



# Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Man's attachment to animals is one of the great mysteries and great joys of life. I grew up on a diet of Albert Peyson Terhune. Perhaps you were one of those unfortunate children who never read "Lad of Sunnysbank," "All Dogs Go To Heaven" and other stories that sprang from the Terhune collie farm. "Black Beauty" occupied a favorite place on my book shelf and as I grew older it was natural to shift to Jack London who shared his great love for the dogs that protected his life in the frozen wastes of the north. And, of course, there were the Saturday afternoon heroes, who preferred kissing their horses but not their girls. Or don't you remember Roy Rogers and Trigger, Gene Autrey and Champion and Frog Milhouse with Ringeye.

In real life we were surrounded by animals. Dogs: Cinders and Ebony whose deaths were almost as painful as those of a loved one. And ponies: Kumquat, Ginger and Napoleon. How big a role they played in my early childhood.

When Jackie and I married and moved to Texas we got a dog — even before our first baby was born. After all, what's a home without a pet? We had to leave Fluffy in Texas, but as soon as we settled in South Carolina, we adopted a big red and white collie. That was more than a dozen years ago and Randy is still with us. It now takes him a long time to get up and he no longer turns around three times before lying down. He just flops. Instead of running to his dinner dish, he now prefers to eat lying down, but he's almost as much a part of our family as one of the children.

Three years ago, while Jackie was out of town on a visit, an emaciated gray kitty dragged herself into our yard. By the time Jackie returned, Mrs. Robinson had become a part of our household. Like Randy, Jackie

only tolerated her to begin with. Both had been brought up to be cat haters. But across the years I have seen them both develop a fond affection for our gray alleycat.

Then last week Mrs. Robinson disappeared — and our house went into a state of total demoralization. The children sent out search parties through the neighborhood but it was no use. She was gone. And yesterday, when Bonnie came home from school in the middle of the day saying she was sick, I knew it was getting to her.

"She doesn't know how to get food herself. Who'll feed her, Daddy? What if some mean people have carried her off? What if she's been hit by a car and is lying in a ditch someplace?" They were questions for which I had no answers. So last night I sat on the edge of the double bed where Bonnie and Sandy sleep and said, "Why don't we pray for Mrs. Robinson?"

"I already have," Bonnie said softly, "and nothing happened."

"Well, let's do it again, and this time I'll join you." I felt good about it when we were finished, but as I kissed the girls good night, I could taste the salt of tears on their faces. They were still apprehensive and Sandy's faltering question to me from out of the dark almost caused my eyes to flood, too. "Daddy, do you think God would let Mrs. Robinson into Heaven?"

This afternoon, on the way back from the car inspection station, Jackie decided to stop by the animal shelter. There she was, huddled in the back of a cage full of cats, a victim of the cat-catcher.

At supper tonight Bonnie's blessing contained a profound P.S. "Thank you God, for answering our prayers." It was a pretty special moment for all of us.