

# Ripper

Flame eludes my memory. Mother and Dad gave away the Irish setter when we moved from a little house with a big yard to a big house with a postage stamp yard. My two and a half years in the little house have faded from memory but they must have included petting and playing with Flame because I grew up loving dogs.

Grandma and Grandpa had Flame's brother Rusty. They had a large fenced yard that allowed the dog to run. The fence, unfortunately, kept grandchildren away from playing with Rusty and petting him. Rusty, nevertheless, provided the image that escaped my memory - Flame must have looked just like him.

More than five years passed before we had another dog in the house. During that five year hiatus, my love of dogs did not diminish. Rin Tin Tin became my favorite television program. The heroic dog saved the day on each episode - reaffirming my belief in heroes and the fight of good against evil. A two foot statue of a sitting dog became my favorite toy, although my parents drew the line and forbade my taking it with me to bed.

A real dog came into the house on my brother Paul's twelfth birthday. I was eight and too young to take responsibility for a dog. Paul

named him Ripper and the frisky puppy grew into a foot and a half high mutt that quickly captured the heart of the family. His short coat sported black fur with brown patches on his paws and white fur beneath his chin.

The initial plan was to keep the dog in the basement. That lasted one night as his yelping kept my parents awake. Until house trained, barricades confined him to the kitchen. After that he had the run of the house. With tale wagging wildly, he zoomed around furniture and jumped onto any available lap.

Like most dogs, Ripper was good with children. My sister Mary Ruth was two when the dog came into the house and treated it like any other toy. Ripper never growled or flinched, even when she dropped him off the side of the back porch. The short drop neither hurt the dog nor changed its faithful disposition.

Ripper was a fierce watchdog. He challenged anyone coming to the door with angry barks. In the back yard, attached by a leash to an overhead clothes line, he greeted every stranger with the same ferocious barks. Leaping against the harness that held him to the leash, the dog wore out many leather harnesses.

Dogs roamed freely in our neighborhood. Sometimes they gathered in packs of eight or ten. Despite his small size, Ripper led the pack. Dogs twice his size kept their distance. Only the big boxers escaped his

intimidation but even they let him have his way. The company of other dogs never kept Ripper from our house. The call, "Here Rip," brought him running back.

The call, "Here Rip," caused one of my more frightening moments. Paul had a paper route and I helped him deliver newspapers to the more remote houses. Those houses were often up the steep hills of our neighborhood. One cold afternoon found me delivering papers at the top of Stafford Street. Steep as it was, a sidewalk and houses lined the street as it descended to Hammond Street. Against the cold I wore a winter coat that had a buckle at the waist. Ripper accompanied me, conveniently attached to a leash that I had buckled to my coat. Standing at the top of the long block, I saw Paul at the bottom. He called, "Here Rip," and the dog took off. With the leash attached to my belt buckle, I took off as well, unable to stop myself on the steep hill. My feet moved fast enough to keep from falling but I had no chance of stopping. Fortunately, Paul caught me at the bottom of the hill where the dog had stopped and ceased his pulling. Never again did I attach Ripper's leash to my belt buckle.

Ripper's end brought tears to my eyes. A neighbor reported that a dog had been run over two blocks from our house. My mother sent me to investigate, just to make sure that it was not our dog. Never will I forget the sight of Ripper lying on the street, his back end crushed by a passing



truck. I stayed home that afternoon from school, too upset to go to class. The familiar bark had gone silent and the wagging tail had become a sad memory. The call, "Here Rip," was never heard again.