

3SHORT.DOC

Like most people who live on the outskirts of San Angelo, I have to catch a ride to town every once in awhile to pick up my car at the mechanic's shop. Also, modern automobiles cost so much to repair, owners need a driver in the early stages of checkbook trauma brought on from learning such horrors as a reconditioned fuel pump costs \$350 installed, or a front end job on a ranch pickup runs 600 bucks.

Last week, I found myself bumming a ride in with a lady taking her cat to the doctor. The only trip I ever took with a cat was 40 years ago when an old tom leaped from under the hood of a Ford pickup crossing Seep Draw. After telling my chauffeur the story, I was awful short on cat material, road, or resident incidents. I was summoned to the boss's bunkhouse the night Felix Rocha, suffering withdrawal from an overdose of Tequila Cuervo, imagined Jose's black cat was a black widow spider. I did a real good skit on Felix screaming, "Aranas, aranas." But she didn't seem interested.

I had a book along to read in the clinic's waiting room. The scene ranged between bedlam and confusion. The nurse's big brindle cat, Barney, challenged all the canine patients. Mainly women filed in and out, leading one or two dogs on leashes. One lady burst through the door, dragging a big pup of a bird dog, and all but shouted; "Silvester Farrington for his three o'clock appointment..."

She was a classy-looking lady, dolled up in white hose and summer print dress. Silvester wasn't a bad looking dog for a big gangling pup. She sat down and brought Silvester to heel. I returned to reread paragraph three for the third time on page 101 of a tedious Russian novel. Suddenly, she yelled, "Silvester! Bad Dog! You have mud on your nose." In a swipe, she wet her finger with her lips and washed off his nose. Then she paused, took a second look and went back through the same procedure.

If mother's warning was right, she and Silvester had just exchanged three tons of dog germs. And I figured if mother was correct, I was going to be lucky to reach medical help fast enough to be sterilized in a full body alcohol wash and save me from dying of germs floating in the air. Barney had already contaminated my pant's leg with cat germs, rubbing against the blue serge fabric, leaving loose white hair to pass his message on how much he distrusted humans.

Temperature on the street side of the building was 98 degrees Fahrenheit, backed by 70-plus percent humidity. Barney followed me outside; Silvester, restrained by a plaited leather leash costing more than a good pair of bridle reins, stayed indoors much to his chagrin.

Animals and pets are the rage today. The Nature Center is San Angelo announced a contest in the daily paper last week to name a couple of baby possums rescued after their mother's death in a car accident. Ranch possums go for years

without names. About the only comments on wild possums, I recall, are sayings like, "He ain't dead, he's just playing possum," or, "Ain't he an ugly son-of-a-gun."

With no more to go on than common phrases, marsupials probably come closer to answering to such names as "Purse," or "Pocket" than anything else. The San Angelo newspaper suggested "Bongo" and "Pongo" as likely names. Before they settle on those monikers, however, they better go out behind the building and try calling: "Here Bongo, here Pongo." My guess is baby possums don't respond to orders as fast as West Point cadets answer commands.

Next-door neighbors can become mighty sensitive to somebody bellowing about six times in a row for old Bongo to find Pongo to come to supper. Plus, possums' eating habits are way too indelicate to put in writing. Let's just dismiss the subject by saying were the Nature Center to have an outing for possums, the rendering plant on the east side of San Angelo is a good location.

If baby possums pass through their formative stages as fast as raccoons, name training had better be rapid and intense. My kids misnamed a pet coon "Davy Crockett" and had to change her name to "Daisy" after she matured. She refused to come down off the roof until we went back to calling her "Davy." Even then she took her own good time responding to her name.

Silvester must have received a good bill of health in spite of his muddy nose, as he came bounding out the door,

dragging his mistress. Barney tensed, eager for a match. I gave up and turned to the back page of my book to read a short sketch of the author's life.