

They called him Old Buddy

He was just an old black dog, and his name was Buddy. No one knew his ancestry, nor did they know the owner. Buddy just appeared one day in the community and adopted several families.

Shortly after Buddy first appeared, he started staying around my parents' home. Every morning he greeted my father at the back door as he went outside to meet the new day. Of course, my parents began putting food out for Buddy, and this made him more faithful around their house. At some point during the day, Buddy would leave and wander the community to visit other homes. As a result of his nomadic nature, he picked up several more acquaintances between my father's house and the church.

On numerous occasions as I taught class in my second-floor classroom at Sale Creek High School, I looked out the window and saw Buddy and his compatriots trotting along Coppinger Road on their way around the community in search of adventure. As a result of his wandering, many people in Sale Creek came to know Buddy, and they always had a pat on the head or a doggy treat for him. He had an endearing nature about him that made him a lot of human friends.

Shortly after he started staying at my father's house, he began following the car as my father went to the store, filling station, and to church. Whenever my father came out of the house on Sunday morning, Sunday evening, or Wednesday evening, Buddy realized quickly that the car was going to the church. He instinctively fell into a jaunty gait behind the car as Daddy drove slowly to the church. In the course of time, Buddy's canine friends along the way started to recognize the sound of my father's motor, and, seeing Buddy cantering along behind the car, they instinctively fell in behind the car, too. As my father turned into the church parking lot, five church-going dogs arrived in the yard to the delight of the children in the youth program.

Being the senior dog in the group and having more social skills than the others, Buddy was not content to stay in the yard or parking lot during Sunday School, church, or prayer meeting. Eventually he managed an invitation into the youth building and went into the classroom where he lay in the floor during the classes. His behavior was impeccable, and his attendance became so regular that it was quipped that he was more regular than many of the human members. One class roll of twelve or fifteen members had a new entry at the bottom of the list – Buddy, and his X's and O's were filled in as meticulously as that of any of the children. Buddy had a very good attendance record.

As soon as church let out for the evening, all the adults and children congregated in the back yard of the church as the usual chatting took place. All of the assembled dogs usually lay in the yard watching as the humans visited with one another. The moment that my father broke away from the group of parishioners and made a motion toward his car, Buddy instinctively stood up. On his cue all of the other dogs rose and watched. As Daddy backed out of the driveway, all five dogs fell in behind his car and started their trip back to their appointed homes. As each one passed their homes, they fell out of the processional until only Old Buddy remained behind the yellow Oldsmobile. As my father turned into his driveway, Buddy took a shortcut to his back porch where he waited until Daddy got out of his car.

This process was repeated many times for several years with more and more people coming to know and love Old Buddy as he expanded his travels. By this time he

was getting along in years, and evidently his hearing or eye sight became less reliable along the roads because one Christmas Eve morning my father got a call from one of the church neighbors that they thought Buddy had been killed by a car. Several of his human friends drove to the neighbor's house and found Buddy lying in the yard. They wrapped him in a blanket and buried him in my father's back yard in a place of conspicuous honor and with the normal and expected amount of tears. All of Buddy's friends were truly saddened to learn of his death, and everyone felt the loss of this old friendly dog.

I once heard a child ask an adult if her dog would be in heaven when he died. The wise parent answered that God has promised us that heaven will contain everything needed to make us happy, and that if a person's dog is required for that, then there will be dogs. If that is true, then Old Buddy will be waiting at the gates of heaven holding out his paw to welcome us in the same manner that he waited on my father coming home from church.