

Boyhood Reminiscences

The Animals I Grew Up With on Our Roslyn 'Farm'

8-23-54 R.N

By ROY W. MOGER

It is difficult to believe that where I live today, and where I lived since I was a boy, could be thought of as a farm. My father, however, wanted to be considered a farmer. Thus he called our carriage house and stable a barn. We had a corn crib and a chicken house and a number of farm animals on our one and a third acres of hillside so, in a sense, we lived on a farm in Roslyn.

When my mother and father moved to Roslyn in 1904, they had a fox terrier named Spot and a collie named Boy. They bought a carriage horse which they named Dick. By the time I was born in 1907, Boy had been given away because he just would not stay home and Spot died of old age. The dogs has been replaced by a Boston terrier named Sis, who gave birth to eight puppies shortly before I was born.

I am told that when Mother brought me home from St. John's Hospital in Brooklyn, where I was born, she found that she not only had to feed me around the clock, but she also had to feed eight puppies, for Sis had become ill and was unable to feed her litter. Although the puppies were fed the same formula which was prepared for me, it was quite a chore feeding the baby upstairs then returning to the kitchen to fill another bottle for the pups and rush to the cellar to bottle feed eight pups around the clock, too. These, by the way, were no ordinary puppies. It was my father's hope that they all would be champion show dogs for both parents were champions.

I understand that, after a few days of this demanding feeding schedule, Mother had had enough. She gave Father an ultimatum, either I or the puppies had to go. She could not take care of both. Father faced with this choice, compromised and sold seven of the puppies. He kept one pup, which he named Tippy, and me, for which, I guess, I should be grateful.

I can hear my father telling of his disappointment in hav-

ing to sell the seven puppies for a lump sum when they were so young that their true value as show dogs could not be determined. In fact, he was even put out when several of them did become champions. In reality he did very well, for Tippy grew up to become a champion, winning a number of silver cups and blue and red ribbons.

I grew up with Sis and Tippy. She never seemed to be annoyed with me. Tippy, on the other hand, kept well out of my reach. She obviously did not trust me. She never snapped at me or did anything to harm me. She just kept out of my way.

When I grew old enough to walk on my own and visit the barn, I became aware that we had a cow. Her name was Bossy. She was a Jersey, brown with white markings. I can remember being held to pet her warm funny side and touch her black muzzle which was soft and damp. When I was old enough I delighted in watching the evening milking. Evening milking was about five o'clock. Billy would call me and I would run to the kitchen to get my glass cup which I would carry to the barn. As I watched Billy milk Bossy, he would from time to time, squirt milk right into my glass cup so that I would have nice fresh warm milk.

I was told years later that the reason we had a cow was because my parents wanted nothing but the best milk for the baby. Before my arrival they had bought their milk from first one and then the other of our two neighbors who had cows, but they were not satisfied. These neighbors were the Andrews, who lived to the North of us on the adjoining property and had two cows, and the Remsens, who lived to the south of us on the other side of Remsen Avenue. They had one cow.

My parents, as I have said, at different times had bought milk from both families, but as one family did not keep their barn very clean and the

pipe and often let the ashes fall into the milk pail, they decided to have cow of their own.

Bossy lived in the box stall at night and during the day when the weather was bad. On

clear days she was staked out at various places where the grass was good and the hillside not too steep. The stake was an iron bar about an inch and a quarter in diameter, pointed at one end, and with a revolving ring at the other. This stake was about three and one half feet long and was driven in the ground with a maul which Billy called a beetle. The cow was attached to this stake by a long iron chain which allowed her quite a wide range for feeding. I often accompanied Billy when he staked out Bossy and when he brought her in for evening milking.

Having a cow meant that we had lots of milk and cream. Having lots of milk and cream meant that we had lots of butter and cottage cheese which Mother made in the kitchen. When Billy finished his morning and evening milking he brought the milk in the milk pail to the kitchen. Mother, expecting him, would have several milk pans on the kitchen table into which she poured the milk which had just come from the cow. These milk pans were about three inches deep and ten inches in diameter.

After the milk had been poured in the pans she covered them with cheese cloth to keep out the dust and flies and the milk was allowed to stand for the milk to cool and the cream to rise to the top of the milk. She then removed the cloth and, with a skimmer, an oval shaped piece of tin about five

or six inches long with a number of small holes in it to allow whatever milk was scooped up with the cream to drain through, she skimmed off the cream. She poured the cream in a glass jar and the skimmed milk into glass bottles and both cream and milk was put in the icebox to keep cool.

There is a picture of me when I was about five years old sitting on our back porch and in the background is a wooden butter churn. That churn I do not remember. The churn I do remember, and still have, is a square glass jar about six inches on the side and about six and a half inches deep. It holds three quarts of fluid. It has a metal top which screws on and which has a wooden paddle with four blades. The paddle is turned by a crank.

Whenever Mother had an excess of cream she would make butter. She very practiced at

view, it seemed that she made butter very quickly and with no trouble at all. I realize now that it was indeed a chore and that few of us today would want to stand a crank a churn for our butter when it is so easy to pick it up our of the freezer in the supermarket.

Even though a cow took a lot of care, it provided a lot of food for the household. Each year the cow was bred and provided us with a calf. I remember the calves, but I was too busy with other things to pay attention to where they came from or where they went. I suppose Father sold them to the butcher.

When Father had the stable and carriage house built he also had a large chicken house built. He wanted to raise chickens as a hobby, as well as dogs. For some reason, he fancied white leghorns. I suspect it was because they were good egg layers. I guess he had several hundred chickens at the height of his interest, but in spite of this close association with so many chickens I never liked them. I didn't like their smell or their noise. I just didn't like them.

Well, I should make one exception. I did like the baby chickens. I used to watch them with the mother hen or about the brooder. In fact there was one baby chick that became my special pet.

This chick had become sick. Mother brought him into the house and put in a shoebox

with some old rugs to keep him warm. She put the shoebox on top of the warming oven of our kitchen stove. The first night in the house he was very noisy. At least at times he was very noisy. At other times he was very quiet. You never know when he would burst out with very loud peeping, loud enough to wake everyone in the house in the middle of the night.

Because he erupted into such loud noises so unexpectedly Father named him, Popocatepetl, after a Mexican volcano which had a reputation of erupting at irregular intervals. After a few days he became well enough to be allowed to walk around on the kitchen floor for exercise and I was allowed to watch him. Thus he became my pet, living in the shoebox when not following me around the house or yard.

Unfortunately, Popocatepetl never lived to grow up. He was killed accidentally when the front screen door crushed him when I wasn't watching. It was a sad loss, for we were all very fond of him.



The author and a "friend" on the Moger family farm on Remsen Avenue, 1912.

Another pet which I had for a short time was a nice soft, warm gray and white rabbit. I was very fond of him and I guess he was fond of me for he liked being petted and fondled. He was kept in a small pen made of chicken wire stretched over a light wood frame. There was wire over all four sides and the top, but the bottom was open. This pen or cage was portable and was moved from place to place about the yard.

Inside the cage we kept a wooden box with an opening cut in the end, for him to go in and out. We kept grass in the box for him to sleep on. The cage was easy for me to tip on its side so that I could let the rabbit out, when I wanted to play with him. He never attempted to run away and like to have me pick him up and carry him about. He was indeed a very special pet.

Unfortunately his cage was not very safe. It was too light and easily turned over. My rabbit came to an untimely end one night when a dog or dogs turned his cage over and easily killed him. It was a very sad day for all of the family, but especially for me. For some time I gave up having special pets.

During the First World War there was a great deal of encouragement to farmers and to anyone else with arable land to increase production. We had always had a large vegetable garden, but during the war the area was expanded to include an area for sugar beets and potatoes. Father and John Remsen, our neighbor, decided to help with meat production by raising two pigs, one for each family. To my delight the pigs were raised at our place.

Billy built a stout pen for them, with a shed for them to find shelter at night and during bad weather. The walls of the pen were made of split chestnut logs and were about four feet high. Very easy for me to climb on. The pigs were bought in the spring when they were very small. I would have liked to get in the pen and play with them but I had strict orders not to do so. I just climbed to the top of the pen and watched.

I liked best to watch at feeding time. Mother prepared

food for them which was called swill. She mixed all sorts of things in a pail with a lot of milk. It had a sort of sour smell which I liked, but I had no desire to eat it. Billy carried the pail up to the pig pen and poured the swill into the trough he had made in which to put the food. I must say that pigs love to eat. At first, when they were small, they would climb right into the trough, but before long they became too big to get into the trough and had to content themselves by just putting their snouts in.

By the end of the summer they were huge. Eventually they were taken to the butcher. He slaughtered them and cut them up and stored the meat in his icebox. Yes, we had plenty of pork that winter. In fact we had so much pork that we became very tired of pork, pork and more pork. We also discovered that the Remsens also became tired of pork too, so neither we nor the Remsens raised any more pigs.

8-7-84 A. W.