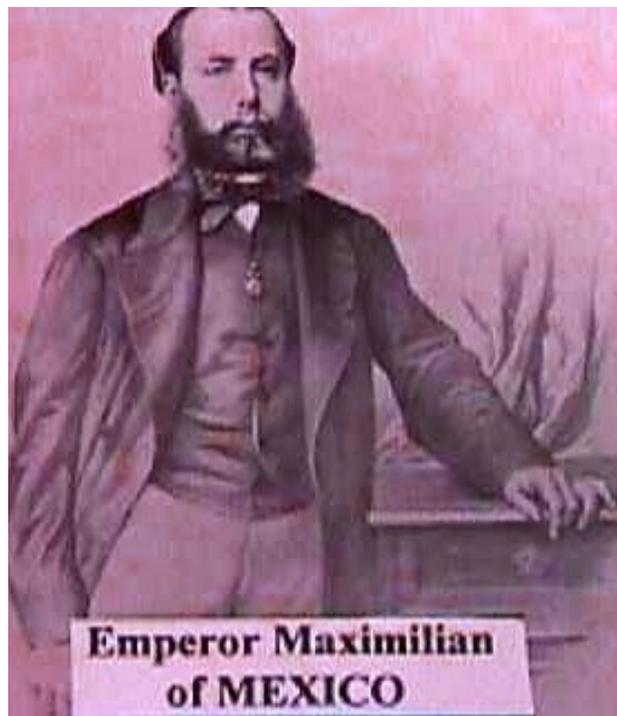
"Ed," replies the man, "you are just about the most reactionary, oppositional, resistant, counteractive individual I've ever imagined. If I want my narrative to stray hither and sometimes yon, now and again, it's because I'm doing an imitation of an old person who cannot stay focused on what other people want to hear about."

"Now you're dusting off those crumpled papers about the *S. S. Merida Salvage Expedition*. I'm warning you plain, old man, you'll not emerge from that story lookin' squeaky-clean," warns Ed.

"Ed, I must admit that the disappearance of those cursed emeralds kept me from making an incriminating decision, so I plead the Fifth Amendment and won't ever reveal what I decided. But don't blame me for wondering what it would have been like to be a free-spirited salvager instead of a toxin-breathing bench-chemist, who spent his life on problems the world ignores, or would rather forget. I could have been the one to raise the *Titanic*, the *Bismarck*, or better still, a Chesapeake Bay bug-eye loaded with fresh oysters. So Ed, if you will not interrupt, it's that 16th Century Hapsburg Count Hermann, not bestfrienddog, who must now take center stage."

Irrefutable old wives' tales, rumors, and U. S. newspapers of the 1930s reported that in the 16th Century, Count Hermann raided a Burmese temple and stole gems which were eventually inherited by Emperor Maximilian of Mexico, while Empress Charlotte was off securing gorgeous emeralds from an Aztec temple at Quetzalcoatl. Who can blame those hapless Hapsburg transplants to the barren soil of the new world for collecting boodle as a productive way to pass the time?

One newspaper darkly hinted there was a curse on those jewels, since Maximilian's regime ended with his execution in 1867, and his wife became insane and remained confined until her death in 1927. The man, who persists in finding linkages at every stage of his life, insists this curse of the Maximilian jewels almost scuttled his career as a chemist.

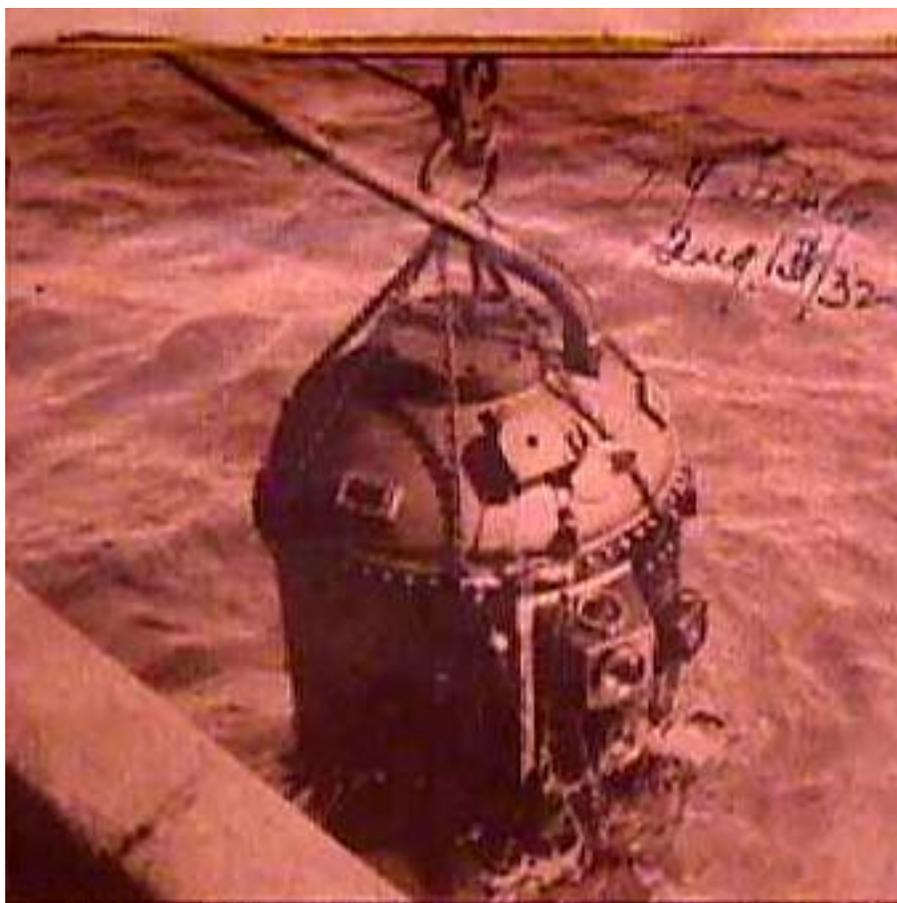


During his freshman year (1931) he

persuaded a biology professor to supply him with fruit flies to be exposed to X-rays in his cellar laboratory. It was an attempt to alter their genetic profiles. Faulty electrical hookups were blamed for a fire that seriously threatened their home, which ever after smelled of charred wood inside the walls. His parents must have considered the damage part of what was required to educate their son, since there was never a word of complaint. Based on what followed, he will forever wonder if he was equally capable of delivering the same loyalty in return.



The man (age 18) joined the crew of the SS *Salvor's* "Merida Salvage Expedition," which operated 50 miles off the Virginia Capes in 1932 and 1933. The SS *Merida*, on May 28, 1911, was carrying wealthy aristocrat refugees from the Mexican Revolution of 1910, when she was rammed by the *Admiral Farragut* and sent to the bottom of the Atlantic with much confusion and loss of life. Reportedly, there was not enough time for the removal of \$6 million worth of gold and silver from the strong room, and the Maximilian jewels from the purser's safe.



**A SEARCH FOR TREASURE OFF THE VIRGINIA CAPE
A DIVING BELL,**

Invented by Captain Henry L. Bowdoin, With Four Observers
Descends Into Thirty-five Fathoms of Water, Where the Merid
Sunk in 1911 With More Than \$4,000,000 in Bullion on Board
Was Recently Located.
(© Submarine Salvage Corp.)

Salvage Ship on Ground In Merida Treasure Hunt



(NEWS photo)
Expedition to recover \$4,000,000 treasure off Virginia has headquarters aboard U. S. Albatross. Vessel is shown as it appeared at dock at foot of Bryant St., Brooklyn, before sailing.

Equipped with special diving suits, a diving bell fitted with electric floodlights, and other apparatus for deep sea work, the U. S. Albatross arrived off the quarter Shoals, Virginia, after leaving Brooklyn on an expedition to recover \$4,000,000 treasure. The Albatross, a



SEEK SUNKEN MERIDA GOLD.

Norfolk Salvors Will Try Again to Find \$4,000,000 Treasure Ship.

NORFOLK, Va., July 12 (AP)—Treasure, gold and silver buttons and jewels worth from \$4,000,000 to \$6,000,000, are being sought by a

BER 9, 1932

Fishmonger Claiming Merida Treasure As Son Of Emperor

London Paper Quotes Peddler As Insisting \$6,000,000
In Liner Sunk Off Virginia Belongs To Father,
Maximilian Of Mexico

[By the Associated Press]

London, Oct. 8—The Sunday Dispatch says a London fishmonger has laid claim to the \$6,000,000 in jewels and bullion that lies in thirty fathoms of water off the Virginia Capes in the hulk of the liner Merida.

The fish peddler, William Brightwell, was quoted as basing his claim on his previously advanced statement that he is the son of the ill-fated Maximilian of Mexico and

was killed and shot at Queretaro by Mexican Nationalists June 19, 1867.

The Merida was rammed and sunk off the Virginia Capes by the steamer Admiral Farragut May 12, 1911, and the hulk has successfully withstood the efforts of salvagers ever since.

Born in Vatican City

Brightwell's story as told to the Dispatch is that he was born in Vatican City after the unhappy Empress Charlotte had besought the Pope to



The man was among those who descended 200 feet in the four-person steel diving tank to view the part of the hulk that was to be blasted open to reach the purser's office. About a year later, the purser's safe was recovered, and stockholders arrived aboard the *SS Salvor* to witness the opening of the safe and the viewing of its presumed contents.

The evening before this event, Captain H. L. Bowdoin informed the man that he would receive an even share of the crew's ten percent of the treasured salvage's value. He asked the man to consider dropping out of school and joining their next salvage expedition - to recover treasure from the *Santisima Concepcion*, attacked while close under the lee of Tortuga and sunk by the Dutch buccaneer, "Wooden Leg."

Capt. Bowdoin's question was never answered. *Merida's* safe was empty, possibly robbed by thieves who may have gone to the bottom laden with loot, while the *SS Farragut* was rescuing more buoyant survivors. The expedition ran out of money, and that winter the *SS Salvor* sank at its moorings.

What happened to the crew in the depths of the Great Depression? They were as obsolete as the old cable-laying ship, self described "steel men in wooden ships" instead of the young seamen, whom they called "wooden men in steel ships." They had taught the man many things. He was not to delay when ordered to climb the forestay and hang a lantern on the mast head, or when ordered below to help the "black gang" shovel enough coal to keep up boiler steam pressure while the vessel was painfully making headway in heavy weather. Commander H. L. Bowdoin's career was also ended, after 15 years spent inventing deep-sea diving equipment and mounting a salvage expedition. At age 64 and 65 he had damaged his heart - too much stress, too much diving. Now he was ill and failing.

He had spent much of his life as an inventor and promoter, and as linkages would have it, 10 years before the man had been taken to the Hippodrome Theater to see a famous stage production called, "Neptune's Daughters." He clearly recalls how the chorus girls, after dancing around a "lake" built into the stage, walked into the water and disappeared.

This remnant of an old clipping states as follows:

Many will recall the disappearing diving girls act which was a feature in the Hippodrome years ago. The act was invented and patented by Commander Bowdoin and shown by him throughout the United States and Europe for many years. "But I was too impatient," he said. "I wasn't satisfied with royalties, but wanted to go it whole hog. So I put on my own show, and lost everything I had in Atlantic City."

Part 4. The Man Refuses to be Outdone by the U. S. Navy

"That young whippersnapper, Donnie Hult, thinks he can put me down by claiming that Theodore is smarter than I am," says the man. "And he keeps me from bragging about those far distant places Dora and I went to up North, by describing more exciting places he saw from the nuclear sub. UNFAIR COMPETITION! Just let him match *MY* story! It's a tru'lyin' experience I revealed to my children over 30 years ago, and one that they still have no doubt is absolutely true."

Corny and Teddy were far out on the Atlantic with the "Scotia Lady" under full sail when they were completely submerged by a huge tidal wave. They quickly donned their snorkel gear and discovered that the strong ocean currents enabled them to sail just as well under water. So they retired to the cozy cabin below, cooked dinner and then climbed in their bunks for a good night's sleep.

Several hours later they discovered they were being dragged along by a huge octopus and through the portholes they could dimly see an underwater city. Above the entrance to one of the buildings was a sign which read, "Atlantis City Hall"!

When the method was clearly explained to them, Corny and Teddy quickly learned to breathe under water and the friendly human inhabitants of Atlantis helped return the "Scotia Lady" to the surface, and secured its anchor. They made the visitors comfortable and entertained them in their finest seafood restaurants, serving the meals cooked over the nearby volcano.

The Atlantisans did not believe in eating marine mammals, and Corny and Teddy began to long for a steak dinner. So they regretfully left the fabled City of Atlantis and sailed home.



Part 5. BIG BROTHER! Have you Forgotten that Chapter 4 Concerns THEODORE? (Your bestfrienddog)



"I beg your indulgence, Dear Reader, whilst I explore, circumspectly, what in truth is the meat and gristle of this narrative," pleads the man, "since the subject of bestfrienddogs addresses issues of intelligence, behavior, and relationships 'trixt human and canine,' which I've not entirely resolved, even after more than five years' association with Theodore."

People are constantly at risk of being categorized, classified, uplifted or denigrated, by attitudes deeply entrenched in their fellow human's psyche. Animals, in a more restrictive way, are considered subspecies, placed on earth, as the Bible insists, to fit our needs. Desmond Morris's book, *The Animal Contract* (1990; Butler & Tanner Ltd., Frome & London) warns that lack of conscience and uncontrolled dominance of humans over animals can devastate the planet.

In spite of the many happy well-fed dogs in evidence, one must assume that a very substantial number will not be permitted to live out their lives with one family, and may even join the ranks of the starving, mistreated, abandoned ones that are eventually exterminated. This rather prevalent belief that dogs do not suffer from neglect in its various forms, and that their feelings are lightweight and transitory, appeared in a science fiction story about a distant future when dogs had learned to talk. Their limited mental capacity, according to the author, only enabled them to mouth trite, meaningless phrases.

"Well, well," sneers Ed. "The same can be said about most of your human brothers and sisters, and no improvement is likely in the future! Why even Rusti's cruciferous leaves say more sensible things than that mindless people-chatter that flies around this table."

"Stow it, Chum," snarls the man. "This here's serious business with no room for insults. Yes, and I'll snarl if I want to, since that's what you learn when you live with dogs. Except Theodore, who has seldom snarled, except when I tried to separate the stubborn scutter from a decomposed moose gut. Even so, I think he was simply reminding me of our shared liking for Limburger cheese, dried herring, salt-cod: liberally laced with beer. One night while company's attention was elsewhere, Theodore chewed through the neck of a beer bottle and salvaged its contents without cutting his mouth, that wonderfully soft sensitive mouth of a retriever!

"A few years ago," muses the man, "Theodore and I drove that long, lonely road from Grand Falls to Harbour Breton (south coast of Newfoundland), and camped that night at Pass Island, strategically located for smuggling from the French Miquelon. Toward evening, we watched a sloop slip into the protective cover of Hermitage Bay, followed closely by dense fog. Then, Theodore and I walked along the lonely ocean beach and listened to the breakers rolling stones up and down the steep incline. That night we stayed locked in our camper whilst we harkened for outboard motors and an occasional truck comin' thru' th' gloamin'."

"Your flowery language is a long way from Limburger cheese," says Ed. "Since you can't stay on course, ask Theodore to pick up the scent."



"The next day we threaded our way near fjords, coves, creeks, rock formations, cliffs, all of exceptional beauty, and finally reached open country, a convenient side road and clearing, and an ideal site to park our Trillium trailer," recalls the man, "and still enough daylight to take a walk before dinner. An enticing abandoned logging road led back into the hills, so we walked farther than anticipated, then Theodore was nowhere to be found. The only solution, before dark, was a hasty return for the truck, with its four-wheel drive, and a search which included crossing a stream, and crawling over and through rocks and deep ruts. At last! There he was, almost three kilometers from the highway, sprawled out comfortably, gnawing on a huge moose bone, with adhering meat sundried, earthcured.

"In my experience, offal left by hunters is most likely to cause us to separate. If Theodore finds a less appetizing morsel (dried bird or rabbit) he will usually bring it to me, look highly repentant, then offer resistance when I insist that he drop it."

"That dog's nothing but a scavenger, a wingless buzzard!" says Ed. "Who would want him for a roommate? And you're insisting that Theodore's a special bestfrienddog?"

"Well, there you have it, my dear Edward, you've put your finger right smack into the right ventricle of the heart of the matter, or perhaps I should say, Theodore's heart of the matter," replies the man. "When Theodore and I attended dog training school, as you persist in reminding me, it was he, not me, who passed with honors. The instructor observed that he learned quickly and had an unusual ability to make eye contact.

"His expressive eyes convinced me I would never want to see anything but unqualified confidence and friendship reflected in those orbs. So I rejected the methods of training that teach unqualified subservience and rigid obedience. Now, having eschewed the protective cover of obedience training, I wondered how to deal with this bright young intelligence, whose potential would be wasted if I failed."

Having posed the problem, the man finds no support for his premise in his large collection of dog books. "Far be it for me to insult this fine collection of bow-wow-honchos, who at least got themselves published, but by and large they cleave to the party line, part of that great conspiracy to make dogs heel, bring up the rear, follow in the wake, and tag after someone's feet; AND to play a role in the flow of capital, as economists require, by consuming sterilized dried, or canned, rations made from raw materials which otherwise would threaten the biosphere.

"At my feet sits a candidate for the title, 'Bestfrienddog.' What qualifications for this title can I list for the enlightenment of my Readers?" asks the man. "I've had dozens of dogs who were never given the time, or attention, that a bestfrienddog requires, except Lassie, when I was in junior-high school. She could count on me to spend most of my free time in her company. We had many exciting places to explore in that newly developed part of Baltimore, woods and streams nearby, and a stone quarry with dropoffs which offered exactly the right element of danger. Her life was ended by a spaying operation, and for many more months than my parents realized, I mourned for my lost companion."

Occasionally, you find human/dog relationships that occur naturally, without effort from either direction. Since most dogs are programmed to bond readily, the fusing process must depend almost entirely on the human side of the equation, but precious few people retain the rapport that is needed. By and large, civilized living has effectively sublimated human awareness of how we relate to nature and the animal kingdom.

The man believes that persons especially simpatico with dogs tend to be loners who avoid the gentling influence of civilization. They are not likely to cotton to education, and they acquire certain feral characteristics from encounters with the wilderness, hunting, and perhaps bootlegging.

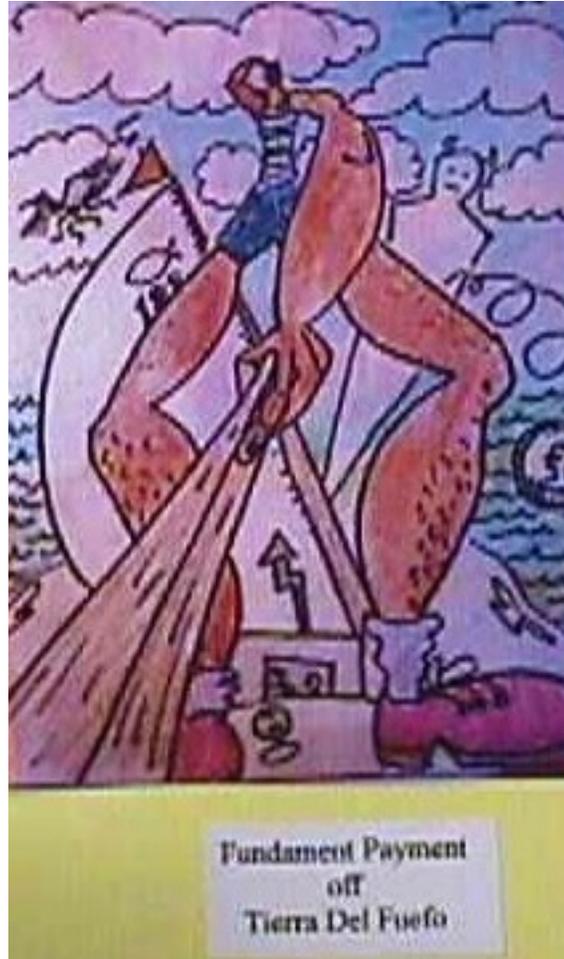
"Halt and regroup!" shouts Ed. "Tell me! What kind of respectable dog would you find hanging out with bootleggers?"

"More like a dozen," replies the man. "In the early '50s when coastal North Carolina was thinly populated, a dim trail led to a huge overturned oak tree, victim of a hurricane. The splintered roots towered jaggedly skyward, while a sizable cave where the tree had been, was occupied by hound dogs - two males, one bitch with lactating dugs fully occupied with vociferous-puppy-clamor. This was my first meeting with Sterling, a big burly unshaven Scotch-Irish type, my neighbor from half a mile away, across tobacco fields and through tangled woods, a bootlegger, renowned for his tomato wine and 'white lightning.'

"We sipped a clear colorless liquid from a quart Mason jar he had brought from his house. He whistled and the dogs and puppies streamed from the cave, settled down, and looked up expectantly, lovingly. He began to hum and sing, and the dogs to howl and bay. My final recollection was seeing them dance around him, the pups stumbling to keep up.

"That great storyteller, O'Henry, suggested another kind of a dedicated dog lover in his tale about a man on the lam for wife abuse. A detective tracked him to a cabin where he found two men, both fitting the description of the fugitive. An old dog was sleeping peacefully under the table, and suddenly the detective delivered a swift kick to its ribs. Only one of the suspects showed anger, and he was arrested. The detective had observed that men who are excessively fond of dogs are the ones most likely to mistreat their wives.

"What egotistical Homo sapiens must do is come off of their high studhorse, look canines squarely and respectfully in the eye, and think about how unselfishly an occasional roustabout gains a dog's respect and affection," pontificates the man. "They are such accommodating, malleable critters, too good for their own good, which gets them used kindly, or cruelty (we can't always agree which is which), for every purpose, and in every conceivable way. Even good intentions may be the way to hell, and too many dogs live endlessly restrained by trolley-leash, or in solitary confinement, so the Devil must have a hand in this, as he did when my friend approached the reefs off Tierra Del Fuefo, and suffered a loss of fundament:"



*His weary eyes scanned fulvous gloam, loom of scantily green-clad island
And hoped for haven, intervening straightrazor-sharp glacial shale reefs,
Precessions of equinoctial tide battering hull, abaft, abeam.*

*Hark! An Omen, alter course on faith, or continue dead reckoning?
A nebulous figure in the sky, saintlike and pure, points way to channel
And to calm water beyond?*

*Reason prevails, no omens, flip coin, ten degrees port, or starboard,
Let head or tails decide.*

*COIN OVERBOARD! Tricked by the following sea. "Steady as she goes, then,"
He shouts, "And let the divel take the hindmost."
Which was him, and the devil did.*

"As the tale goes, so reality goes," says the man. "A wrong choice of alternatives can be painful, and so much depends on right decisions in finding a suitable bestfrienddog for a person in dire need of one. As already stated, most dogs are adaptable and capable of responding to the prevailing management, training and

feeding systems that produce 'average housedogs,' the kind younger people with overriding responsibilities are willing to accept.

"But a person in need of a truly satisfying bestfrienddog is unlikely to find one full-grown-ready-made. If not willing to deal with a puppy, then a young, housebroken relatively untrained candidate may have to do, but a six-week-old pup with clean-slate mind is preferable. From then on, care and handling is much like what good parents do for a child - much love, and proper care and feeding. Someone unfamiliar with raising puppies, or young dogs, will need help and advice, but before long there will be quality time together, and continuous improvement of the relationship as one year follows another."

Theodore, the prototype bestfrienddog of this narrative, exerted great influence on the concepts that have evolved. If his obedience training had been continued, there wouldn't have been much else to talk about. Instead, there were behavior problems, especially stubbornness and temper, during his first year, but patience and kindness prevailed. He thinks of himself as the man's brother, and that defines how they get along. They are bonded in their enjoyment of a simple lifestyle, nature, travel, shared meals - and his keen senses more than double the man's awareness of wild animals, his vision, and hearing.

July, 1999