

Cochise and Bobaloui

By Tia Owen

I was four years old when Cochise first sat between me and my brother in the back seat of our old rusted out Continental. Mom didn't tell us the exact reason why we were at the animal shelter; she just instructed us to wait in the car while she went inside. Within a few moments, she came strolling out the door with a dog on a leash, opened up the back door and in hopped Cochise.

Immediately, Cochise sat in the middle seat; giving my brother and I had a great view for inspection of this animal. Dad grumbled something about having a dog. Mom intercepted by telling him not to be so uptight about it. I can't recall exactly what was said between my parents, I was too engaged with the Shepherd pup that now had his head on my lap. He looked at me with a side ways, upward, glance; it was love at first sight.

A few years passed and dad lost his job, which meant our family had to move to a different neighborhood. It was no big deal. The new house had more space and the yard was bigger. In the new neighborhood, Cochise was free to roam like the other dogs in the neighborhood. I would worry sometimes and wonder if he would come back. Mom would tell me "He knows where his food is," and Cochise would always come home.

When we moved into the new house we had made an incredible discovery. The previous renters had abandoned the house leaving many of their belongings, which Mom immediately threw away. However, there were two belongings that were left outside that Mom was not so quick to get rid of, the people had left their two female dogs.

One dog we named Sporky. She was a spirited yellow lab that tended to stray away from the pack. It was like there was no holding her back;

when she roamed...she roamed. The other we named Bobaloui. She was a beautiful collie mix that appeared to have survived distemper which had left her with a limp front paw and caused her body to shake involuntarily. Bobaloui was a home body, and she and Cochise were always at each other's side. It wasn't too long afterwards that we discovered that Sporky and Bobaloui were both pregnant. The news spread quickly through the tight knit neighborhood that Cochise had impregnated the two females that were left behind at the house under the Cass Street Bridge.

Bobaloui was the first to give birth and she was a very fit mother as she tended to her seven puppies. Cochise proved to be a very fit father and partner, as he saw to it that Bobaloui had the food she needed to nurse their young pups by hunting small animals and bringing them to her to eat. With money being tight as it was, we could not afford to feed all those dogs and their instincts took over and they learned to fend for themselves. It was not as if we neglected the dogs; we pampered them as best we could. Once we saw that the dogs had let nature take its course, we knew that they would survive in their own world and on their own terms.

A few weeks later, Sporky gave birth to her puppies; seven to be exact. But, unlike Bobaloui, Sporky had no interest in her babies. She took off and we never saw her again. Bobaloui was left to nurse all fourteen puppies; and she did. We would help her nurse and we would shift off the puppies for her so that they could all eat. Cochise, in a leadership way, stepped up to the challenge and continued to supply Bobaloui with the nourishment she needed to feed all those babies. However, she could only nurse for so long before her body stopped producing milk, and the stress began to take a toll on her.

What this duo did next amazed everyone that lived in the neighborhood under the Cass Street Bridge. And had I not seen it with my own eyes, I would have never believed *this* dog tale.

The neighborhood we lived in housed a grocery store. One day as me and Mom were shopping, we heard a ruckus coming from one of the aisles in the store. A stock boy rushed past us in a frenzy stating that there were two dogs in the store. Mom and I immediately looked at each other and we just knew that it was Cochise and Bobaloui.

We followed the stock boy to the front of the store where some of the employees were attempting to make a human fence to block the dogs from going any further. The dogs made brief eye contact with us. We did not say a word or gave any hint that the dogs causing the ruckus were our dogs! Cochise and Bobaloui separated and took off running in different directions causing a flurry of stock boys in an attempt to chase them down. To the astonishment of all, Cochise returned to the front of the store carrying a 20# bag of dog food in his teeth; Bobaloui was right behind him with a chunk of cheese and those two dogs bolted out of the store and took off running. The stock boys gave up the chase as they were truly stumped by what they had just witnessed. Mom and I checked out immediately, trying not to appear too rushed, and went home.

We arrived home a few minutes after Cochise and Bobaloui. We were both amazed at what we had just seen. Mom rambled on about how those two dogs had to have planned that out. That was just impossible to believe if we were not there to see it with our own eyes. I swear it was like watching Bonnie and Clyde, but in a canine version.

By the time we got to the house, Cochise had already ripped open the bag of dog food and all the puppies had surrounded the bag and were enjoying a well mapped out meal. Bobaloui was lying down next to her pups, seemingly satisfied with the mission accomplished, enjoying the chunk of cheese. Cochise sat proud next to his brood with his chest puffed out and a very distinguished look of achievement in his eyes. Only when the puppies

bellies were full, and content, did Cochise eat the remainder of the food; Bobaloui had saved him a piece of cheese. Once Mamma and babies were settled in for a late afternoon nap, Cochise too settled in next to his large family and fell asleep.

I was now eight years old and I was so proud of my dogs. It was not the fact that Cochise and Bobaloui had gangstered their way through the grocery store and actually stole food. But, it was for the fact that I had seen these beautiful animals actually provide food for their family. I was amazed. I sat with our dog family for hours that day and only went into the house long enough for a bathroom break and to grab a couple of sandwiches. And when the pups started to stir out of their nap, I helped Bobaloui shift off the puppies so that they all had a chance to nurse. When she finished nursing, Bobaloui and I shared the sandwiches; as well as a very heartwarming moment. I was so proud of her and she knew it.

News spread quickly through the neighborhood and Cochise and Bobaloui were heroes. To imagine what the two of them had done was to be commended and now people were inquiring about the puppies; it was only a few days later that we had found homes for each one of them. One by one they went and you could sense the relief in Bobaloui; she was so tired.

Cochise and Bobaloui had been outside dogs up until the day the last puppy was given away. However, after having won their rightful place within our family, we brought them into the house and gave them their rightful place within our home.

This story took place thirty years ago and my dogs have long since passed. But, I can remember as if it were just yesterday...Cochise...Bobaloui ...and all those puppies.