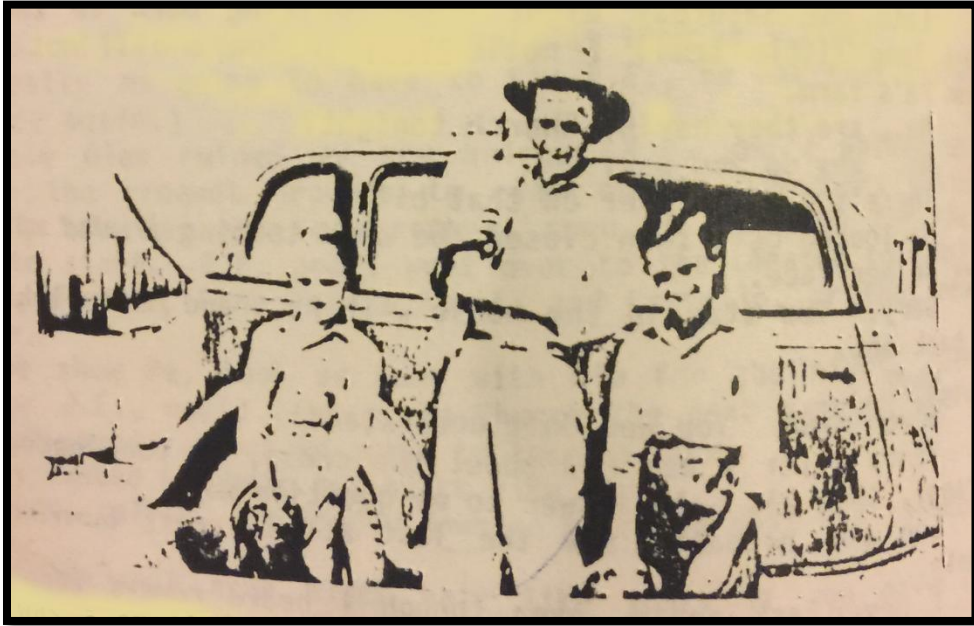


DUST

## TOOTS



Toots was a small female black-n-tan Coonhound, the only female hound I ever remember of Dad allowing to stay on the farm, the reason being was that Toots was the best female hound that ever chased the old chicken thieves. Most of her pups were true-to-the-blood because she could take her pups into the canyons to train them before most young pups had the opportunity to know where the canyons were.

Three things about Toots made her special. First was where she came from, second she was an exceptional hound (true-to-the-blood), and third was where she went.

Because of Toots' reputation among black-n-tan Coonhound men from states as far away as Illinois, Arkansas, and California, and the fact that Dad wouldn't sell or ship a hound that didn't prove themselves on the hunting trail, her pups were in demand as soon as she had them (green trained to the trail).

It must have been the fall after our family moved to the farm between Thomas and Custer that Toots came home with Dad in the front of his old pickup truck about a year after the Second World War started for the United States at Pearl Harbor, that infamous day in December, 1941.

"Just another trading dog." Mother said, when she first saw Toots, but Toots who was unusually small for a Coonhound, stayed for eight years and proved Mother wrong for one of the few times she misjudged "Dad's exceptionally good buy."

Dad was delivering gasoline to a farm North of Fay, Oklahoma for a custom wheat cutter he had known from childhood, the wheat cutter also lived and farmed some sandy land near the small community of Longdale, Oklahoma. He was also known for his passion to chase the old ringtail

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bandits that so often slipped into a farmer's chicken houses to steal a midnight meal. Once they started doing that they wouldn't stop until someone chased them down or they had stolen every chicken on the farm leaving the farmer's family without breakfast eggs or Sunday's fried chicken.

The farmer, who I believe to have been Mr. Anderson, knew of Dad's passion for a coon hunt, invited Dad to come up to his farm for a coon hunt later in the fall. So come the first cold nights of autumn, Dad and Lee Welchel loaded their hounds, Bob and Buck, into the back of the pickup truck and started off to the farm near Longdale, Oklahoma for a night's hunting with Mr. Anderson and his hounds.

Pulling into the Anderson farm the pickup was met by a group of Coonhounds anxious to defend their territory from this pickup loaded with strange hounds that had just pulled into their home. After a few minutes of mixing the strange hounds to calm all them down so they would know that a hunt was about to begin and the new hounds that had just arrived was going to be working with them in the chase for "that old ringtail bandit," everything was set for the hunt and all of the hounds that was going on the hunt were loaded.

Frank, are two hounds all that you and Lee are going to hunt?

Well Anderson, if you have any coon up here that can whip those two hounds under the tree, they sure don't need any trading dogs under their feet during the fight!

"All right Frank, let's go see if those hounds of yours will back up what you say or if I will have to put my hounds in to finish the job." Everyone laughed at the friendly challenge and loaded up for the hunt.

After a good night of hunting, ending with a couple of successful trees, the hunters with their tired, but satisfied hounds, returned to the Anderson farm house where the gracious Mrs. Anderson awakened to prepare hot coffee for her husband and his hunting guests.

"Well Lee, you men have a couple of real good hounds out there in the truck." Mr. Anderson said. "I'll have to agree with Frank that we don't have any coon up in these parts that can stay under the tree with those two black-n-tans and I want to thank you men for not bringing a gyp along to confuse the hunt." (A bitch dog was always referred to as a GYP when women were around.)

Mr. Anderson we don't own a gyp and I don't suppose we ever will since I've never seen one that wouldn't cause trouble when there's a brace of Dog Hounds around.

Mrs. Anderson, I think Lee and I had better go on home before we are both divorced by our Coonhound widows. We sure do appreciate the hot cup of coffee, that hit the spot after a cool night of hunting.

Back in the truck and driving down the road through the night with two bone tired hounds in the back, Dad and Lee talked over the night's hunt and how it was a good short run for the hounds

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first night out for the winter. When they had driven almost to Canton, Oklahoma, Dad noticed an Indian boy in military uniform walking down the side of the road toward Canton.

Lee, I think we should give that service boy a ride, don't you?

Yes, I sure do. I would hate to be out here walking on this cold road at two o'clock in the morning!

While Dad was stopping the truck, Lee rolled down the window and the hounds stood up in the back of the truck to see if they were going to be jumped out for another run.

Soldier, do you need a lift?

Yes, I would appreciate a ride if you are going down the road South of Canton!

That's exactly the road we are taking back to Thomas. Hop in and you'll be where you're going real soon.

Once in the truck the Cheyenne Indian soldier introduced himself, adding that he was glad someone stopped to give him a lift since he was so cold.

I noticed you have some Coonhounds in the back. Do you men hunt a lot?

"About as often as we can." Dad replied.

I have the best Coonhound around Canton, would you be interested in buying another dog?

A dog? No, but a good Coonhound! Maybe.

She's as good a Coonhound as there is, and I would like to sell her to someone who will take care of her and hunt her.

What do you think Lee, do we need a bitch?

Don't say WE, Hooper! WE don't need a bitch. Sally is ready to Kill me now over this Buck hound as it is, and if I was to show up at home with a multiplier bitch, "Hell's bells" would be ringing in my ears before the sun came up!

Dad laughed and said to the soldier, "I guess we don't need a bitch hound young man."

But don't you need one Mister? She's a real good hunter! And you go hunting a lot! The hunting season is just now beginning! With this war on, the price of hides are going to be real good.

All right, you've convinced me to at least look at your hound.

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About a mile South of Canton the soldier told Dad to turn East to where he lived. Pulling into the driveway of a farm house, Dad stopped the truck as a small black-n-tan Coonhound came running out from an old car body to challenge the strangers who had drove into her yard with strange hounds in the back of their truck.

Mr., there's my Toots hound.

Dad and Lee stepped out of the truck to look at the small thin hound standing in the truck lights while the soldier calmed her down.

Toots, calm down, it's just me and some friends.

At the sound of her master's voice she cowered down at his feet.

Dad looked at Toots in the truck lights while the Indian boy held her by the collar for him.

She sure shows good blood with those ears and bone structure, and I can tell that she has been in a few fights with coon by the scars on her ears and nose, but I don't really think I need a bitch hound young man.

Mr., I promise you she can run with both of your hounds and stay with them. I'll take ten dollars for her.

Dad looked at her again.

If she's that good, why would you take ten dollars for her?

"Well Sir, she's all I own in the world and the Army is shipping me to the Pacific Islands in less than thirty days." Then he looked Dad straight in the eye saying, "I won't be coming back! And these are hard times around here. If I leave her here alone, the Indians around this town will eat her! I might as well have ten dollars so I can have one last party with my friends."

Dad walked back to the truck window.

Lee loan me five dollars.

Frank, are you really going to buy that bone skinny bitch without trying her out?

Lee, that boy has enough to worry about without worrying that someone will eat the only thing in this world that he feels is worth owning. He's not just asking me to buy a hound. He's asking me to save the one thing he owns and loves.

Lee reached into the bib of his overalls and pulled out his wallet handing Dad a five dollar bill saying, "Frank, if Sally ever finds out that I loaned you five dollars so you could buy that skinny bitch hound that caused Marvell to kill you, Sally will never let me live that down!"

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Dad laughed, walking back to pay the soldier for Toots, then putting her into the front of the truck with Lee, saying, "We better keep her up here or those dog hounds will either chew her up or fight each other over her all the way home!"

Thank you Mister, thank you for buying my hound. I don't mind leaving for the South Pacific so much now that I know she's safe and will be cared for by a good hound man.

Young man, you take care of yourself out there in the Pacific.

I will, you take care of my Toots.

Driving down the road, Dad said to Lee, "Reach under the seat. I think there's an ID collar down there to put on her.

Frank, this Toots is so skinny that even with the collar hooked in the last hole it slipped off over her head, and I'm going to have to take a cold shower at the well house before I can go into the house, because she's eat up with flees!

OK, I'll fix her a collar in the morning.

You're not going to live until morning when Marvell sees this skinny ten dollar dog!

I'll hide her in the granary bin until then.

You better hide her at your Dad's place, at least your Mother might not shoot you for this.

No, I can't do that. Mom would get real upset if I left a Coonhound there, even with Dad's heart condition if there's a Coonhound on that farm that will run, he would have to chase it, so you'll need to think of another solution to my problem.

I have!

What?

You are going to die! Before sun up.

The next morning Mother was in the kitchen fixing breakfast when I came into the room.

Frank, why is Bob barking at the granary? Did you hang some coon hides in there?

No!

Well I think I hear another dog.

Well, uh, oh. Yes, there's a trading dog in the granary.

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Mother walked out the door, heading down to the granary to see this thing that was bound to cause silence around the farm for a few days. Opening the door, she looked in.

Frank! I thought you liked your dogs!

I do.

Don't tell me that! You was up there feeding your face while this poor thing was down here starving to death! Now you get up there and take that weevil infested cornmeal and some of those cracklings and bake some corn bread to feed this hound, and put some sulfur in that feed. This dog is covered with fleas. I won't have anything looking starved around this place, if we can't afford to feed it, then we'll sell it!

Dad went back to the house to bake up some (running grub) for Toots.

(I'm sure he was thinking how lucky he was that Toots was starving and Mother's mercy was stronger than her anger, while Mother, R.E., and I petted the new hound.)

After about two weeks of weevil corn bread, with crackling running grub, Toots was ready for Dad and Lee to take to the canyons for a tryout run, returning home early the next morning in time for milking the cows.

Well Frank, how did Toots do with Bob and Buck?

The Indian boy was right. She can stay with anybody's dog hounds and with the bloodline I can see in her, Lee and I think we'll put her with Bob to see if we can't raise some good, true-to-the-blood pups.

What would you need more hounds for?

With this fur market getting better all the time, good green broke trail hounds will bring a real fair price.

Bob and Toots did parent a line of black-n-tans that were in demand from coon hunters in many states from Texas to Alabama, and North to Chicago, Illinois. From her litters Toots had very few whelps that didn't hold true-to-the-blood. One of her pups was featured on the cover of Mountain Music Magazine, a very prestigious national Coonhound magazine.

*[Mountain Music, The Coon Hunters Magazine. "When the Hounds Come Over the Mountain, Sweet Music Floats Through the Air". This magazine was based in Monroe, Louisiana.]*

In 1949 Dad received a long distance telephone call from a coonhound man in Arkansas asking Dad if he had any of Toot's pups that he would sell.

No, I don't. Sorry but Toots is just getting too old for raising pups and she has been such a good hound for me that I won't put her life on the line for another litter of pups.

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Mr. Hooper, I'm not just an avid coon hunter, I'm also a Veterinarian and I know Toots isn't a registered hound, but I'm not interested in papers. I'm interested in whether or not a hound can go to the woods and do the job. Would you allow me to see Toots if I was to drive out to Western Oklahoma?

Yes, you may see her if you want to drive that far to see an old, worn out Coonhound.

One week later, a new pickup drove into the drive of the farm with Arkansas tags and out stepped a man with a friend who had rode all the way from Arkansas with him.

Mr. Hooper?

Yes.

I called you about your gyp hound, Toots.

Yes. Well there she is.

The Veterinarian from Arkansas checked Toots over real close for a long time, then said, "Mr. Hooper this hound is old, but she is in real good shape. If you're not going to litter her again I would like to buy her.

Well Sir. I know you don't understand about me and this gyp. You see I used to work in a service station and when I ruptured some disk in my back and couldn't work there anymore, the only way I could make a living for my family was to farm tomatoes in the spring, summer, and fall, because I could stand up to hoe down a tomato row and I could bend my legs enough to pick a bushel of tomatoes up to carry them. But in the winter, the only income we had was my wife's milk cows and chickens, but most important was this gyp and her pups. They chased down enough coon hides for the Saint Louis Fur Market that we were able to hold things together until three years later when I was able to go back to work full time. So you see, I owe this old hound a good long rest.

Well Sir, the mark of a faithful hound is a faithful master, and if there's a man alive that appreciates that story, I'm that man. If you will sell her to me I will see to it that this hound has the right ration of feed, plenty exercise, and bar any unforeseen accident, she should live another ten years in good health and still whelp at least six more litters in good health. Without that kind of care, she might live two.

Dad looked at the faithful old hound, with tears in his eyes, then said, "My son there, Gary, lost his hound in the tornado that hit us this last spring. The price of this Toots to you, and you only, is two hundred and fifty dollars and the best dog pup from her next litter for this boy. You pick the pup and you pay the freight to Thomas, Oklahoma."

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The Veterinarian reached into his pocket, pulling out two hundred and fifty dollars. Stuck out his hand to shake, saying, "This is my address. Any time you are down in our neck of the woods, stop in and visit with Toots and me."

Dad never did have the opportunity to go to Arkansas so he could see Toots again, however he did talk to a couple of friends of ours (Clifford and Bea Murray) who was going down to Arkansas about four years later into stopping to see how Toots was doing. They came back with a good report, that she was doing well and had a fine young litter of pups under her ready to be trained in the coming fall.

I did receive my pick of the litter pup. On a Wednesday afternoon the next spring a railroad freight truck came from town and pulled into the drive. When we went out to see why it was there I saw inside a wooden crate, one small, true-to-the-blood, black-n-tan pup.

When the truck driver stepped out on the ground with the papers, he said, "Gary, someone shipped you a pup all the way from Arkansas."

Dad knowing the truck driver to be a hound man himself told him the story of Toots and the small pup who I called Pepper.

On Saturday evening when we were ready to go to town and sell the produce for the week, Dad said, "Gary, you better put your pup in the barn, he's strange to this place and he might wander out into the pasture where he could be caught by the coyotes."

The next morning I found that someone had broken off the barn door latch. Pepper was gone. With him went the last of Dad's true-to-the-blood black-n-tans from the dusty western plains of Oklahoma.

Somewhere in the creeks and rivers of Arkansas, Louisiana, East Texas, Alabama, and a thousand distant places, there are furry chicken thieves running hard for the safety of a den tree, unaware that they have stolen their last chicken from the farmer's hen house, because not far behind them, and closing fast on his track, there is a black-n-tan who won't trash and won't be tricked by the bandit's circle in the woods, or his running through the water, marking a tree, and then crossing on an overhanging limb. That hound chasing the chicken bandit has in him the genetic line of Toots that forces the hound to run TRUE-TO-THE-BLOOD.

In 1950 Dad and Lee Welchel took our families on a fishing trip to Canton Lake for a week. On a trip to town for ice they decided to drive out South of Canton to the Indian house where they had first seen Toots and bought the little hound that had the sad, droopy eyes, with long scared ears, and a desire in her heart to train her own pups to be first on to the track, first in the chase to stand on the tree, first into the fight, and the last to go home. When Dad and Lee drove into the yard at the Indian's house an old gray headed Indian man came out to see what these strangers wanted. When Dad and Lee ask about the soldier boy who had trained and loved his little Toots, which Dad had bought, they were told that The Cheyenne Soldier Boy never came home from the war.

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Dad was never able to forget the Indian boy's word, "They are sending me to war, and I won't be coming back. Please take care of my Little Toots."

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