

Dads and Daughters, Cats and Dogs

Every kid should have a dog.

MY FATHER

Helen tugged Evert to wake him. "Evert, it's time." Evert thought, "Time for what?" Then he remembered Helen was pregnant and she was due. "I'll go warm up the car." It was the evening of December 7, 1952.

They stepped from the bed to the braided rug Helen had made from her old wool dresses and skirts. Then the couple quickly found their clothes in the neat piles Helen had stacked on the table by their bed. The baby crib was in the dining room near the oil burner. Helen was a little scared, but she didn't say anything. Evert was scared, too, but he didn't say anything either.

Upstairs Evert's mother Hulda stirred in her sleep. She wondered if it was Helen's time. Hulda had born ten healthy children, but each time her daughters or daughters-in-law went into labor, she worried.

Hulda liked Helen. Before Evert married her, Hulda told her, "I want to retire. Evert needs a housekeeper." Helen was thrifty and hard-working. She canned, she gardened, she mended. She only bought two new dresses for her pregnancy that could be worn afterwards and sewed another one.

When Hulda and Helen ran out of things to talk about, Helen suggested Hulda teach her Swedish. Helen didn't discard Hulda's old-fashioned furniture; she just moved it upstairs. Hulda couldn't ask for more from a daughter-in-law, and now a new baby was coming to the the house, too.

As Evert and Helen left, Evert called upstairs, "We're going to the hospital." Hulda called down, "That's a Mainquist."

As Evert drove to the hospital, he remembered when he was a little boy, when his younger sister Mary was born. His mother went into labor one night, and the children went to bed. Dr. Walton was called, and Aunt Anna was midwife. The next morning, Evert's father called the children to come downstairs and see their new baby sister, Mary. The

kids were so excited, but Aunt Anna only let the older ones hold Mary. Evert just looked, held her small hand, and smiled at her. She was so tiny. Evert was six-years-old then and he continued to be pleased each time a new life--whether kittens on his farm or daughters in his family--came to this earth.

Both Helen and Evert were pleased with their first daughter. She was healthy and she was beautiful. As a farmer, Evert could have been disappointed with a girl because boys can help more with the work. Instead when Evert took Helen home from the hospital, he told her, "Now all our dreams have come true." That was one lucky baby, and that baby was me.



As the first daughter of three, I got the lion's share of pictures. Since Dad liked his first baby and he liked animals, it was natural to take pictures of us together. I sat on Buck, the white border collie, before I could walk, and later I sat with Dad on Flicka, his Appaloosa mare. I was even photographed holding the lines for his workhorses, Cap and Connie, when I was still a toddler. My father holds his dog Lucky in the last picture of I took of him.

Dad always made sure my sisters and I had pets. Since he had loved animals as a child, I expect he thought pets were the finest gift a farmer could give his children. He couldn't teach us to cook or sew or take us shopping because he was male, and he didn't expect us to help in the barn because we were female, but he crossed the father-daughter line through the animals.

To my father's praise, Buck, the dog, followed me and my sisters everywhere on our fifty-acre farm. When Mom and Dad couldn't find us, they looked in the pasture for the big white collie, and we would be there. Sometimes, we hit Buck with our stick horses, but he never growled or snapped at us.

About ten years later, he bought a border collie my sisters and I named Cindy Lee. He didn't like her because she didn't do tricks or herd cattle; she only herded chickens on occasion. She was a good mother though. Dad often spoke about how she stayed with her new borne puppies for three cold winter days in the northeast corner of the barn.

In Cindy Lee's final litter, Dad kept the last puppy. My sister Laurie named him Wolfgang Amandeus Mozart Mainquist, but Dad changed it to Sam. When we played baseball after church on Sundays, Sam caught fly balls to my delight. He even played tether ball and opened the door to the milk house. Summer evenings, my family walked to the watering pit in the pasture.

There Dad threw sticks and sometimes even fence posts into the water. Sam jumped in the water, grabbed the stick or post, swam to shore, and returned his toy to Dad. Then

Sam paced on the shore and wagged his tail until Dad threw another stick in the pond again. It was a command performance for the Mainquists alone.

When Dad finally had to put Sam down, he said fine words before he buried him by the water pit in the pasture. Unknowingly, my father gave me a lesson. Now as I think of my dad's death, I think of God taking my father as mercifully as my father took Sam.

One cold winter afternoon, Dad and I sat in the kitchen. His puppy Buck, Sam's successor, stretched across his lap and wagged his tail. Dad said, "I was never any good at mechanical things because I never got to do them when I was a little boy." I replied, "Well, what was your job then?" "It was taking care of the calves. I guess that's where I got my hankering for registered Holsteins." That hankering led to Dad winning the first Premier Dairy Award in the county, and that afternoon we were closer as father and daughter.

As a boy he named all his calves and trained them to lead. After my brother-in-law Tony Groble saw the picture of my dad standing with four of his calves on lead ropes, Tony asked him, "How did you get all those calves to stand still?" "They were trained."

When I came home from college in the spring, Dad asked me, "Do you want to see my calves?" One spring many years after I had graduated, he pointed out the prettiest one--a light beige one with brown eyes. I was flattered because he only showed his calves to children and adults he liked and trusted. Not everyone understood the wonder of a big-boned, doe-eyed calf with clean, bristly fur.

Just recently, the Lanagans, a city family, built their home next to my parents' farm. The three girls--Ashley, Brittany and Katie--often visited my father. He gave them each a kitten to name and call their own. When a new batch of calves was born one spring, he also gave them each one to name and call their own.

The Lanagan girls ran home and announced to their mother, "Evert gave us our own calves." Terry Lanagan replied, "That's all right, but you can't bring them home." Terry later remarked the move from the suburb of Minnetonka to the country would have been harder for her daughters without my father.

When I went through a different adjustment--divorce--my father gave me the two cutest kittens from a litter of seven. "They'll put life in your apartment." The first, Felix, ate my Haagan Daz ice cream on a hot day and drank my V-8 tomato juice one evening. I could understand the temptation of ice cream, but the tomato juice was beyond me. He also bit my toes when I was sleeping. Felix was returned to the farm.

The other, Patricia, was a white, orange and black calico with shiny thick fur--the prettiest cat I have ever seen. When she was so little you could hold her in your hand, Dad named her Patricia because she was a lady. When a veterinarian called her Patty, I quickly

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corrected him. "Her name is Patricia." Now she politely pats me when she wants to be petted and will engage in conversation--even if her only response is "meow." As a well-bred calico, she always thinks of something to say.

With those kittens, my father thought of something to say, too. "I am concerned that you might be lonely. You deserve the best kittens and the best from life. You are a dream come true."

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