

Scoutimer Jones

By JESSICA DEAN

In hindsight, I probably should have waited to get another dog. My dog-of-a-lifetime, Cody, had died unexpectedly and I was heartbroken and lonely. To assuage my grief, I volunteered at an animal shelter near my Washington, DC apartment, which is where I met the little fluff who became my dog - maybe not of a lifetime, but certainly of grand adventures.

He was a mischievous little rascal from the beginning, and soon his escapades were legendary. When I lived in Charleston, I had a roommate name Cara who worked at a farm and would take Scout with her in the mornings. One evening, I returned from work to find Cara in a tizzy. Upon asking why she was so upset, she said Scout was forbidden to ever go out to the farm with her again because he'd been so horrible. Apparently that day a school for blind children had come to the farm to work with the therapy horses. After the time with the horses, the children were seated at a long picnic bench and served lunch. Cara, who had been putting the horses away, heard screams coming from the picnic area and ran to see what was the matter. Scout, never missing an opportunity for an extra meal, had jumped up on the picnic table and was taking sandwiches out of the blind children's hands and scarfing them down. The children had NO idea what was happening other than a hairy thing with teeth was taking their food, so of course they were terrified, but Scout was a happy little pig - not believing his great luck that these nice humans were so generous with their food! After shooing Scout off the table and calming the children down, he was brought back around and the children had a chance to pat him and make friends with him. He surely thought it was the best day ever - sandwiches and endless children loving on him. Unfortunately for him, that was the last of that good fortune, and from then on he accompanied me to the equine vet clinic I worked for, which was significantly less fun than days on a farm, but still not such a bad deal.

I sometimes left him at my mom's house in downtown Charleston if I was going somewhere that didn't allow dogs. He loved going to her house, and eventually I figured out why - she'd cook him a ham when he was staying for a few days and they'd share it. At the time she didn't have any human grandchildren, so she was nicknamed "Ham-Ma." Scout figured out how to escape her small yard when he was bored and would roam the streets of Charleston. His favorite route was along posh King Street, where I'd often get a call from a jewelry store he seemed to really like saying that Scout had been hanging out all day and though he was welcome to come back anytime, they were closing for the day and would I come retrieve my retriever.

Scout had friends all over town as well as the many horse farms I worked for in those days. His best pal was a stray German Shepherd pup mix named Wink who was missing an eye. Wink lived at Brick Church Farm in the middle of thousands of acres of national forest with about thirty other dogs, give or take. Brick Church was a haven for discarded dogs, mostly homely hound mixes that were covertly tossed out of cars in the middle of the night. Sometimes the farm owners would get a peek at the vehicle and name the dogs accordingly - there was Dodge, Ford, Chevy, Tacoma, Rust Bucket, and Beater. Some dogs were names by

their first impression - such as EsselBeeDee (SLBD - Stupid Little Brown Dog), Hops who was missing a leg and, of course, Wink. Most of the dogs figured farm life out quickly - if they didn't, the head honcho dogs made life uncomfortable enough that the miscreant dog would move on. Some of the new dogs thought catching the chickens was a job that needed to be filled, but if they caught one, they'd soon find the chicken corpse tied to their collars. The first few hours the dog inevitably thought was magical - a dead chicken, right there for the eating! But after a few hours, it was uncomfortable to be so close to their prize, and after a few days in the hot Lowcountry sun, chicken became the last thing they ever wanted to see again. In fact, Brick Church chickens were probably the safest poultry in the state - the dogs would guard the farm from any predator that might think a chicken would make a good meal, but they'd rather starve than eat a chicken themselves. It must have been paradise because a dog never left Brick Church unless it died or was chased off by boss dogs.

Our companionship was fun and I was Scout's favorite person until I began dating Will in May of 2005. The first time Will came to visit me (by then I was back in Washington) he met Scout and I was suddenly and unceremoniously dumped by my dog. It was as though I'd merely been the caretaker for him for twelve years until he could meet his soulmate - Will. That dog LOVED my boyfriend from the minute he walked into the door and adored him until his dying day. Will would fly in from Alabama (where he was assigned in our dating days) every Friday night. I'd pick him up from Reagan airport, and we'd go back to the house for "Champ-poo" Fridays - Will and I would split a bottle of champagne as we walked Scout around the neighborhood employing poo-bags as needed. So, Champ-poo. When Will and I married a year later, Scout was to accompany me on what would be our biggest adventure yet - marriage, military and Italy. I may have been anxious, but Scout knew he'd hit the jackpot.