

LOST IN THE WOODS

Blackie, my cocker spaniel, was not a dog who rode in a car or truck very often. He was a stay at home type dog whose life revolved around me, and who delighted in following me every where it was possible for him to go.

Occasionally Daddy would take Blackie with him as he went to work in the woods at the logging site, during the time he, Wilbur, and his younger brother, Hulan, were partners in Thacker Brothers Logging or at times when he would go hunting or fishing.

On this particular day, he had taken Blackie with him to go hunting. Usually Blackie would follow Daddy closely, with occasional side trips, always to return to Daddy's side. He disappeared on one of these excursions and failed to return as expected. Daddy speculated that Blackie had been on the trail of a deer and had wandered too far. Whatever the reason, at the end of the day, after calling and whistling, Blackie failed to appear. Daddy knew I'd be heartsick if he came home without my dog. He waited there until dark but finally, he had to give up the search and head for home without Blackie. Before leaving, he took off his coat and left it behind at the very spot where he had last seen Blackie.

When Daddy came home without Blackie, telling the full story of how Blackie became lost in the woods, the howls from one small girl filled the air and the tears began to flow. A feeling of sorrow and despair came over me. Daddy said he would go back tomorrow and search for him again but I knew that I would never see my beloved dog again and he would wander all his life in the woods with no one to love him or to feed him. It was a very sad evening and a very long night.

The following morning before the break of day, Daddy left as promised to retrace his steps and hunt for a dog instead of a deer. He headed for the area where Blackie had left him when he went on his last excursion and where he had left his coat. Lo and behold! There was Blackie, comfy as could be, nestled down, lying on Daddy's coat. Blackie had come back and found something familiar and warm and comforting. The plan had worked! Upon spying Daddy, Blackie barked, jumped, did turn-a- rounds and was excited and extremely happy. Of course Daddy was overjoyed to see him, too.

At times, late at night, Blackie, for no apparent reason, would sometimes bark, keeping the family awake. My father, who went to bed early and for whom sleep was essential because of the danger in his work as head rigger for Clark and Wilson, a large logging company in Oregon was bothered the most. He often had to sleep at unusual hours, especially in the summer since they were unable to work in the heat of the day on a regular basis due to low humidity which created more of a danger of the possibility of starting a forest fire. Therefore they usually began working at 2A.M. – 3.A.M. or whenever daylight occurred. These hours in logger vernacular were called working the “hoot owl” shift or “hoot owling”. Daddy always referred to Blackie's nightly episodes as “barking at the moon” since we could neither see nor hear anything, although I was always convinced that he was only trying to protect us.

Nevertheless, all those times of annoyance and exasperation, as well as other misadventures, were forgotten at the sight of the dog curled up on his coat, covered with dew, waiting patiently for the return of *his* family.

Blackie came home to the joy of family and friends and especially one small girl.

Mildred “Millie” Thacker Graves 22 March 1995