

Foreword

This here roamin' GMC wee-hickle-van's got pictures on the panels where windows oughta be, of Canada Geese in flight, captioned "WILDEGEEST", a name dreamed up by my daughter, Cindy.



Strangers keep asking, "What's a Wildegeest and where can I buy one?" My poor child didn't mean to cause confusion when she mangled "wildebeest," which in Africa means a gnu, hartebeest, springbok, rebok, dikdik, eland, or Cape elk. That's all I can tell you, except that a Wildegeest ain't a Texas Longhorn.

When they ask, "What's a Wildegeest", I tell 'em, "It's our calling card, and the name of a book I'll someday finish, Lord Willin'." But in a more serious vein, the true meaning of Wildegeest appears in William Wadsworth Longfellers's poem (also a song), *EXCELSIOR!* (1843), which starts with, "*The shades of night were falling fast*" and describes a "*Banner with a strange device- Excelsior!*" Perhaps, in future, Wildegeest! will be adopted as a synonym for Excelsior, Alley-oop. Upsy Daisey, Onward and Upward!, and enter into dictionaries, defined as a rebel yell that confronts and denies the degrading effects of old age...

The manuscript acknowledges the support of two other daughters, Leslie and Jennifer, for their suggestions and admonishments, such as, "You'd be finished sooner if you'd stop wasting time pontificating." To which their father replies, "I'll finish the bloody thing when I have my wildegeeses in a row, and besides, you naughty girls, when did eggs tell a chicken what to do?"

The narrative describes how in 1990, loss of my wife made me a prime candidate for a rocking chair, but instead I opted for a whole new life with heart-warming

linkages to the past. This new life provided exciting wilderness adventures, friendships with people with different perspectives and insights, and completely new learning experiences in sharing everything with two wonderful Golden Retrievers, Dora, and then Theo-Dora (Theodore).

In this narrative, by Internet, and other devices, I will propose that dogs which achieve this strong mutual bond and importance to a human partner be recognized as "**bestfrienddogs**", and that they be given special privileges, in much the same way that "seeing eye dogs" (for the blind) and "companion dogs" (for the disabled) have access to many places that do not permit "pets".

It has become evident that this partnership of human and canine is only achieved after much effort and mutual understanding. The leadership and "training" role must be undertaken lightly, as with a child, not as an underling. A gentle, understanding partnership can achieve mental and physical health, good nutrition and health habits, and a satisfying life style. Whole chapters are devoted to these accomplishments, i.e., cooking and feeding natural human foods to dogs.

The reader needs an imagination as big as Texas to follow everything I have written, because this old cuss likes to impose as many twists, turns and asides in his tales as possible, and once something is mentioned, LOOK OUT!.I'll describe a linkage, or imagine one. You've guessed it - Texas is where I was born, early one frosty morn, fewer years after the WAR BETWEEN THE STATES (SUH!) than we are now from THE BIG ONE (WWII).

Somehow, my greenhorn father, a recent escapee from Russian Cossacks, persuaded his teenage bride to abandon New York City and invade the Wild West. Their stormy return voyage during the winter of 1919, via steamship from New Orleans made a lasting impression on me, the start of my longing to log as many miles as possible under my keel, wheel, or wing. Even at that tender age I loved the pounding of the sea, and the motion of the ship in its slow roll to port, then starboard, and its shuddering lurch. I discovered a taste for olives when the kindly steward dispensed them as medicine to my frightened, seasick parents, in their cramped cabin.

An understanding of this narrative requires an imagination even bigger than Texas, the Canadian Northwest Territories will do, and as boundless as next millenium's computer in its ability to eliminate logic, generate hype, and track dates beyond 2000. The narrator insists that grim reality leaves only imagination as an escape route for that constantly growing population of healthy, viable "oldsters" who are routinely forced out of the loop, and beached like stranded whales.

These folks are more an endangered species than the most beleaguered animals, because their diverse thought processes make them more susceptible to the consequences of lost initiatives, reduced physical activity, and shaken

confidence. As if the millions of persons subjected to this undeserved purge from the mainstream were not enough, add those vast numbers who lose a partner, or suffer other debilitating events that shake them from established life patterns and push them into this pool of confused, unhappy, disengaged humanity.

I don't hope to be a later-day "Isaac Bickerstaff", the pseudonym for Jonathan Swift and his wonderful imaginative powers. But I admire this 18th century satirist and will emulate him by weaving social innuendoes into my own collection of tru' lyin' stories.



"Gulliver's Travels" (1726) was a satire on social injustice, wars, and the misdirected callousness of government. Forsooth, noble Jonathan, what would I give to have your skill and humor as a teller of tall tales with social significance?" Most people in the 18th century didn't have lifespans long enough to create an "age problem", and resource pilfering corporations able to threaten the entire planet were still over Swift's horizon. However, he recognized man's greed and inability to act in unison to achieve a better world. Gulliver found to his dismay that the race of intelligent horses, the Houyhnhnms, considered humans totally unsuitable for Utopia, and called them "Yahoos". Gulliver could not overcome his Yahoo nature, so he was banished to live with his own Yahoo kind.

Don't be a Yahoo, is the sage advice of this narrative - Not while there's life in you and a chance to partake honorably of this generous planet. "Last Places" are

there for you to discover and enjoy, the potential bounded only by your imagination.

Those who seek "Last Places" will find it impossible to go it alone. If human companionship is lacking, try a dog. Dora and Theodore are featured in this narrative because they were the essential ingredient in my finding a happy new life that continues to this day.

Perhaps you have felt the cutting edge of humanity's inhumanity to persons whose only offence is outliving the age requirements for the loop. This hard-edged society has a mind-set that welcomes every form of discrimination - race snobbery, racism, ageism. The word, *canine-ism* should be added to include the majority of people who denigrate dogs. At the very least, a bestfrienddog deserves respect, and should not be described as "owned", called a "pet", or discarded.

Poor Dora did not live long enough for her true status to be recognized. Her successor, strong-willed Theodore advanced the learning process early on. He was assisted in this by a shocking revelation of what dogs mean to older people. The waiting room of a fine veterinary hospital where Dora and other dogs faced last ditch battles for their lives. Tears flowed as the dogs huddled near their grieving grey-haired human companions. There was no doubt that the loss of beloved friends was imminent. This was all too reminiscent of a few years before, burned forever in my memory: the hopelessness of the cancer ward, the desperation and defeat of loved ones, and the despair of families.

The Washington Post (06-20-98) published a story titled, "Nearer My Dog to Thee", about how St. Clement's Episcopal Church in New York City welcomes parishioners' dogs. Rev. Barbara C. Crafton observed, "I don't know what a human soul is, and I certainly don't know what a canine soul is. These things are mysteries and I have a lot of respect for mysteries. But dogs are living, loving creatures and they give human beings pleasure. I don't see any particular reason not to have them in church."

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