

Stanley always put on the dog

Royalty came on four legs

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Stanley toured the nation's capital, tasted the finest cuisine, and dated the prettiest girls on the block. Sometimes I envied his life style; sometimes he envied mine.

My mother found his majesty sniffing around the front stoop 17 years ago after food shopping. I returned from junior high school to find a little brown dog with big eyes and floppy ears wagging his tail on our living room rug. He looked thin, frightened, dirty, and without a collar or license — independent.

"I have three boys already, what do I need another for?" mom complained. "At least if it were a she I might be able to relate a little better. I'll end up being the one to walk, feed, and take care of it. Believe me, your father will never, ever go for it."

At first Stanley must have sensed his tail was on the line, because each evening he would raise his ears and cuddle his thin body against my mother's leg and gaze with sad, attentive eyes at anyone who cared to make eye contact. He was an expert on body language before the book came out.

His condition gave us reason to believe that he had been abused and abandoned. He was particularly terrified of large men. Still, my parents made every effort to find the owner through neighborhood inquiries and an advertisement in the local Shopper. I kept my fin-

Stanley showed me his "Jaws" impression by leaping high and snatching a Ring Ding from my hand.

gers tightly crossed, and the owner never turned up.

Pets weren't new to us, but a dog certainly was. Before moving to Fair Lawn we lived in a cramped apartment five flights up in Hudson County, where it was impossible to have a dog.

My two brothers and I substituted with goldfish, frogs, turtles, mice, and even three small chicks. It was hard to get emotionally close to chickens. Walking around a cramped apartment lined with newspapers wasn't my mother's idea of a good time, either. Eventually the chickens were sadly donated to the egg man.

Stanley, who was probably born to a terrier mother and golden retriever father, was



One of Stanley's more curious habits was to raise only one ear.

named by my older brother, Michael, after Stanley Beemish, a bungling superhero who was making his TV premiere the night we found him. Michael thought the name was appropriate, while the rest of the family thought it sounded somewhat peculiar. Arguing with Michael in those days was like trying to tell Don Rickles to be quiet. Stanley didn't seem to care either way, so the name stuck.

In the first few weeks, Stanley revealed a loud bark and a knack for mischief. Oddly, sometimes only his left ear would go up, owing, the vet said, to a hearing loss. Michael, now a lawyer, would advance quietly, steal Stanley's bone, and have our new dog chase

him full speed up the stairs. One day Michael left the bridge to his false teeth on the night table near his bed. Stanley took his revenge by using them as his new bone.

I was slowly noticing many other differences between a dog and a chicken in those first weeks. When Stanley came in from the rain or was overly excited, he would run full speed chasing himself in circles. He wasn't very popular with the cats, rabbits, and squirrels in the neighborhood, either. And he seemed to have a peculiar sense for Saturday night as he would almost always find a way to sneak out of the house.

Stanley's thirst for adventure didn't sit too

All in a dog's life

well with our neighbors — especially those with female dogs. Once, my father caught Stanley in a neighbor's yard and tried to pull him and his lover (who was twice Stanley's size and curiously named Charlie) apart. Stanley growled and showed his teeth. My father was never one to be intimidated — especially by an ungrateful mutt. He picked up a stick and smacked Stanley fiercely on the tail end. Stanley took a considerably more mellow approach toward my father's wishes after that.

Snow was another one of Stanley's pet peeves. He often looked like a snow blower plowing through mounds of snow twice his height. During a massive blizzard one January the front door opened a crack and off he went. Stanley had tunneled a path for three blocks before I finally caught up to him.

"What are you trying to do, freeze to death from exposure?" I yelled in shivering tones. "Obviously, you're not a pedigree [the ultimate insult], because a pedigree couldn't possibly be this dumb!"

Stanley was scolded often as a reminder that a leash was required to leave the premises. Nevertheless his sense for independence and free instincts never waned. If you wanted to go one way, he invariably wanted to go another. It was like he was trying to tell us that he refused to be molded into some robot animal and that it was important that we knew. The leash we used to take him out for walks never looked quite right around his neck.

Endless appetite

Stanley wasn't a fussy eater, and his endless appetite simply amazed

the guests who visited the house (his castle) over the years. Although Stanley never weighed more than 25 pounds, he ate everything that moved and several things that didn't — couches, Kleenex, grass, chicken bones. My mother always said he worked better than her vacuum cleaner.

One day as I walked through the kitchen, Stanley showed me his "Jaws" impression by leaping high into the atmosphere and snatching the last Ring Ding from my hand. Another time someone made the terrible mistake of leaving three quarters of a chocolate cake on the kitchen table.

Stanley started out on dog food, but later enjoyed some of the finest meats money could buy, thanks to a mother who fell victim to his charms. One day when the folks were away on vacation, I was preparing my Chinese food specialty — beef with oyster sauce. I like to think it was Stanley's ultimate dining experience.

Each morning he sat at my mother's heels and enjoyed bits of toast and cornflakes. Sometimes he would even get his cheese omelet before me. When I and younger brother David still lived at home, we were conditioned each night to give his kingship a dog biscuit before we went to sleep. If one night we forgot the biscuit and somehow managed to avoid the ritual, Stanley would scratch our doors open and sniff our armpits until he got that biscuit. His habit of sleeping on my bed got me into trouble one time with a girlfriend demanding to know whom I preferred.

One spring Stanley came to visit me for a week at college in Washington, D.C. I took him off the leash and

on a hidden path along the Potomac River past Watergate, Kennedy Center, and the Lincoln Memorial. We basked in the warm sun reflecting off the river as I told him that although millions of tourists were moved by the sites each year, none had ever enjoyed their aroma as much.

To smell a passing world

Probably his greatest joy, however, was to stick his sensitive nose out the window of a moving automobile and smell the passing world. Attempting to take him in my convertible one summer was a big mistake. We weren't even halfway down the block when a French poodle raised her leg in salute.

In the end, Stanley suffered from arthritis in those once-powerful legs that passionately chased baseballs, cats, Michael, and sprung him up over the doorknob when bathroom privileges were needed. He subsequently began to sit by the door, and later he just sort of ambled there.

"Before Stanley suffers too much, I'll have him put to sleep," said dad, with a rare twinge of emotion in his voice. His hard line on Stanley's table manners and general privileges had softened considerably. Stanley had indeed won him over.

In the last couple of months I tried to visit Stanley every day, even if it was for just a few minutes. It had become increasingly obvious that he was in pain, yet he never cried or whimpered.

I prepared myself for his loss by telling him that an incredible memorial in the backyard was planned. Last month I walked through the door and knew he was gone.