

The Birthday Party Pony

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My buddy Clyde is from a big family. He had seven brothers and one sister. The sister, Rose Bud, was the youngest. I often wonder who my buddy would have been if Rose Bud would have come second instead of last.

Clyde was fifth on the list meaning Wilmer being the first to come along was much older than Clyde, who by the way was a Jr. There was Wilmer, Wilbert, William and Walter and then Clyde. Then came Waldo and Wallace, Wellington and finally Bud. Yes, she was called Bud which was better than Bum. You see, with eight older brothers, what do you expect?

Do you think for a second she looked like a girl? Just take hand-me-downs for instance. By the time everything got to Rose, it had patches on its patches. I mean the poor girl looked like a bum which is what she was called at school until the brothers decided Bud was better than Bum so Bud stuck. Let's say it stuck until her wedding day when the preacher said he would rather change it back to Rose because it sounded much better than "Bud, will you take . . . well you know.

Bud was somewhat of a tomboy. I remember one day Clyde's dad was at work and his mom had gone to town. Bud was in charge of the house. Bud cooked dinner for the gang which was at noon time for you city slickers. Breakfast is what you eat when you get up in the morning, dinner is at 12 noon and supper comes after the work is all done. Lunch is what you carry to school in a brown paper bag.

Bud told the boys they were to do the dishes. One by one they all completely ignored her by walking single file out the door laughing at her. Clyde was the last in line. Bud hollered once more about the dishes and something about telling on them when Clyde turned around and saw her standing at the door giving them a disgusting salute. Clyde instinctively picked up a flat rock and sailed it right past Rose Bud and into the kitchen. Off the porch she came. What she lacked in stature she made up in ferocity. She came waving the broom over her head knocking over the barrel of skunks they had just caught threatening the very lives of her brothers and the oldest being 15 years her senior. They all loved Bud.

Everything Bud got was patched or broken like the BB gun with no lever or a baseball glove with three fingers. Bud never had her own coon dog. Every time Sadie had pups she would get to pick one only if the female had more than eight. However, when Bud's sixth birthday came, it was decided she should have something special. All she ever talked about was a pony. On the day she turned six and at mid-afternoon she was told to go outside. Following her was her dad, mom and all eight brothers to get her birthday present. Tied to a meadow fence was the prettiest paint pony one ever laid eyes on. Bud had her pony!

Clyde's dad stood there beaming. Not only had he gotten Bud a pony but he had worked the greatest deal of his life with Arthur Cockrin who was one of the slickest dog and pony traders in seven counties. Clyde (remember my buddy Clyde was a Junior) stood there with his chest puffed out remembering all the dog deals with Cockrin that had gone sour. He had dickered Cockrin down from \$500 to only \$150 and it only took six hours. He did get a little upset when Wilmer mentioned something about seeing a pony like that sell for \$5 at the sale barn last Monday evening when he and Hilda were out on a date. "Come to think of it," he said, "I believe it was Cockrin that bought it."

Clyde, Sr. shot him a stern look and said, "Son, I know ponies when I see ponies and I made a deal to remember." That being said . . . Clyde, Sr. never had a pony in his life.

Everyone helped Bud get the pony saddled up and set her up on the critter and turned her loose. She looked like a city cowgirl sitting up there and proud as a peacock on her new steed. There was no lack of instruction from everyone yelling at once. Why, you would have thought they owned all the horses of the Ponderosa instead of only one old mule named Ethel.

Away she went all of 15 feet and right into the meadow fence. Clyde, Sr. yelled to her "Turn 'er, Bud! Turn 'er!"

Bud somehow turned the pony to the right and proceeded to walk her another couple of steps when the critter walked right

smack into her mom and knocking her flat on her backside. That's when Clyde, Sr. started waving his hands. It was not a happy sort of wave but a kind of wave in front of the pony's eyes yelling loud enough to be heard in the next county, "This critter is as blind as a bat!"

Yep, ol Cockrin the dog and pony trader had sold him a blind horse!

Clyde, Sr. ran into the house followed by eight boys. As I remember Clyde telling the story, I believe that is when their mom swished them all outside. Clyde said something about his mom saying the phone wires were going to melt so they didn't mind being pushed out the door. After all, it isn't every day you can watch phone wires melt.

Time stood still around Clyde's house for a few weeks — like the blind pony. One day his dad came home with a new bear dog. It wasn't much to look at but it was big. When his dad got it out of the truck, it looked like it had a neck about three feet long. We didn't realize at the time but it had come from pulling the critter. You see, to get him from the truck to the dog box meant you had to tie a strong rope with a slipknot around its neck and hook the rope to a double coupler dog lead and the other end to a wheel-er and pull the dog across the yard to the box.

The dog had his legs straight out in front of him pushing away from Clyde, Sr. as hard as he could kick swinging and bouncing from side to side. The dog was ripping up the grass in big clods as he struggled to get away from a beaming Clyde, Sr. I've seen shy dogs in my day but nothing like Lightning. That was his name, Clyde's dad said.

The next three weeks Lightning sat in his box and only came out to eat in the darkest of night. Little by little Clyde's dad was befriendng Lightning. At the end of the three weeks, he could get Lightning out of the box anytime he wanted him with only a slight nip with the cattle prod.

Unbeknownst to the eight boys, Clyde, Sr. was working behind the scene. He had visited every bear hunter in seven counties and developed the most awful dog trader plan to hit that neck of the woods since the beginning of bear hunting. No matter where they were, Lightning was the main topic of conversation with all the bear hunters.

One Sunday morning during the middle of the message, Preacher John was right into Moses going up Mt. Sinai when between sucking for more air "and oft in the distance there was Lightning treeing up a big oak and he had 'em rite ther. Yeah, talk to 'em, Lightning!"

Down at Hank's Grocery between trimming the fat off the steak, Hank would say "Hey, boy, go easy on that trimming. Don't take so much fat off 'cus it will hurt the flavor. By the way, Lightning sure did a good job yesterday on that big bear."

Right in the middle of town, a cop hollered at Bertha as she was crossing the street with her arms full of groceries, "Get back! What's the matter with you? Don't you see those dog trucks coming? They have to get to the Low Water Bridge as Lightning has a big bear coming."

Yep, it was all around and the whole time Lightning hadn't even been off his chain.

On Tuesday of the fourth week of this, sure enough here came Arthur Cockrin into the farm. He strolled slowly up to where Lightning was cowering as far back into his box as possible. Seeing a stranger, Cockrin said as he spit some tobacco, "Is he a bear dog?"

Now there is only one way a dog man answers a question like that and it's exactly what Clyde did. Looking shocked, he jerked his head to the side and hollered at the top of his lungs, "Is he a bear dog?" Well, it must have convinced Cockrin because they set in to dickering. Cockrin said, "I bet a dog like that would fetch a good hundred dollars."

To that, Clyde threw his head up laughing and said, "Son, the big boys wouldn't sell a good dog like that for under \$1,500."

Well, I knew then the spread between \$100 and \$1500s is going to take a heap of dickering. As the story is told, it was well into the night before they came to a meeting of minds. The deal was

drawn that Clyde and his boys would bring Lightning up on Big Ridge on Saturday morning before daylight and Cockney would then pay him a sum of \$3,000 for the dog — \$1,500 cash on the spot and the other \$1,500 after a two weeks trial. All the guys in the bear hunting gang would be there to witness the deal and handshake.

All that week Clyde told the boys, "Feed Lightning well. I want him in good shape for the hunt and be able to run fast. I don't want him to die or nuthin."

Soon Saturday came and up on Big Ridge they went with Lightning still crammed in the back of the box, his neck longer than ever. Jud was all excited because he said his Juice dog had hit hard on the way up the mountain which Clyde said couldn't have been right because Lightning didn't make a peep. Of course, he said Lightning hadn't made a peep in the four weeks they owned him.

Cockrin was there and in front of everybody with a great big grin placed 15 brand new \$100 bills in Clyde's hand with the promise of the other 15 after the two weeks trial. Shaking Clyde's hand, he reached for Lightning. Snap went the latch on the dog box and Lightning came out of there like a shot from a gun. "Look at 'em go!" hollered Cockrin. "He will have that sucker treed before your sorry dogs even hit the track."

Laughing, he climbed into his truck saying something about making a few "k's" on that dog when he puts him up for sale.

It was almost two weeks later when one evening Mr. Cockrin came driving into our yard. Getting out he said, "How ya doing, Clyde? Huntin' been good? Treeing many bears? Oh, by the way, how about giving me another week trial on old Lightning? I haven't seen him for a few days and I really would like to see him actually tree something."

Clyde grinned and said, "Cockrin, the last one to see Lightning was the UPS man and that was 75 miles away from here on Route 40 going south."

Mr. Cockrin said, "Clyde, was there something wrong with that dog?"

Clyde said, "I'll tell you one thing about him. He ain't blind!"