

## Loyalty

When my wife was a kid in Watertown, NY her dog followed her everywhere. I would later do the same. But Tippy kept on the girl's trail right through Public Square all the way to school. To lose the mutt, she cut through public buildings and as a youngster she could ditch the pet by jumping over a fence, leaving the pooch to dejectedly head back home. Tippy was also in the habit of following my mother-in-law and the woman had her own tricks for losing the dog, but they didn't include hopping over a fence.

Mrs. Dave's mother didn't like Tippy very much and although she allowed him in the house, she believed animals belonged in a barn or in the woods. She had a litany of complaints against my wife's loyal young pet. Most of them came to the woman's mind one afternoon downtown as the dog waited outside each store she visited on the Square. When the dog began to chase cars around the fountain, my mother-in-law was so embarrassed she ducked into a Men's Pool Room without realizing what she had done. An old man offered to buy her a beer before she raced out of the joint.

Dude ... my mother-in-law ... was idly wasting time and avoiding a visit to the appliance department of the Sears store where she planned to reluctantly make a down payment on a refrigerator the family could barely afford. The old Kelvinator in the family's kitchen refused to keep anything cold, but unfortunately the furnace had needed major repairs a few weeks before and my father-in-law had been ill for some time.

When Dude came out of The Arcade on the back lane that led to Arsenal Street, she turned to see Tippy still following her. Heading up the street toward the Sears store, my mother-in-law knew she was delaying the inevitable, but she also wanted to lose the dog. Dude stopped abruptly in front of the Avon theater and noted the display poster for "Roman Holiday" with Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck. A matinee ticket was a luxury my mother-in-law seldom afforded herself, but Gregory Peck was too tempting in the face of a purchase she didn't want to make. And so, with the

excuse in mind of getting rid of the dog, she told him to go home for the hundredth time that day and entered the cool interior of the Avon. After a while, Tippy headed home, his head hanging almost to the sidewalk. Just as he was sniffing his way up Academy Street, Mrs. Dave's mother was winning the grand prize. She had stumbled into the waning hours of a month long publicity blitz that culminated in the door prize raffle of ... you guessed it ... a brand new Frigidaire refrigerator!

Dude seldom complained about the dog again, according to my wife. And on the few occasions when she did, the girl my wife will always be went into the kitchen and loudly opened and slammed the door of the Frigidaire a few times. That gesture was to become a family tradition of emphasizing a point.

Mrs. Dave said that through her teenage years Tippy was the only worldly being she could tell everything to, because he always listened and sagely said nothing. I have over the years repeatedly tried and failed to match the dog's astute silence when anyone needs to talk to me, but am seldom able to last even five minutes without offering a comment. The dog's talent was not practiced, it was innate.

Tippy managed to kill himself in the late '60's. The Frigidaire gave up the ghost in the 1970's. My mother-in-law, a wonderful lady I more appreciate as I get older, stubbornly held on a good deal longer and made it just into the 1990's.

Had the dog lived as long as Dude, he would have enjoyed a comfortable old age with a comfortable old lady. But maybe it was the Year of the Woodstock Nation or the dawning of the Age of Aquarius that caused Tippy to attempt one last excursion in 1969. Deep in his senile confusion, he tried to follow a young female purebred home on a wintry January afternoon and fell into the Black River that runs through Watertown. He went in old and blind and befuddled and barely alive. He came out frozen like a huge ice cube and decidedly dead. I condoned the dog's final fling and said he was only following his instincts. But my wife said I should take a lesson from Tippy's demise. She slammed the refrigerator door when she said it.

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