

OCTOBER 22, 1987

Well meaning folks are always recommending that I move in a cat or a dog to keep me company at the ranch. People who seek remedies for loneliness for their fellow men seem to think that all a guy needs to be happy is to have his backyard full of tomcats fighting or falling in love and his flowerbeds overflowing in lap hounds conducting themselves on a bit higher plane.

I find it offensive when a cat or a dog is prescribed as my companion. I don't think I have that much in common with animals. Sometimes when I'm walking down to the barn I talk to the saddle horses, but after I pass off a few cautionary commands such as getting out of my way, our discussion ends.

Two or three weeks ago an abandoned Collie showed up off the public road. She was a fine featured little black and white bitch, heavy bred, and trained to roll over on her back at any command or request. At the time, one of my sons had guests out hunting doves. On off hours when they weren't blasting birds from around the dirt tanks, these hunters put on a big front of being animal lovers.

Since the three of them are trained in the law, they make convincing cases in behalf of this discarded dog. Nevertheless, I could tell by her movements that the point wasn't going to be keeping one dog. Soon the point was going to be what to do with eight or nine pups.

After the hunt was over and we had the grounds alone, I began to notice that by lunch every day she was lying on the north side of the house looking directly toward San Angelo. It didn't matter what I was doing, I was constantly aware of that sad-eyed dog gazing off to the northeast, just pining away for whatever it was that she'd lost in life.

I couldn't stand being alone, the way that dog was acting. Part of her trouble might have been those prenatal blues that go with a pregnancy, but I was breaking down so fast that I couldn't treat her troubles for staying on the road to town.

Well, her influence finally got so bad that I wasn't home one night out of every seven. Things must not have been going very well for her, either, because one morning after I cooked her breakfast, she left without warning.

The next dog I try out is going to have to have been raised in the country. Until I got out from under her spell, I haven't felt so lonely since I was in grade school. Those hunters would have really been sorry if they'd caused me to move back to town.