

## Chicken herder or Don't be a loser

by J.D. Rogers

Another era has passed here at the old homestead. Our border collie Utah recently went to that enormous chicken-herding pasture in the big beyond.

More than a decade ago our late and dear friend Ruth Austin found Utah wandering down the middle of Highway 238 just past The Academy winery in Applegate. He was covered in mud, which camouflaged all of what I call “Velcro weed,” also known as beggar’s-lice. He had no tags or identification markings like tattoos.

Ruth had no trouble coaxing him off the highway and into her car with an offer of dog cookies. She checked with different residents in the area to see if he might belong to one of them, or if they knew to whom he might belong. No one recognized him. Ruth then drove over to Applegate Store to see if anyone there might recognize him. One of the staff told Ruth, “Yes, I have seen him before. An old, ratty brown pickup truck pulled into the parking lot a few days ago, dumped him out and drove off.”

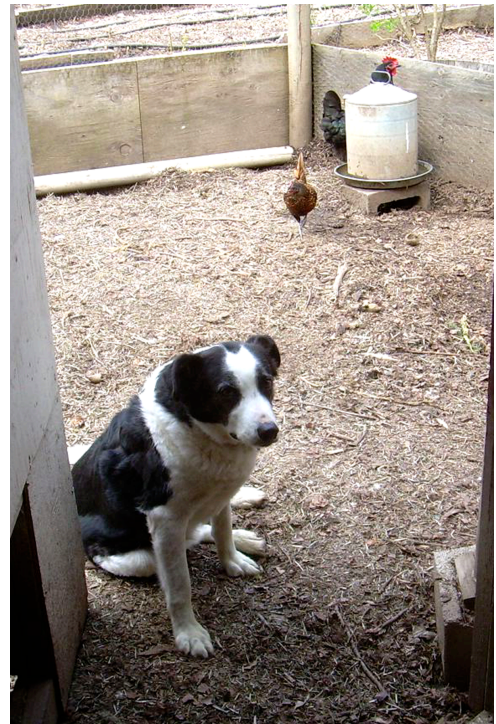
What to do? What else! Ruth brought him up to our place, figuring my bride Sioux and I could use another dog. “I don't think so,” I told her. “We are finally down to just one dog.” “Oh, but he is so well-behaved. Even though he is quite dirty, you can still see how handsome he is,” she explained as she led him out of the car. “I think he is a border collie,” she said.

He walked right up to me, sat down and offered his paw to shake hands. He must have sensed that I would be a sucker for a well-mannered dog. That is how we acquired a new addition to our family. Of course, he never shook hands with me again.

What to name him? That day the Oregon sky was colored with intense, eye-squinting Utah blue. There is nothing like a Utah-blue sky, so I named him Utah or “Ute” for short. The veterinarian we took him to guessed that Utah was “a five- or six-year-old McNab border collie cross. Other than a couple of chipped teeth, he is in excellent health.”

Utah fit right in with the Rogers' pack. Our late little Miss Tuesday, who also had been an abandoned border collie, immediately adored the handsome, muscular Utah.

One thing Utah loved most in life, with the exception of any type of people food, was to go out to the orchard and herd our flock of 26 chickens and six ducks. He would use any excuse to herd “his” flock, even if it meant breaking through the fence anywhere there was a weak spot. “Chicken herder” was Utah's chosen profession and he took his job very seriously. If anyone



*Utah guarding the chicken coop.*

came to the house, he was off and through the fence, herding his flock to safety. It didn't take me too long while mending fences to figure out that if I would just install a doggy door in the fence, so Utah could easily get in and out, the chickens could not get out and I would not be spending so much time repairing our fences. Once the doggy door was installed, I showed Utah how the door flap worked. In one lesson he mastered the workings of the doggy door. Other than the initial fence repairs, Utah never caused us any sort of problems—definitely no juvenile delinquency tendencies.

Utah was so into herding chickens that when he tired of his own flock he would squeeze through the fence in the back of our orchard and head over to our neighbors, the Fischers. It didn't take the Fischers too long to figure out the mystery of where all of their chickens had gone. Utah had herded them into the Fischer's chicken coop and was standing on guard at the coop door. The Fischers would call us and let us know that Utah was once again on the job over at their house. So I would walk next door, bring Utah home and ask him, “So buddy, do we need to get you some more chickens?” Upper management (my bride Sioux) suggested maybe we could get some buffalo or something more challenging than chickens. I am glad that did not happen or I might have had to do more serious fence repair.

A few years before Utah's self-imposed retirement from chicken herding, we had a Bantam rooster we called “Nasty Bird” and the name, believe me, said it all. At some point Nasty Bird had ticked off Utah, which happened when the wrong person or dog was attacked by the bird. Utah would cut Nasty Bird out of the flock and herd him around and around and around the orchard. “Don't come to me whining for help,” I admonished as the rooster ran to me. “I, too, have been the victim of your sneak attacks one too many times.”

Most animals that get dumped or lost meet with an unpleasant ending. They starve to death, get hit on the highways, eaten by predators or, in Utah's case, he might have been shot while herding someone's chickens. They would never have known that the strange dog meant no harm, but was simply a professional chicken herder. Utah was quite fortunate to have ended up in a home where he was very much loved. Actually, we were the fortunate ones because he gave as much as he received. Utah lived nearly 17 years. Then, along with our tears for Utah, another dog that had been dumped came into our life. We call her Lily Rose and she is another sweet border collie.

If you can't or don't wish to care for your pets anymore, for “dog's” sake, don't dump them. There are other options. Take your pet to an animal shelter, or a rescue organization that specializes in a certain breed. If you are not stone-cold broke, give these caring organizations a couple of bucks—they can *always* use your donation.

Don't let yourself fall into the same category with people who put the capital “L” in “Loser.” Don't dump your animals!

J.D. Rogers  
541-846-7736