

Norman is a delightful, pet lover's tale - the true story of an exceptional dog's life, told in his own voice. With wit, affection and insight, he relates his adventures - some tragic, some comic - with his human family and fellow beasts.

Norman - A Dog's Life

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NORMAN
A DOG'S LIFE

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Chapter 7

Animal Friends and Foes

When it came to guarding my turf, I was both fearless and foolish. Animals straying into my vicinity got the same treatment as human strangers. Frequently they were together, connected by leashes. They would receive my warning charge accompanied by fierce barking. This action usually produced a wide cautious berth by the interlopers accompanied by the standard commands from the family to stop, which I would heed with the deed done.

One day I was in the road with my dad when a neighbor with two German Short Hair Pointers on leashes, each about three times my weight, stopped to visit. I'd escorted these dogs before, but not at this close range. As the neighbor greeted my dad, they got too close for comfort and in a flash I was on them. In another flash I was on my back and they were on me with teeth slashing as their master struggled to pull them off. Dad plunged into the fray to rescue me, and caught some glancing blows himself before we were separated. Face still red from the adrenalin of battle and clearly embarrassed; he apologized profusely for my ill-behaved attack and his own negligence in not being in control of his charge. This humiliating defeat was not the worst of it. My days of unleashed walks were over. I got the same kind of half hearted reprimand a kid receives when he gets hurt doing something he's not supposed to do. You feel bad for him at the same time you're

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mad at him for scaring you. Though he tried to hide it, I knew that Dad secretly admired my loyalty and courage in taking on these brutes.

This was not my first or worst encounter with an animal foe. That occurred earlier in Medfield when I chose to attack what I thought was a bandit breed because of the lone ranger type mask he wore around his eyes. Yup, you guessed it. As I was later to learn, it was a raccoon – stronger, quicker, and far more vicious than any dog I was ever to encounter. He tore me to pieces and sent me home with cuts and gashes, my coat covered in blood with a chunk of my ear missing. It was a very distraught mother who sped me to the vet that day.

Chipmunks, squirrels, and geese were also in my foe category, though as prey rather than threat. Chipmunks were not very serious opponents. They are mostly just fun to chase around, darting in all different directions like a water bug with their cute little tails sticking straight up in the air and their tiny feet going so fast you can't see them. Tootsie would not agree with this characterization as she considered them quite serious prey and tasted her fair share of them.

Squirrels, rabbits and geese were another matter. Squirrels were frequent and most unwelcome visitors to the bird feeder, making them public enemy number one. It was my official duty to keep them out of the yard – a never ending task. They had destroyed a birdfeeder station in the back of the yard, so one was hung over the deck where I could keep better guard. If I was inside, the family would keep an eye out and when a squirrel was sighted on the deck, sometimes even on the feeder, I would be called into action with a shout of "Squirrel, Norm!" How I loved that word: squirrel.

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Springing into action, I would race to the sliding glass door that led to the deck and crouch in a start position like a sprinter waiting for the starter's gun.



By the sliding door with Kiki, keeping an eye out for squirrels.

Then someone would open the door and I would spurt like a road runner cartoon with feet spinning out on the plank flooring until I caught traction and then shot across the deck after the now fleeing squirrel with the family cheering “Get him, Norm” in the background. By the time I reached the end of the deck, I was going so fast that I would go airborne over the three steps that led to the yard. I would then bank a sharp left turn and stay in hot pursuit with much barking to the edge of the woods where the squirrel would shoot up a tree.

Geese and rabbits were public enemy numbers two and three - geese because they dirtied the yard with their dog-sized turds, and

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rabbits because they dined on Dad's vegetable garden. I flunked miserably at keeping the rabbits at bay. I rarely even got to chase them because they would sneak into the garden at night, and Dad gave up on the vegetables after a couple of years.

Geese, on the other hand, were plentiful on nearby ponds and tested my yard patrol only a few times before deciding to stay clear. Occasionally, Dad would take me to parks with woods, ponds and expansive lawns which were over run by Canada geese. I would shag the geese, but I found it frustrating work. Before I could get close enough for a decent chase, they would fly out of range or land on the pond where I couldn't reach them. Now, you may be wondering how come I only talk about chasing these critters. Well, it's because I never caught one! Never once. Even in my dreams, and I did dream about them, they always got away.

Enough about my animal foes. My first animal friend was of course Tootsie – though with reluctance on her part. That's understandable. After all, I did move into what had been her exclusive territory. She also had her own special relationship with Molly, who dressed her up in doll clothes and pushed her around in a toy baby carriage – a humiliation I never suffered. I was too big for the clothes and wouldn't sit still for it anyway. Also, Tootsie was well along in middle age when I came on board as just a puppy.

Still, we did have some good times as she gradually accepted my presence and occasionally tolerated my enthusiastic adolescent play. I liked to chase her around the house or pounce on her when she wasn't looking, then hold her down with my paws and gently chew on her head. She'd sit still for this for a brief moment, then struggle free and leap to higher ground out of my reach. Sometimes she would roll over on her back or stand on her hind legs and cuff me with her front paws, but never with her claws out. Once in a great while, she even initiated play, giving me a cuff

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when I was napping and then running away. We were always fed together and after I had wolfed mine down, I would wait patiently until she was done and then finished any of her leftovers.



Tootsie in disguise.

One of the things I envied about Tootsie, in addition to her climbing and hunting ability, was her history of prolific procreation. In her prime she produced as many as four litters a year, with five to six kittens in each litter. After over 100 kittens, the family exhausted their ability to find homes for them at school, work and around the neighborhood. The last litter was taken in a box by the girls to the Deerfield shopping mall where they managed to give them away to strangers by appealing to their sympathies with stories of the kittens impending demise if they weren't adopted.

After that, Tootsie was "fixed" and bred no more- a status which I shared without ever having a chance to even try out my

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plumbing, let alone overindulge the way she did. In spite of being neutered, I still had times where I felt the need to mount and I wasn't fussy about species or gender. So Tootsie was occasionally the object of my thwarted canine affection, as were various human legs with neither recipient appreciating the attention, though onlookers always seemed to be quite amused.

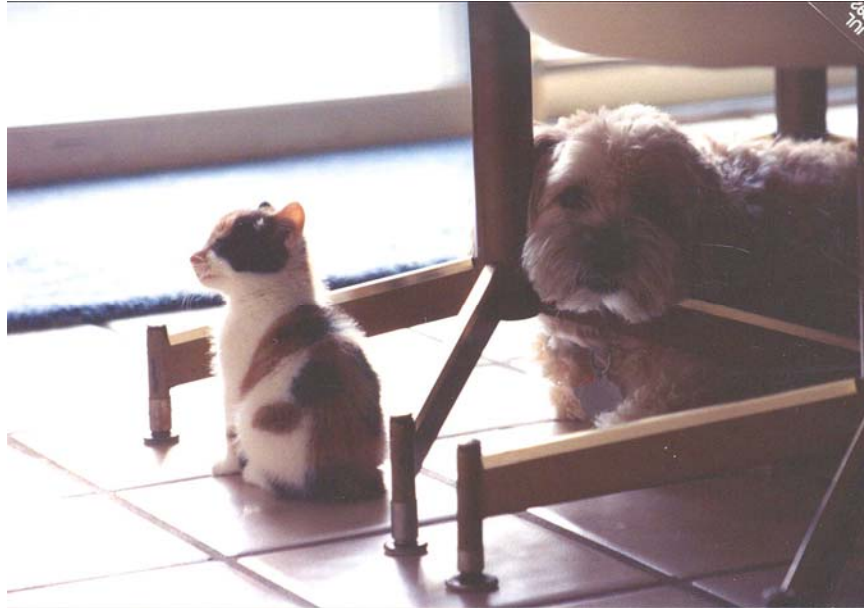


One day Tootsie stopped eating and just lay still. This caused great sadness in the family, especially in Molly, who shed many tears. Mom and Molly took Tootsie away in the car and returned without her. She was fourteen years old. Even Dad was deeply saddened. I missed her too, and would sometimes wake up in the middle of chasing her in my dreams.

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After a while, Dad brought a new kitten home, the calico offspring of a wild farm cat that lived under a barn. Her name was Kiki and like me, she was brought into the family under some duress from Mom. Kiki was Molly's replacement for Tootsie, and she took to her with immediate and intense affection. Without a tinge of jealousy, I welcomed her too. In contrast to Tootsie's dignified grey/brown tiger stripes, Kiki's crazy bright colors offered the promise of a wild playmate.

As with Tootsie, my enthusiastic rush to embrace her was met with fear and loathing – back arched, hair bristling, claws out, and hissing through bared fangs. This passed quickly as she learned what a great guy I was and then, wow, did we ever hit it off. She liked to romp, wrestle, chase, sneak attack, cuff, pounce – you name it – as much as I did and to the great amusement of whatever people were around.



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Dad captured our antics on film as he had done with all of my tricks. If I had lived at a later time, I'm sure I would have made it to one of the animal TV shows, especially with my head chewing performance. After the kids, I was his most frequent photo subject, as you can see from the samples in this book. One of my favorite shots is of me facing a stiff ocean breeze next to a fishing shack on Prince Edward Island. It was enlarged, professionally mounted and framed. It hung in a prominent place in the basement recroom for many years until our father retired and became active in Pittsburgh's North Hills Art Center. He entered it in a juried art show there and it came back with a ribbon which now hangs proudly from the frame. Another of my favorites is of Kiki and me watching for squirrels through the sliding glass door to the deck.

Unfortunately, there was a dark side to Kiki's wild nature. Sometimes her behavior was so crazy and out of control that it was scary. She also persisted, despite constant scolding, in sharpening her nails on the furniture. I had no problem with any of this. Being bigger and stronger, I could give back two fold anything too rough that came my way. Our mother was another story. In spite of my example, Kiki never got the picture on the importance of winning over Mom. What's worse, she actually attacked her. She'd come flying out of nowhere with a demon look in her eye, and land on Mom's bare leg, claws out for gripping like she was climbing a tree, and then give her a most unfriendly bite – producing a loud, pained scream. She'd then be gone as fast as she'd come, escaping the immediate punishment that might have helped her learn better manners. You don't bite the leg of the hand that feeds you and expect the food to keep coming.

After Molly had gone off to college, Kiki drew blood from our mother's leg one time too many. She was taken for a ride from which she did not return. I'm sure she found her way into a new home more compatible with her wild nature and she was better off for it, but I missed her. She had become a major part of my life

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Dad's prize-winning photo and painting.



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and my best ever animal friend. For months afterwards, I was vulnerable to Dad's new prank of saying to me with great urgency, "Norman, where's Kiki?" I'd come to attention so excited I could hardly contain myself – ears perked, eyes darting, nose poised to pick up her presence. With continued urgings from my father, I'd set off on a search, racing through the house expecting to see her around every corner until his laughter would give away the game. Nice guy.

I had some cousin dogs that were friends too. They belonged to Mom's sister Margaret and were Shih Tzus, an offshoot breed from my own. Shih Tzus are a little smaller than Lhasas, with flatter faces and bigger eyes and the distrust of strangers has been reversed to overt affection for anybody and everybody. The first of these was a good buddy named Max and he was a great one for tag and wrestling. The first time we met was at our New Hampshire house and he had been brought in on a leash. I felt instant affection for him and he for me. After checking out his important smell zones and allowing him the same privilege, I took his leash in my mouth and gave him a tour of the house, much to the amusement of the humans. Margaret visited a lot so I got to see Max often. He had much more energy than I did, and he'd usually wear me out. Maybe that's why he was sickly and didn't live long – he just burned his life up too fast.

After he passed away, he was in time replaced with a brother and sister pair of Shih Tzus named Milo and Zooey. They would stare straight into your face with these huge, sad black eyes that would melt your heart. They seemed quite infatuated with me. However, at my by then advanced age, hours of puppy romping were no longer of interest and I would occasionally have to put them in their place in order to fend off their well intentioned but overly enthusiastic overtures. I showed them my tricks but they turned out to be as dumb as tree stumps when it came to learning

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such things – even not to pee on the floor. Perhaps they had to give up space in their brain for all that affection they harbored. Poor things, they also had the same propensity to ill health as Max did but were fortunate to have doting surrogate parents that made sure they were well attended.

My last animal tale occurred on one of our many road trip vacations, this one to Nova Scotia with Molly and her boy friend from college, Guido, tagging along. David and Brenda had graduated from the University of Massachusetts by then, and had their own homes. I rode in the back with Molly and her beau. They played games between sight-seeing stops and were so competitive with each other, particularly at chess that they would get testy and have to quit. I figured this relationship was going nowhere, and I was later proven right. But I digress.

One of the places we stopped at had a small petting zoo, which we passed by as we walked. I was on a leash, but not for long. On



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the opposite side of a chain link fence, 20 feet in front of me, I spotted a large Billy goat with two huge curved horns arcing out of the top of his head. Something snapped in my gut and I took off for him like I was shot out of a cannon, ripping the leash from Dad's hand. Or, did he let me go on purpose? I wouldn't put it past him, but I'll never know. The snarling and barking that accompanied my charge got the goat's attention and he put his head down and charged straight towards me. We met at the fence and the smash from his horns pushed the bottom of the chain link mesh smack into my snarling muzzle. If that fence had not stopped him, I'd have two nicely curved grooves down the front of my skull from those horns. With the fence holding him back, I continued my vicious but harmless attack until Dad got hold of the leash and pulled me back. We strode briskly away, Dad looking straight ahead to avoid eye contact with the small audience which had gathered to stare at us.

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