Pets from Our Past

Four-Legged Confidant Was a Friend for Life

IN MY TEEN YEARS, I lived on a ranch in Monte Vista, Colorado. I spent my 13th birthday, in 1957, with my favorite grammy. We had lunch, sat in her yard and played endless games of Chinese checkers.

Weeks earlier, I had cautiously put in a request for an animal I could raise as my own, and when I was opening cards and gifts, the last envelope contained directions I was to follow—12 steps through the dining room, seven steps across the kitchen, 10 to the back door…until I reached a white building.

I was to open the door, take 50 steps and turn right. The directions ended there.

As I made that final turn, I was greeted by the very loud braying of a very small donkey, sporting a huge red bow on an oversized halter.

Fast Friends

I rushed to hug him as he laid his head on my shoulder and made soft crying noises. This was my special gift, my friend-to-be.

That donkey and I became instant buddies. I named him “Skeeter” because his little nips were more like mosquito bites. Skeeter was grayish tan with a dark brown cross along his neck and shoulders. He had tall, shaggy, brown-tipped ears; a soft, velvety nose and mouth; and deep, brown pools of eyes.

He enjoyed generous portions of sweet-smelling rolled oats but relished slices of bread with a thick mixture of butter and sugar.

Skeeter followed me everywhere that summer. In the grassy yard, I

would lie down, and Skeeter would lie down. If I raised my head, Skeeter raised his head.

We spent hours together. I'd sit against a tree and he would kneel down to place his head on my lap.

As the only girl in a family with three children, I had longed for someone in whom I could confide. I could tell Skeeter my dreams and aspirations, and he responded with soft nudges and contented sounds of "m-m-m."
Skeeter roamed and grazed in the yard and orchard. He was very intelligent and quickly learned how to open almost any kind of gate—especially the one to the rolled-oats bin.

Entertaining Antics

One evening, as I helped prepare dinner, I glanced into the dining room. Standing at the head of the table was Skeeter. He immediately let out a braying hello.

He had opened the porch door by grasping the round, ridged doorknob with his teeth, turned it and pulled the door open.

That donkey was always a special friend. He never wore a saddle nor carried a pack load. He constantly entertained with his antics, like trying to herd milk cows, with which he chose to associate over horses.

When I went off to college, I missed my confidant terribly and even more so when I left to teach at a distant university.

However, when I returned home for visits, I'd go to the pasture and call out Skeeter's name, and he would come running, braying all the way.

I'd hug him and he would lay his big head on my shoulder. I'd scratch and rub his face and whisper sweet nothings into those beautiful, tall, shaggy ears. He never failed.

In the end, I was home when my friend of 22 years died with his head in my lap as I whispered my last good-bye. He was buried in his favorite blanket with a box of sugar cubes nearby for his final journey.

Many years have passed since that birthday walk when I found my dearest friend. And I can still feel his head on my shoulder and the touch of his shaggy ears and the love in those deep, brown eyes.

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