

“Waiting at the Forks of the Road”

By Barbara Myers

As a child growing up with my three mischievous brothers, one older and two younger than myself, it was “root hog or die” keeping up with them. And as usual I chose “root hog and not die.” My two younger brothers always got the most attention, especially from Dad. If it took shooting marbles, climbing a tree, or just riding “old blue,” our old gray mare, I did whatever it took to keep the peace with my brothers. None of their games were enjoyable in my book, but I was older than two of them, so I aimed at my target to win, stay alive and ahead.

Through the years, I had bruises, cuts, broken bones in my arms and ankles, cuts on my elbows, knees and other places that I won’t mention. Whether I got knots on my head and sported black eyes, I struggled through it all. We had a favorite swimming hole down from our house that we called the “Family Blue Hole.” The water wasn’t too blue, but to us kids, it was still perfect. I couldn’t swim at first, but let me tell you, with an older brother and two younger ones, it was swim or drown. My older brother, Joe, would duck me under the water until I’d become intoxicated with all the water in my nose and throat. Once I could crawl and get away to the bank, I’d sober up either to go back into the water or high tail it through the woods for home.

The Blue Hole was our place to relax and have fun after our chores were done at home. We stacked Mama’s two wood boxes with wood. One was on the porch and the other was behind the kitchen stove. We fed the chickens, cows and Old Blue. Whatever work needed to be done, we did it. On top of all that when school was in session, we had loads of homework to do.

We always had a dog or cat around our house. The smartest dog we ever had was called Ponto. He had belonged to Dad’s brother in Sewanee, TN. Later Dad brought him to our house, so that he could hunt squirrels, rabbits and coons. Mom kept our table quite often filled with fried squirrel or rabbit. If the meat was old and tough, she boiled it and made dumplings in the stew. Mom was not at all happy about cooking a coon; she’d tell Dad that she might as well skin the kids’ cat and cook it for that’s what a darn coon looked like.

Our dog, old Ponto, was around for so many years; it seemed like an eternity. Ponto could lie on the front porch and tree a squirrel when it was across the road in a tree or on the ground. Dad said he could smell it for he had the senses of a smart dog. He lived to be eighteen years old. That’s the total of 125 years in a dog’s life.

One day we were on our way home from school and at the forks of the road, as we called it then and now, there was the prettiest, shiny black dog wagging its tail. As I bent down to pet him, he began licking me in the face. I got on my knees hugging him up close to me. I told my brothers, “He’s mine!” “Can’t we pet him too?” they asked. “Yes, but he is going to be mine,” I said. I named him Tramp because he came to me begging for me to give him a Master and home.

Tramp followed the three of us home that day; he was running, jumping and playing right along with us.

As soon as Mama saw him, she said, "Your dad will pitch a fit about that dog." Sure enough, Dad threw a fit saying that they did not need a dog around the place with young puppies yakkling, and he insisted that the dog had to go. Naturally I cried when I learned that the dog I claimed to be a "he" had become a "she." Mama spoke up to Dad and told him that he took so much pride in his old dog, Ponto Bill, so why couldn't the kids keep the dog a few days and see what happened? He agreed.

Well, Dad was right; Tramp started running the chickens until he killed one, then another. Later she dug a hole under the chicken house fence and began sucking the eggs. Dad was home the day that Tramp chose to run for the third chicken to make her next meal. Out the back door came Dad with his 22 rifle. He shot Tramp to the ground. I ran to the gate and into the lot falling down over Tramp crying loudly. "Now you can get that dog out of here, take it and bury it," he yelled.

We pulled Tramp in a wagon to the woods finding a place to bury her. We dug a small hole and saw that it needed to be larger. Instead, we laid her in a deep ditch beside the creek bank where we used to go and sit, a place where I'd sit and write poetry. Tramp lay on the bank beside me for a while. After we got her buried with leaves and dirt, we patted the top of the soil then planted wild flowers on the grave. It was her funeral, so we sang songs. All three of us were crying as we left Tramp's grave that day.

On school days, we always remembered Tramp because she always met us at the forks of the road at the spot where she was dropped, the spot where she chose me as her new Master and decided to make our home her own. Most children then and even now say that Tramp is in Doggie Heaven with a new Master. Kids will be kids, and their best friends are often their dogs, just as Tramp was my best friend.