



MY ONE-MAN-DOG

By Tiffin Shewmake

My father was surprised to find Sable's name in the acknowledgements of my book along with our other dogs because "We had him for such a short time, I didn't even know that you remembered." He does not realize that Sable, despite his short life, had a great influence on me. Sable was to be my Buck—a one-man-dog—who loved only me.

An avid reader, even in elementary school, I loved dog stories, my favorite being *Call of the Wild* by Jack London. I dreamed of having a dog like Buck, who loved me above all others and would risk his life for me like Buck did for John Thornton. I also read the Lad stories by Terhune about the intelligent, devoted, loving and protective Sunnybank collies. I knew that the perfect dog in the world was a Collie-German Shepherd cross because such a dog would have the best traits of both breeds and strongly bond to one person, me.

We had a family dog, a dachshund named Ralph. (I had named him after a friend of my Father's who, not realizing the complement, thought that it was a joke and got a cat to name after my father.) Ralph was a great dog but a dachshund is not the noble dog of my fantasy, and he was a family dog, meaning that my mother was his favorite person.

At about this time, we moved to a new house and I switched schools. I was not very happy in the new school. We moved in the middle of the year and I did not have any friends. At recess, which was completely unstructured, the girls all played with Barbies or jumped rope. I did not have a Barbie. My mother, in her effort to counter the sexist media of the seventies, discouraged us from playing with dolls. I learned to jump rope out of desperation but with no friends, was lonely.

Then my one-man-dog appeared. He was only here for a short time, but he carried me through the rest of the school year. I was getting off the school bus one day and saw movement under some bushes. Always looking for animals, I investigated and found a puppy. When I coaxed him out, I was horrified: he was starving. I had never seen a dog so thin, every bone stood out, clearly defined. But I also realized that he was my perfect dog, a Collie-German Shepherd mix. It was fairly long walk home, and down a steep hill but it was easy to coax the puppy into following. At the house, I stood under the carport at the side door and called for my mother, saying that I had something to show her. She must have heard a special tone in my voice because her response was "We don't need another animal in the house."

When she came out, she took one look at the dog and immediately took him inside for food. I named him Sable, after his gold and black flecked coat.

At first Sable was lethargic, only eating and sleeping. My mother, for some reason, decided to feed him chitlins and bought big plastic tubs of the stuff at the Northside Shopping Center grocery store. Sable quickly started gaining weight and a little energy. I remember the first time he played. He took a little brown paper mache horse that my

sister had made and chewed one leg. He finally had enough energy to play with Ralph. I have one picture of Sable, a bad shot from above of Sable and Ralph wrestling in the kitchen. Most importantly, Sable actually preferred me to my mother and had started following me around the house. Here was my perfect, one-man-dog.

Then tragedy. Shortly after Sable felt well enough to play with Ralph he came down with distemper. In his weak condition, he had no chance against the disease so I lost my special puppy.

On a rational level, I know that a true one-man-dog is not best for the dog. People spend long periods away from their dogs and a dog with broader social bonds is a happier dog. But emotionally, I still want a one-man-dog and will find him again, waiting for me at the Rainbow Bridge.