

Kid's Learning Center Story: A Pack Of Three

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

A Pack of Three

story of the month

By *Richard W. Jennings, the author of Orwell's Luck
"The Master of Middle American Whimsy"*



Life with a single mom has a definite upside.

Without a husband to care for, Aubrey's mother could devote all her time to her only child, the second smallest kid in the sixth grade at the Sunflower Middle School.

But Aubrey's mother had recently married the wise and kindly Reverend Gordon, founder of Reverend Gordon's Ranch for Troubled Dachshunds in Fosterville, Kansas. They now lived together as a family in Aubrey's mother's house in upper Wisconsin while Reverend Gordon's close friend, the retired Fosterville veterinarian, Dr. Race Faster, took care of things in the famed Flint Hills of Kansas.

No matter what size the group, whether two or two hundred thousand, when you add just one person, things change. Of course, as is written in the last paragraph on the last page of Aubrey's favorite book, *Orwell's Luck*, everything keeps changing all the time. But this isn't something that you think about until it happens to you.

To Aubrey, when the giddy couple returned from a honeymoon in Tuscany, Italy, the change seemed sudden and disconcerting.

Please don't misunderstand. Aubrey was very fond of Reverend Gordon. They shared hugs, books, long conversations and a deep love for animals of all kinds. But Aubrey was no longer the center of attention.

Aubrey could not remember having a dad. Now that she had one, literally a perfect stranger, she often found herself not quite alone in her room with Porchie, her fluffy orange cat, a former neighborhood stray; Cupid, her mother's Ocicat, a leopard-spotted purebred cat from Kansas, a gift from Reverend Gordon; and Sandy, her baby Octopus bimaculoides.

To amuse herself while Reverend Gordon and Anne, Aubrey's mother, spent private time together, Aubrey would sit at her computer and practice making up jokes. The one today

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was beginning to take on the characteristics of a lengthy list. A list of unexpected songs to be sung at a funeral instead of the usual "Amazing Grace."

Whose funeral?

Perhaps only Dr. Sigmund Freud, the famous psychoanalyst, could figure it out. Or maybe you can. Nevertheless, here is a sampling:

"Hit the Road, Jack."

"I'll Be Seeing You."

"On the Road Again."

"It Haint Necessarily So."

"Ghost Tell it on the Mountain."

"At Last."

"Gone with the Wind."

"The Wayward Wind."

These last two, Aubrey thought work especially well if a scattering of ashes is planned.

When Aubrey tired of this exercise, she looked up pet bird supplies on drsfostersmith.com.

Ever since Aubrey had hidden the new girl Christine's parakeet Budgie at her uncle's house for a week to teach Christine a lesson for deliberately letting it go - at Anne's wedding, of all places - Aubrey had wanted a bird of her own. Nothing as big as a parrot, of course, but something fun, such as a yellow, singing canary or maybe a pair of finches that bob their little heads up and down as they peep. Even a tiny spotted owl would be a hoot.

With cats around, however, it was a difficult decision to make. So Aubrey learned everything she could about pet bird care and safety.

"Aubrey? Can you come here for a moment?"

It was Reverend Gordon calling from the living room.

Not yet ready to call him "Dad," Aubrey replied, "Just a sec, Gordy. I'm on the net."

"Take your time, honey," Reverend Gordon said.

I sure will, Aubrey thought to herself.

Ten minutes later Aubrey sauntered into the living room. Reverend Gordon was sitting on the sofa holding a



potato-shaped, potato-colored, fur-covered animal in his lap, rubbing its tummy. His actions were not surprising. Reverend Gordon was always bringing home stray or discarded animals and finding them new and loving homes. This, after all, was his calling.

It may be that this behavior was what Aubrey liked about her new father best of all. He was more than just a nice guy. He was the modern day equivalent of Saint Francis of Assisi.

The man who loved animals.

"What on earth is it?" Aubrey asked.

"Part corgi, part dachshund, part bird dog and part watermelon," Reverend Gordon answered somewhat jokingly. "He's dangerously overfed, but he's the sweetest dog I've ever met. He's truly a fat bundle of love."

"Where'd you find him?" Aubrey asked.

"One of the Sisters of Charity has been taking care of him," Reverend Gordon explained. "But he's really quite a handful and she's over ninety-seven years old. She says she'd be better off with a hamster. Want to hold him?"

The little dog wagged his tail.

"The heaviest thing I've ever held is a bowling ball," Aubrey said. "Do you think I'm strong enough?"

Reverend Gordon laughed.

Once snuggled within Aubrey's arms, the little dog licked her face.

"What's his name?" she asked her new father.

Time out for a lesson everyone must learn. It goes like this: Once you learn a creature's name, or decide to name it, it's more than halfway to becoming your pet. After that, it's simply a matter of time.

"Chubby Biscuit," Reverend Gordon replied. "No kidding."

This goofy information closed the deal.

Chubby Biscuit was now Aubrey's dog, joining Porchie, Sandy and often Cupid as one of her personal responsibilities. This is a lot for a sixth grader to take on, but not too much. People say that God never gives us more than we can handle and Reverend Gordon not only knew a lot about animals, he knew quite a bit about God.

He was going to be a fine father for Aubrey, as Aubrey would find out.



It would just be a matter of time.

"Thank you, Gordy," Aubrey said.

Unlike cats, that even though they may want to, dogs require at least two walks a day. This was fine with Aubrey. She enjoyed walking through the misnamed neighborhood. For one reason, people who walk dogs run into other people who walk dogs. This is an easy way to make new friends.

At first, Aubrey encountered Mr. and Mrs. Smith from Mag-moley Street who were walking no fewer than four pets: An English Springer spaniel named Parker; and three English pointers named Marshall, Shelby and Queeny. None had ever seen a dog like Chubby Biscuit before. In fact, the pointers were pretty sure Chubby Biscuit was a groundhog, but because he is so sweet, all five dogs soon were playing happily in the grass.

Aubrey's next dog-walking encounter was less satisfying. Bean, her back yard neighbor, was out in the November sunshine walking his three singing dachshunds. At his side was none other than the new girl, Christine.

"Hello, Bean," she said politely.

Somewhat less politely, Aubrey said, "Christine, dear. How's Budgie?"

"He just sits on his perch and stares out the window," Christine answered, adding, "Is that a pot-bellied pig?"

"No, dear," Aubrey replied. "It's a sweet little puppy named Chubby Biscuit."

"That's a stupid name," Christine observed, as if naming a budgie Budgie was smart.

"Any new dog songs, Bean?" Aubrey asked, a longtime fan of the musical abilities of Owen, Sophie and Jozie.

"Just one," he answered, blowing a silent dog whistle. Bean then raised his right arm high above his head. Immediately, the dogs began: I love Aubrey in the springtime. I love Aubrey in the fall. I love Aubrey in the summer when it sizzles I love Aubrey in the winter when it drizzles I love Aubrey every moment Every moment of the year I love Aubrey, Why, oh why, do I love Aubrey? Because she lives so near.

"Aw, Bean," Aubrey said, blushing. "That's so nice."

"I think it's a stupid song," Christine interjected.

That's when Chubby Biscuit lifted his short left back leg and peed on Christine's pink leather sandals.

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