

## Broken Dogs.

When I was 4, call it the spring of 1957, I was walking home to lunch from Mrs. Householder's Happy Corner Kindergarten. Now before you freak about a 4 year old walking home for lunch, remember it was 1957 and things were a lot different. Kingman was very small then, about 6000 people, everyone knew everyone else, and 57 Chevy's were new. No one had a library card, the librarian knew everyone. There was no fine for an overdue book; she just called your mother; a fate worse than death. If you are too young to remember a fine at the library think of it as a late fee from the DVD store. Government's fine you, businesses fee you. It was an adventure for 2 blocks that I undertook 4 times a day, and yes, it was uphill, ... both ways.

On this particular day I chanced upon a yellow dog, a pot licker of questionable ancestry. He was a yearling, as big as he would ever be but alone, scared, confused, he was still a puppy. I coaxed him to follow me, which was kind of a trick since I didn't have a hamburger in my pocket, but a few yards at a time with a lot of whistling and clapping he followed. When I got home I ran into the house and announced to my mother that a doggie had followed me home and could I keep him? Technically this was not a lie; he had followed me, reluctantly, but I was in front the whole time so he was following.

She called my dad on a new newfangled device we had, called a telephone. It didn't have push buttons or even a dial. You picked it up and the operator said, "number please" and you said "red 124" for the truck stop dad owned or "blue 389" for my pal Sparky. She put me and on and I said, "He followed me home." Dad said, "... yeah, I'll just bet he did" and then snorted in that dad kind of way. Mom asked, "What will you name him?" I have no clue where the answer came from but I immediately answered, "Rex". I said "But will he stay?" When we are 4, dads are pretty wise. Mine was usually succinct. "Feed him and he'll stay."

Indeed he did stay. He became my trusted friend and companion. He would wait on the steps at the grade school for hours on end, until school was out, and he and I would play in the alley or hike in the desert, or do a thousand things that little boys and dogs do. He went to church every Sunday, running alongside the car for 3 blocks to the church. When we were out of town he went to church anyway, eventually having better attendance than I did. Visiting dignitaries to the church would make jokes ... in most places the church is going to the dogs, but in Kingman the dogs are coming to church ... he must be making a mark in the sand some where so he knows when it is Sunday ... I heard them all.

In many ways my childhood was idyllic; meeting Sparky at the bakery, both of us armed with two pennies, just enough for one doughnut. We sat on the curb to eat; our legs were too short to reach the street; cub scouts picking wild grapes on the mountain side and then playing in the yard, still bedecked in our blue shirts and yellow scarves, while our den mother turned our labor into grape jam. Sometimes the Elks would show cartoons at night on the football field, projected against a large white sheet that came from the Fire Department. Everywhere was old Rex, that yellow confused loyal puppy. Everyone knew him. When I was overdue my mother didn't look for me, she looked for the dog, or for Sparky's dog, a boxer named Rox, knowing I would be nearby. Once icy day he was chasing a car in front of the house. She tried to kick him, missed, kicked the gatepost and broke her toe.

In the evenings I would go sit on the front porch with him. He would lay there on the cement with his front paws crossed. He did it all the time. I've never known another dog to do that. He wouldn't let anyone touch his front paws. I suspect that who ever had him before I did abused him by stepping on his feet. I could pet him while he ate, he was very tolerant of everything except his front feet. At some level he understood that he was on watch; he would lay on the porch for hours, checking everything out, making sure we were safe.

One day, when I was 8, I was walking down a big hill in the middle of town, right next to US 66.

Rex got hit by a car.

Dad happened to be nearby, saw it happen, and stopped traffic long enough to scoop up the dog, and me and my pal Jimmy; we drove directly to the vet in his pickup. Rex was bloody; obviously in a lot of pain ... it was horrific for an 8 year old, and probably just as horrific for old Rex. The adults looked at each other with concerned faces; nodded sagely; I was sure they were going to kill him. I loved that dog and they were going to kill him. I could just hear them saying ... 'it's the best thing' ... 'he was suffering' ... that kind of stuff adults say.

Eventually dad explained that his eyelid had been almost torn off and the vet had sewn it back on, but if it didn't grow back the vet would have to take his eye out. I spent a tortured night dreaming about my dog with a black patch over his eye ... he stopped saying "bark bark bark" and started saying "harr harr harr" ... I dreamed he was chasing cars with a knife in his teeth ...

In the morning, as the sun cleared the mountains and began yet another crystal day of my youth, I prayed. I said ... 'Dear Heavenly Father,' as I had been taught to say, like I was addressing one of those silly Thank You Notes that my mother insisted on ... 'Dear Heavenly Father. My dog is broken. I need you to fix him. I know you can fix him if you want to, but I am just a kid and I can't fix anything. I know I am not a really good kid. Sometimes I don't take out the trash and sometimes I don't make my bed, and I know I shouldn't have put a grasshopper into my sisters soup, but I love my dog and I need You to fix him because he is broken.' I summoned up all the love and all the faith I had, all the humility I could muster and I said ... "Please fix Rex. I will try to be a better kid."

His eyelid grew back. In a few weeks the stitches came out and Rex was whole and normal and as full of vinegar as ever. One night at a PTA meeting the City cops were showing off their new police dog. Rex was not impressed. He nearly killed that German Shepherd, twice his size ... and they had to retire the dog. It's not the size of the dog in the fight, ... and there was a lot of fight in old Rex.

In my 15th year someone poisoned old Rex. My dad thought it was probably the Chinese men across the alley. We nursed him for a week but after a while it became pretty obvious, even to me, that it was time to let old Rex rest. Dad asked me about it ... to his credit didn't just insist but actually asked me ... I decided I should do it. Mom decided that she should be there too, so the four of us climbed into the pickup and drove out toward the mountain to shoot the dog.

Dad dug a little grave, it took a few minutes, and then handed me his rifle. I stood there for a few moments, with the rifle lined up on his head ... and simply could not bring myself to squeeze the trigger. After a while my dad moved toward me, as if to take the rifle; I couldn't let dad see me be weak. I jerked the trigger and the bullet missed his head but went into his neck. It didn't kill him. Taking better aim I fired again ... Mom freaked, turned away, screaming, walked aimlessly into the desert ... it was a scene from a lunatic asylum.

This tale now advances to 2006.

About 3 months ago my landlady showed up with a bottle of wine, and a cigar. It turns out those were bribes to take a puppy.

He is a yellow dog, another pot licker. I gave some thought to his name. I eventually chose Chewy. The Mexican faithful name their firstborn son Jesus ... pronounced HAY-SOOS. I couldn't name the dog Jesus but the diminutive for Hay-soos is Chewy. When I was a cop I knew of a case where one Mexican murdered another. When a friend asked where Jose was the killer said, 'He's with Chewy.' So I named the mutt Chewy. What else would a mystic name his dog?

In a short time he earned the name, Mr. Poopy, because he is a poopy puppy. He is so cute that we have had a hard time with housebreaking ... I can't bring myself to actually hit him. Once he peed right in front of the front door, while I was watching, so I grabbed him, rubbed his nose in the puddle, carried him to the back door and threw him out onto the lawn, where he rolled several times. It was such fun that he ran back into the house and over to the puddle, so I would roll him on the lawn again.

Then he became sneaky about pooping in the house. He waits until he is sure I am not looking and then goes in the same place, by the front door. So his whole name is Mr. Chewy Sneaky Poopy III. He loves to drag my slipper out of the closet and into the living room. He chews on it just enough to make the point; and I chase him around the house a little with my slipper in his mouth. He became big enough to jump onto the couch without help only a week ago. He delights in sitting on the couch like he is a human, he looks toward the TV ... I can only guess what he is thinking.

In a short time Chewy and I have become fast friends. My relationships with people have never worked out. Hiding within that idyllic childhood was a time bomb that has destroyed two marriages and destroyed my life. But dogs don't care about such things ... if you feed them and water them and love them, they think you are god ... as opposed to cats .. if you feed them and water them and love them they think they are god ...

Last Friday the landlady had a graduation party for her youngest. She has a half coyote bitch and brought the dog over here for me to baby sit during the party. She actually invited me but for reasons I will not go into I am not yet ready again for a social life. So I left the dogs alone on Friday and went to bed early.

On Saturday morning I opened the back door and found Chewy pretty stressed. He was hiding under some junk, I had to look for him. I took him inside and gave him some water, but he refused to drink. He found a hide, between a mattress and box springs on their side, and stayed in it for a full day. His condition became worse. I was afraid he had parvo; I am told that once infected nothing can be done. On Sunday he tried to drink but couldn't keep any water down; threw up on the couch. Mr. Poopy's stool was green and yucky and had a kind of glow in the dark quality. I knew he hadn't eaten so what was he pooping? Did he have Ebola?

I emailed a friend and asked to borrow his hand gun.

I was beside myself. I felt like a parent watching a child suffer, with no money for the Doctor. A friend offered up his credit card to the cause but I could still hear the vet ... .. 'it's the best thing' ... 'he was suffering' ... that kind of stuff adults say.

The little guy left his hide for a few moments, came into the living room and laid down in front of the couch, and crossed his paws. I sat next to him; put my hand on his head ; and began to pray;

I thought about old Rex., my other broken dog. I thought about broken wives and broken children; my broken life. And then I summoned up those feeling of faith and humility and love; the same ones from before; and I asked our Father to save the puppy. It seemed, at that moment, that every time I try to love something, bad things happened. I wrote that silly thank you note again ... Dear Heavenly Father ... you are so large and Mr. Poopy is so small ...

On Monday he drank and did not vomit. On Tuesday he drank again. On Wednesday he ate two cans of Mighty dog and a can of chopped ham. I let him spend the night outside and just as I closed the back door, he winked at me.

Tomorrow I will start him on the Gravy Train. I will buy another pair of slippers and Chewy can have the old ones ... they are just slippers after all. We will still have to deal with housebreaking but ... it just doesn't seem as important any more.

Thanks Dad. I owe you. I love you.

Johnny.