

CHAPTER 5

ANIMALS ARE LIKE THAT

It Just So Happened that I came by my fascination for animals naturally. It got started early. Indeed, the earliest clear memory I have of anything is of little white rabbits. We were living in Englewood on Cherokee Street. It was probably in early spring. There was snow on the ground. My father came in excited about something. He bundled me up and we headed out to the rabbit hutches he had in a shed in the backyard. Apparently a mother rabbit had had some little ones that were that morning old enough to come hopping out of the nesting box at the back of the hutch. Father lifted me up so I could see: little white rabbits. I am sure he said, "Bunnies". He opened the cage door so I could pet them and hold one in my hands. How long ago? Heaven knows, but I was pretty young.

GET OUT OF THAT WATER! At a later age, and in a different location (we moved from Cherokee street to the 3000 block on South Broadway) I experienced three more animal episodes. The first was "The Bantam Hen Episode." We called her "Banty" and she was a little charmer. She was also a terrific mother. Whenever she got in the "mood" my father would supply her with eggs and she would sit on those eggs dutifully and then she would mother the hatchlings dutifully until the duty time was over. She was small and the eggs she sat on were not bantam eggs but Rhode Island Red chicken eggs, which meant that once hatched it was not long before the chicks were about as big as the mother. It was fun to watch her fuss with those oversized kids.

Father, for whatever reason, and he did have that kind of humor, one year put duck eggs under Banty, and she dutifully hatched out a supply of ducklings. All went well until one day Father opened the gate and let Banty and her young ones out to where the pond was. What happened then was unbelievable and nerve wracking--for Banty. You guessed it. The ducklings did what came naturally, while Banty franticked back and forth ordering them to get out of that water!

THERE ARE CROSSES AND CROSSES. Also, while I was still young and innocent, Father bought a dog for me--but mostly for himself. The dog's name was Sport. I heard Father tell somebody that Sport was a cross between a wolf hound and a grey hound. Whatever that meant--a cross between. But I heard him say it.

Some time later Father found me with Sport rolled over on his back. I was examining carefully, searching, searching. Frowning down at me, Father asked, "What are you doing?" I told him that I was looking for the cross. After all I had become familiar with crosses. Remember? To rescue me from being a Jesus sunbeam, the Tremmel family had become serious cross watchers each Sunday morning.

A SAD THANKSGIVING DAY. One more: as stated above, my father also

raised Rhode Island Red chickens. Into that backyard flock was born a little rooster who grew and grew until he was quite a fellow. I knew Father liked that rooster. I would see him stop whatever he was doing and stand watching and listening as that rooster practiced crowing. And when that rooster got big enough to strut about and threaten anyone who came into the chicken yard, Father would go in the yard and they would have a fight. Father liked that rooster.

Most people ate turkey on Thanksgiving, but Father had chickens out in the backyard, so with us it was Thanksgiving chicken. The day before one fourth Thursday in November, Father killed that rooster. Next day everything was ready. We sat down at the table. Father had a funny look on his face and when Mother offered him the plate of chicken, he shook his head. I saw her look at him. I think I saw sudden tears in her eyes. She knew. I didn't. Not then. But I know now.