

They Have Their Little Ways

(being a brief and bemused account of the family pe(s)ts)

Kerry Truelove

ISBN 978-0-646-81687-6

Acknowledgements and Apologies

I have put together this series of reminiscences largely from my own memory, which is a faulty instrument at the best of times and sometimes only partially refreshed from photographs. Furthermore, not all of the tales contained here took place in my presence, and as a result many of them have been put down second-hand. The origin of these will be a mixture of family meals, reminiscences, letters, emails, and in a number of cases outright input. For those insights into the lunacy of inevitable pet-owners, I thank my mother, Mrs Joan Truelove; my father, Mr Frederick William Truelove; my brother, David John Truelove, and my sisters Helen and Leigh.

I can only offer my most sincere apologies to all members of the Truelove family for any inaccuracies or offence, and indeed to anyone else mentioned in the narrative – notably my friends Josie Minshull, Cath Callaghan and Gillian Oats.

I also would like to acknowledge the use of a number of photographs that were not taken by me and therefore are not really my property to co-opt into these pages. Once again, my apologies go to my father and my mother, my brother and sisters, and to Josie. I have attempted to ascribe ownership to these photos, but if I missed some then I hope you all will forgive me the transgression.

In making acknowledgements, I must also make mention of Milena Rafic, with whom I worked in my heady days in the Australian Nature Conservation Agency. Milena it was who, on reading one of my emails recounting encounters between Duma and mice, told me I should write a book. I already had a vague idea of doing so, but her words must have turned a vague idea into the following pages.

Having said that...

Table of Contents

1.	Dramatis personae	1
2.	The Big Daddy of them All – Butch	7
2.	Pe(s)ts on Postings.....	31
a.	An African Experience	31
b.	The Grecian Pair.....	37
c.	Two Singapore Slings.....	43
d.	The Dark Continent revisited	48
4.	The tabby, the black-hearted Irishman, and the hoodoo of the Siamese multiples	53
5.	Apostolic Encounters	64
6.	The Boxer and the Siamese	81
7.	Burmese nights (and days!).....	94
8.	The Girl of Infinite Philosophy.....	136
9.	The Barney and Duma Show	147
10.	The Blue Boy and the Warrior	169
11.	Two Riotous Thugs and the Cyclops.....	183
12.	Detached Contact and Buster Keaton’s Canine Double 204	
13.	Mischief from Moorook	215
14.	Household happiness... ..	263
15.	Garden menaces and delights	314
16.	The protective instinct	360
17.	Carnivores at large	372
18.	Watersports.....	446

16. Afterword.....481
17. Appendix.....481

1. *Dramatis personae*

Since I'm going to subject you to the tales of our various pe(s)ts, I'd better give you a cast of characters – I think I can safely say they are characters. Here they are, in chronological order to the best of my ability, although some of these dates relate only to the time we had them and not their full lifespan. One of the penalties of a Foreign Affairs life is we have had to leave a smattering of canine and feline characters in various corners of the globe; a trial and often cause for great angst, but we would have pe(s)ts wherever we settled. A house simply was not a home without one furred character, at least (and usually more).

Butch (*Wellington, New Zealand, and Canberra 1960-1971*): Our first boxer, a solidly-built dark brindle dog

Mrs Pussy (*Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, 1964-66*): A black queen

Rudolf (*Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, 1964-66*): Her son, a big rangy grey-and-white

Hellenic (*Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, 1964-66*): Another son by a later litter, with Siamese markings

Pfennig (*Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, 1964-1966*): A long-haired, at least part Dachshund dog

Mrs Patch (*Athens, Greece, 1966*): A calico Grecian street queen

Henry (*Athens, Greece, 1966-1968*): One of her kittens, a ginger tom

King (*Athens, Greece, 1966-1968*): A happy little corgi dog

Wee Jasper (*Canberra, 1969-1970*): A tabby tom kitten

Seamus (*Canberra, 1970-73*): A black-hearted Irishman of a tom

Twa Too (*Canberra, 1971?*): The first Siamese in the family, a tom

Sirrikit (*Canberra, 1971*): A Siamese queen

Kittikachaun (*Canberra, 1972*): Yet another Siamese tom

Bart (*Singapore, 1973-1975*): A ginger tom from Singapore RSPCA

Raffles (*Singapore, 1973-1975*): A Singapore Dog

Lais (*Australia, 1975-1997*): An excessively well-bred Burmese-Siamese queen

Matthew (*Canberra, 1975-1992*): A brown tabby tom with a hare lip

Daisy (*Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, 1975-1979*): A black part Labrador bitch

Ajax (*Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania 1977-1979*): A shovel-nosed red boxer dog

Marc (*Canberra, 1976-1993*): A tuxedo tom

Pibul Songkhram (*Tweed Heads, 1979-1996*): A slab-sided Siamese tom

Chokka (*Tweed Heads, 1979-1990*): Another dark brindle dog

Kinda (*Canberra, 1984-1994*): A red boxer bitch

Poltergeist (*Australia, 1989-2009*): A brown Burmese queen

Barney (*Canberra, 1993-2011*): A broad-stripe tabby tom

Blue (*Canberra, 1995-1996*): A solid, dark tabby tom

Warrior (*Canberra, 1996-1997*): A black-and-white domestic longhair tom

Kim (*Tweed Heads, 1994?-1997*): Another red boxer bitch

Maddy (*Canberra, 1995-2005*): A somewhat under-sized light brindle boxer bitch

Clancy (*Canberra, 1996-2010*): A dark brindle boxer bitch

Jewels (*Canberra, 1994-2009*): A dark brindle boxer bitch

Sandy (*Tweed Heads and Canberra, 1997-2017*): A BIG ginger tom

Minnie (*Sunlands, 2007-?*): a blonde Burmese queen

Tarzan (*Sunlands, 2007-?*): the brown Burmese tom

Meg (*Sunlands, 2008-2017*): another brown Burmese queen

Rascal (*Sunlands, Jinjilly, Canberra 2013-?*): a black rescue tom

Harry Spencer Buzz (*Sunlands, Jinjilly, Canberra 2013-?*): a Barney look-alike rescue tom

Larry Beckham Buzz (*Sunlands, Jinjilly, Canberra 2013-?*): another Barney look-alike rescue tom

Shadda (*Sunlands, Jinjilly, Canberra 2013-?*): a rangy calico rescue queen

Naming them all

They were all individuals - even my brother's dog Gunnar, who was probably the most "just dog" of them, was an individual. So finding names for them wasn't that hard – well, animals often name themselves (although I have to admit I cannot recall how Hellenic got his name, there was nothing Grecian about him and Helen wasn't with us at the time (or maybe that was how...)). Kinda was named when I was pulling

up weeds and furious with my brother for giving her to us, a play on the German word for child *kinder*; Twa Too was named after the driver my parents had in Burma; Seamus was a black-hearted Irishman of a cat (he stole my father's sole...); Henry was a Navigator; Pfennig was a long-haired dachshund, only one pfennig-worth of dog anyway; Rudolph had a red nose; Mrs Pussy had borne half the cats in Dar-es-Salaam. The list goes on.

Some even came to us with names, like Clancy and King. Barney came to us with a name, but he didn't respond to it and in any event it wasn't the right one. It took a couple of weeks of hiding in dark places and coming out all sleekit and cowering after dark before he let us know his name. He was originally called "Clive" - at a pinch Matt could have acted like a "Clive", but not Barney! Not because he lacked dignity - he didn't - but because he lacked courage...

This does not mean any animal was necessarily stuck with a single name - not in our family! Matthew could be Matt, Mattethew, USCIABCWAP (John, it had to be.); Poltergeist could be Polly, The Geist, Bratlet, Catlet; Maddy could be Mädchen, Madrigal, Maddy-one, Miss Maddy (usually said in a very poor imitation of a Southern US accent); Lai's could be Widge, Widget, L'widgee; Duma could be Dee-chee, Grublet, Goos-goos, Baby Cat; Ajax could also be Nayjax (especially when he was up to mischief).

That list, also, goes on. Alternatively, they all could be "that bloody dog!" or "that bloody cat!" depending on the villainy.



Of course, there are other pets I haven't mentioned or described in any detail - the border collie, Scamp; the cats Frisky

(in New Zealand) and Mitzy (in Australia), sundry lizards and a frog in New Zealand. Most of these were before I started really noticing the behaviours, likes and dislikes of our pe(s)ts, although I have no doubt they all had likes, dislikes, favourite nests and favoured humans. Except maybe the reptiles. I know they liked live flies, because my mother would catch them for John, whose pets the lizards were.

I suppose it must have been a bit odd for the visitors, to be having a sane, most likely diplomatic-wife's, conversation with my mother only to see her rise up to collect a jar and piece of cardboard from the sideboard. When she started stalking something across the room I imagine they began to get seriously worried, and would not have been particularly relieved when she put the jar over a spot in the wall and then slid the cardboard between jar and wall....

Well, the lizards had to eat, hadn't they? – seemed perfectly normal to us!

Then there are others, more recent, who belonged to other members of the family and whose personalities made less of a mark on my memory because I had much less to do with them. Pe(s)ts like Bozo, Gunnar, Shaun, Tiger and Capt'n Chaos – all boxers, all owned by my brother; Squirt, a leggy black-and-white cat with intellectual limitations (but Oh! such whiskers!), Rusty and Wally, fox terriers with a thing about balls - all three living in Darwin and, in Wally's case, Sunlands South Australia with Leigh and her *de facto*, Allen; Minnie, Tarzan, Meg and Inta, also living with Leigh and Allen albeit in Sunlands; and Pibul, Chokka and Kim who at various times, sometimes overlapping, owned my parents while they were living the retired life in Tweed Heads. You'll find them lurking in these pages somewhere...



And of course no account of the family pe(s)ts could be complete without the human variety:

Fred (Frederick William Truelove): my father, a career diplomat; before that a farm boy and bomber navigator.

Mum (Joan Truelove, nee Turton): my mother, daughter of an ex-Yorkshire builder who moved to Sydney.

John (David John Truelove): my brother, six years older than me and ultimately a disaffected Naval architect and a farmer. Married to Martha and father of two children, Barbara Rosalind and Roy.

Helen (Helen Truelove): my eldest sister, four years older than me, a public servant.

Leigh (Leigh Truelove): my other sister, eighteen months older than me and a much-travelled veterinarian. Partnered with Allen, who could – and did – turn his hand very effectively to many a construction endeavour.

Myself (Kerry Truelove): also a public servant and ultimately a fitness trainer, with a love of woodworking.

2. *The Big Daddy of them All – Butch*



Butch in his youth, possibly in New Zealand (photo FW Truelove)

Our introduction to the boxer breed

Butch – Bramanah Ajax, to give him his kennel name – was the one wot dun it. He was a dark brindle boxer, of the English body type and therefore solid to the point of almost being massive. We got him in New Zealand, on the advice of the vet. My father had asked which was the best man-sized dog with children, to be told that only man-sized dogs were good with children and the best of them were Labradors and boxers (I assume my father asked the question because Scamp, the border collie we had had in Australia before, had not been at all good with children). *Labradors get fat*, thought my father – so he opted for a boxer, knowing nothing much about the breed except the vet. thought they were good with children (the vet. also said they were hard to train, but once the commands were in the animal's skull they were in for life. We learned the truth of that; Fred (my father) trained Butch – and Butch trained Fred).

But Butch also completely reinforced the vet.'s views. I don't believe we could have asked for a better dog for a mob of children starting out between the ages of four and ten. What nobody thought to ask, of course, was whether children would be good for the dog...



“If that dog bites anyone,” my mother declared, not many weeks after we got Butch, “that child will get a hiding.”

The occasion was a delinquent youngest child sitting on the dog’s back, taking his bone from him and giving it back to him. Not once did Butch react, and he was probably all of six months old at the time, hardly a seasoned dog well accustomed to the cruel vagaries of human puppies. All he did was look imploringly at my mother *please, pretty please, rescue me - this is embarrassing!* (come to think of it, a similar event happened thirty-something years later, with my brother’s dog Shaun – also a dark brindle. Toddler son Roy, learning how to walk, found his balance going and grabbed for the nearest support. At the time, Roy still had that surprising manual strength of a baby, so you knew when he grabbed you. The nearest available support happened to be two large and delicate swellings between Shaun’s hind legs, of considerable importance to the male of any mammalian species.... But apart from going stiff with surprise (and other things!), Shaun did nothing.)



Where we went, Butch went – to my uncle’s farm, to the beach, to the drive-in, wherever...

“John!” called my mother, one day. She knew her eldest had been playing in the back yard, with the dog; they had to be out there somewhere (or rather, she hoped they were – both John and Butch could go over the fence at will...).

“Yes Mum?” a boy’s head appeared like magic halfway up a tree.

Silly me, of course he’d up a tree, where else? thought my mother and then remembered the other delinquent who was meant to be playing in the yard.

“Where’s Butch?”

A dark brindle head appeared like magic, slightly less of the way up the same tree *yes Mum?*

Don't ask.



Let us not forget the time Mum confidently told her dog “stay” and went up the escalator to JB Young’s in Kingston. Halfway up she noticed something low and dark, coming up the stairs that ran beside the escalator, keeping abreast with her more mechanised progress.

Yup. Butch, on his way up the stairs to keep her company and no-nevermind that dogs weren’t allowed in the store.



Did I mention the training aspect? Fred spent many hours training Butch in the prerequisites for urban living – to come, stay, sit and heel on command, and to fetch the newspaper from the front lawn every morning. Butch learned those commands perfectly; the only thing was, he was selective as to when he would obey them (a characteristic we were to find in all our many boxers – don’t let anyone tell you they as a breed are stupid, they are not. But they can be remarkably and selectively deaf when it suits them...).

Selective deafness, and the ability to train Fred, were in prime evidence with the morning paper when we were living in Narrabundah. The drum was this: Fred would open the door, stand on the front porch, point out and tell Butch to fetch the paper. Butch would go out, have a little sniff of the various bushes just to make sure he was abreast of the night’s canine events, a little piddle here, and little marking there and finally bring in the paper. I was never sure he brought the paper because he’d caught up on events, or because Fred was starting to get quite annoyed and yell at him; the point was, he knew

exactly what he was meant to be doing, he just took his own time about it. Not stupid, opinionated.

Or rather, that was the usual way of doing it. But Butch knew that if Fred couldn't actually see the paper, he couldn't be sure there was one there; and if the paper landed on the road side of the big pinoak tree, or in the irises at the base of the tree, Fred couldn't see it.

“Fetch the paper, Butch,” my father would command and the dog would sally forth, obviously more than willing to carry out that small task. But he would stop and look around, seeking the elusive paper, “go on, fetch it!”

So Butch would take a good look, and maybe inspect some innocent clump of grass or check earnestly under the black wattle, giving all the signs of a dog willing to bring in the paper. Finally he would look at my father *no paper today, boss*. My father, being wise to the wiles of Butch, would yell at him to fetch it and stop mucking about, and again the big brindle would do his search – this bush, that shrub, perhaps a brief foray behind the pinoak before once again stopping to turn worried dark brown eyes towards Fred *no, honest, boss, no paper today*.

This would go on for some time, my father getting more aggravated, until finally he abandoned the porch and got to a point where he could see the paper, perched jauntily among the irises or just flat on the ground. An instant before his blood pressure was really going to go through the roof, Butch would suddenly swoop on the paper *oh you mean this paper, boss! Why didn't you say so?* and trot proudly back to the house.

The neighbours probably also had blood pressure problems, but from laughter; I suspect that was hardly the only time they killed themselves over our dog (and our!) antics.



No paper today, boss... (photo FW Truelove)



Then there was the serious business of transporting a young boxer male from New Zealand across the Tasman SEA to Australia. We went by boat – the *Patris* – and of course we couldn't have Butch in the cabins with us, he had to be in a cage. But they weren't inhuman, so we could get him out of the cage and give him a bit of a walk on the deck and bond a bit more with our dog.

Well, Butch was well and truly house-broken and you just didn't piddle on floors, even ones that heaved around like the *Patris* in the middle of the Tasman. So despite our urgings he 'hung on' – but he wasn't super dog, though we often treated him as such. One day it was unendurable and he had to pee. And pee. And pee... Damn near flooded the ship, but he felt a lot better after that!



This training business, that was serious. Nobody wanted to walk a dog, any dog, on a lead and certainly not such a large, powerful and boisterous dog as Butch, so he had to be trained to do as he was told when he was told. To be fair to him, apart from when he was told not to fight another dog (or, indeed, told "don't even think of it", my mother's phrase when another dog came into our view if not his. Not perhaps the most sensible approach, for whenever she said it Butch instantly thought of it),

he was mostly reliable, particularly as he got older. But in his youth there was an element of hit-and-miss about his obedience, particularly if there was a hint of temptation. So the day Mum had him out walking in New Zealand and encountered another dog walker she probably had quite a few misgivings.

Mum's story is that she smiled at the other dog walker, one dog lover to another. Instead of the anticipated smile in response, she got a stony glare and the other dog walker stalked on with every intention of passing her and Butch without so much as acknowledging they existed. Now Mum was very proud of Butch – so were we all – and this kind of slight would have raised her hackles at the best of times. Butch was actually behaving himself reasonably well, for him, which made it worse.

“Butch,” spoke my mother in a firm voice (just a tad low, in case he ignored her and the other dog walker heard and thought all the less of them), “here,” and Butch instantly stopped what he was doing to join her, correctly on the left side, correctly at her heel.

Mum could have hugged him for it. Instead, she decided to press her luck because this other dog walker was being so snooty, so plainly contemptuous of anyone who would have such a large, untidy dog as a boxer (theirs being, I think, a miniature poodle).

“Heel,” and serenely swept on by the other dog walker with all the air of a woman who knew her dog would do exactly what she told it to do, no more, no less. Appearances were deceptive. Mum was in a stew inside *what if he doesn't heel? What if he goes over to the other dog and invites it to play? What if he bounces the other person? What if-*

Butch trotted obediently and perfectly at heel past the other dog walker and her dog, and around the corner – and then washed my mother's face with an excess of delight when she

dropped to one knee to hug him. But then, Butch liked to show off, too, and had a fine sense of occasion. This, clearly, was an occasion; so he rose to it.



Mum was a redoubtable woman, and no doubt in these less permissive days would have been up before a magistrate for the way she would, on occasion, take Butch with her on an off-lead walk down to Griffith shops – about three blocks westward along Stuart Street. Usually it was for a few bits and pieces, and when told to “stay” Butch would wait patiently outside the shop while my mother conducted her business. I’m not sure all the retailers appreciated this – after all, Butch was a solid, muscular dog with the apparently uncompromisingly foreshortened muzzle of a boxer, frequently likened to a bulldog. The uninitiated might have been – well, shall we say a tad intimidated? – by his presence on the pavement (nowadays, of course, there would have been an uproar, police would have been summoned, great discussion entered into about the dangerousness of the dog, the absence of a lead let alone a muzzle, and so forth culminating in an official caution about having to keep the dog on a lead and attended or tied up while in public places).

But I do know there was one retailer who had absolutely no issue with Butch waiting patiently outside his shop door...

It happened that Mum needed to get some meat from the butcher.

“Butch, stay,” pausing just long enough to see his bottom descend to the pavement before sweeping into the shop, list in hand.

“Good morning Mrs Truelove,” and business commenced. Shortly afterwards another customer entered, sidling past the quietly waiting dog as if escaping from a particularly uncompromising crocodile. Before the customer could speak,

the butcher leaned over the counter, “don’t say a thing against that dog. He’s our best customer.”



Having Butch obedient could have its drawbacks, particularly for him. Take the time in New Zealand he was rioting ahead of us and got onto the roof of a changing shed that was nestled against a slope (this was New Zealand, after all: slopes everywhere). We were a bit worried because we’d lost sight of him and then suddenly there he was, like a jack in the box, some six or seven feet up. Some idiot among us, in a classic example of not thinking, called Butch to join us. So he did – a flying leap off the changing roof shed.

Omigod! He’ll break a leg!

He hadn’t – maybe a little graze and a slight limp for a day or two, that was all. But it was not a small fall and he was lucky to get off so lightly.

He also was infernally lucky the time he ran out onto the street in Narrabundah and was hit by a car. Picture it if you will – the car screeching to a halt, big brindle dog flipping off to the side, mother and child white with fear for their darling pet and no doubt, at least on my mother's side, rapidly going through the list *broken ribs and leg, broken neck, internal injuries now how on earth am I going to tell the kids and Fred?!!*

Then he got up and came over to her. He’d torn a flap of skin off his chest and that was about all; and he’d learned a valuable lesson. Cars on roads could be a bit of a risk. Not that it stopped him from crossing a road, of course. Nor did it affect his enthusiasm for cars, in particular going in them. If there was an outing to be had, Butch was in it – and in the car – right from the start.