

DOG DAYS

Mid-July days, in the Mid-west, frequently would hit the mid-nineties. That was one of those days – sunny, hot, and humid. High blue skies, smattered with little puffs of clouds, accompanied with just a whisper of a breeze. A Sunday in mid-20th century rural America was still considered a true day of rest. The day commenced with a misty cool stillness, overseen by the patiently rising morning sun that would swiftly fuel the temperatures skywards. The pre-dawn quiet was not interrupted by the banal plop-plop of tossed newspapers slapping driveways, as in city neighborhoods. Here, the dawn was announced by a periodic roosters' crowing from various directions, pinpointing the location of each farmstead. The livestock, anticipating the morning chores, interjected their urgent, incessant comments for the new day. Attending church, and just resting, taking a nap, were encouraged, if not expected of a young boy. Only acts of necessity and mercy, tending to the livestock or visiting and assisting friends and family, were acceptable Sunday activities. To Felix, a six-year old boy, these afternoons seemed like an eternity to idle away. Lying around that day, sweaty and hot, sleep just wasn't an option. A walk was permissible.

By all standards the 160 acres was considered a small farm. Since farmers raised both crops and livestock, it meant that there never was an off-season, just that some times of year were busier than others.

Clad in faded, raggedy, blue denim bibbed overalls, shirtless and barefoot he took off to explore this limited farmland world, with a degree of restlessness and the household's two farm-dogs. The dogs were free to roam, but always came when called for companionship.

They had been given by friends in the community to fill the void of “man’s best friend” on the small acreage. There was no extra money for purchasing pets, and fortunately, in this case, there wasn’t a shortage of unwanted “extras” to be willingly shared with any taker. The matching of these two animals isn’t important, neither owned a pedigree, and they certainly made for an odd pair at first glance. The elegant, lanky large Irish setter loping along behind the scurrying pace-setting rat terrier – a magnificent red banner, paired with the rambunctious, black blur. As puppies, this twosome had been acquired within days of each other. Prior to their arrival, the three boys in the family had not had a dog for some time, limited to varying quantities of cats and kittens for pets.

Over the years there was not an aversion to having dogs around. It was just that there had been a history of bad and unacceptable behavior on the part of the big mixed-breed dogs on this farm. On the day of doom for the previous two dogs, the older brother was at school and the younger, too small for “men’s” work, was inside the large two-story farm house with his mother. Felix was impressionable and he was much impressed the morning the last two mongrels were served justice by his father, the resident judge, jury, and executioner. The tendency to dig holes around the farm buildings was pretty much overlooked and easily corrected. Their egg sucking ways, although much more critical, had been deterred by reframing the chickens’ entrance to the hen house, making it too small for the large self-serving creatures to access the daily crop of eggs. The eggs were considered critical for food, with the extras sold periodically for a few dollars, which in turn purchased the staples that had become the current priority. Accidentally breaking an egg was equivalent to throwing money away. There was just no way that these pets were going to spend time in the hen house or in the residence, let alone assume a decision making position in the household.

However, the chasing down and joy killing of the baby Durocs from the spring litters was “strike three – you’re gone”! The rapid succession of that morning’s events was