

The
Little Book
— OF —
Puppy Love

**True Animal Stories
to Warm the Soul**



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Jennifer Basye Sander

PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED AS THE DOG WHO HEALED A FAMILY AND THE DOG WITH THE OLD SOUL

FRANK OBSERVATIONS *



E. G. Fabricant

Every dog deserves a boy, or two.

Smooth-haired and black and tan, Frank came to us—my nearly-new, second spouse, my two boys, aged 10 and broaching eight years, and me—in mid-1985, on the outskirts of Alexandria, Virginia.

His procurement process was equal parts evolutionary and deliberate. Geri had grown up in the company of miniature dachshunds. I was a deprived child. I am the third of five brothers, sandwiched between two older and one baby sisters; we span 21 years from oldest to youngest. My parents' patience with desirable, non-athletic character-building activities—dancing lessons; music lessons; and pet ownership—ran out with my next-oldest brother. My mother put her foot down when I was 10. Literally:

“Goddamn it, Frank—I’m not feeding, walking, and cleaning up after any more goddamned dogs! That’s it!”

In between, we had rescued three Shepherd-mix dogs, with mostly low to moderate shedding characteristics. Now, the rest was logistics. Family of four; three-bedroom, detached Federal, vacant during

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school hours. Two working parents; two pre-hormonal boys. The ideal candidate:

- Short-haired;
- Low-maintenance;
- Agreeable, but not overly needy;
- Long-lived enough to stick around, God willing, at least through high school and, preferably, college;
- Small enough (a) to manage, um, input and output, efficiently enough to foist that and other chores off on the boys, and (b) to be unable to do much physical damage above baseboard level, when left alone; and
- Large enough to fend off childhood diseases and to be willing to stand his/her own ground with the boys, as required.

Those considerations, along with Geri's imprinted girlhood bias, led us to a litter of mini-doxie pups who, it was mutually assumed, were somewhere the other side of the A.K.C. tracks—hence, the asking price and lack of complications. Frank was the only one not fighting, frisking, and falling all over his outsized feet in that six-week-old way. He sat apart, motionless, and never took his eyes off us. He embarrassed and intrigued us into taking him home.

Okay—about the name. My solution: a *double entendre*, played off the more familiar “wiener” or “weenie” dog; to wit: “Frank.” She agreed, but my self-satisfaction was short-lived. Not only did I have to explain its meaning, anyway, but friends familiar with my story would invariably ask, with Oedipal gravity: “Why did you name your dog after your father?”

His childhood was a little rocky, attributably mostly

to human error—mine. So, from my largely vacant boyhood I combined two crude concepts, “papers” and “outside,” and spread newspapers both on the kitchen floor and outside the entrances. Reaching what I thought to be a respectable interval, I’d take him outside, place him on the papers, and wait expectantly. He’d park himself in the middle of the pulp and give me his most tolerant look: “Okay, Chief; what’s next?”

(Dachshunds are renowned for feeling separation anxiety and taking revenge.) It was a testament to his native intelligence that he pretty much foreswore barking after that. Chastened, we arranged for a pet-sitter to look in on him while we went north to Delaware for Christmas break. On our return she sang his praises, took the check, and left. It soon became plain that she’d left the door to the basement open, and he’d exploited that loophole; fortunately, the floor was vinyl tile. In the end, he swallowed his pride, to keep the peace, and trained us.

Frank did us the courtesy of respecting Geri and me as the general governing authority, in that order—mostly because she hoisted him onto our bed one night at his first plaintive, puppy plea, which he seized upon as a *carte blanche* entitlement. The eventual compromise was between our California King and a folded quilt on the floor nearby (“Flap,” in his vocabulary.) He’d ask routinely for the first; ordered otherwise, he’d plod glumly away, ears down, as though wading through molasses—followed by a grand and deliberate show of bedding down. Dachshunds are instinctive burrowers, having been bred to hunt badgers, and they like to sleep covered. Before retiring, they find it necessary to fashion a trench in which to recline safely, so they scratch, dig, and hump up their spines while imaginary dirt flies out from under the



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