

What Happened to Joe Btspflk

By Gladys Whitlock

Many years ago, (more than I care to remember) nearly all the daily papers carried a fantastically popular cartoon strip by Al Capp called "Lil' Abner." This backwoods boy was eternally pursued by a voluptuous blonde named Daisy Mae. Among the many other characters appearing from time to time in the comic strip was a gloomy little man with a dark cloud hovering over his head. His first name was Joe but his last name was unpronounceable. It looked as if the cartoonist had hit the keyboard with his fist and produced a written sneeze. Joe brought such disaster wherever he went that many of the other character left town when he appeared.

Lil' Abner retired from the paper long ago. He and Daisy Mae went to the city to star in a musical on the New York stage. I always wondered what happened to Joe Btspflk. I think I found out recently.

It was to be the most exciting month in our rather quiet lives since my husband's retirement, and had required careful financial planning. First, there was a three day family reunion in Kingman, Arizona. Then we were to continue to Montrose, California where we

planned to help my sister redecorate her house. We also planned to sell three of our registered Schnauzer puppies to help defray the expenses of the trip. The Grand Finale was to be the participation in the long planned wedding of our Granddaughter.

The first glitch in our plans appeared when the young lady who had agreed to care for our five adult dogs, phoned the night before our departure to cancel the agreement. Kenneling them for a month was financially out of the questions, so when my cousin in Kingman volunteered the use of a her fenced yard, in went the travel crates, filling the back of the car.

Schnauzers are good travelers. We had often taken one or two with us on trips, but eight dogs in a closed car on a hot day, even with the air conditioner going . . . well it just isn't advisable!

Evidently, it was too much for the car, too. Twenty miles from Kingman, it blew it's top and came to a stop in a cloud of steam. Of course, when the air conditioner stopped, the inside of the car soon felt like a good place to bake bread.

I took the dogs out and leashed them in the shade of a roadside cedar tree. There I sat watching the half of my husband I could see protruding from under the hood of the car. It looked like he was about to be swallowed whole by a monster. Traffic roared past, the draft of the big trucks rocking our car and threatening to shake the hood closed on his upper half.

Eventually, a good Samaritan stopped and took my husband up the road to a service station where they could get a replacement for the hose which had ruptured. His wife kindly stayed with me and the dogs until they returned. With the hose repaired and the radiator refilled the car limped balkily into Kingman. We deposited our animals in my cousin's yard and took the car to a garage. The verdict was a cracked head . . . the patient required surgery and we were afoot.

Fortunately, with thirty-five or forty relatives in town, transportation was no immediate problem. With our pets safely stowed within a grassy fenced yard, we prepared to enjoy the reunion. We had a fantastic time until my cousin approached us the following afternoon looking a little upset. Somehow, our gentle well-behaved animals had gotten into her neighbor's yard and killed two precious laying hens which had regularly provided two eggs every morning for breakfast.

My sister drove us to the scene of the crime. We assumed they had dug under the fence, but the lady insisted they had climbed over. Incredulously, we listened as she described how two of them had wedged their backs against one side of the corner and clawed their way up the other side of the corner and over a four foot chain-link fence. I admit we never saw such a thing, but that's what she said happened. With abject apologies, we paid for new hens and assured my cousin the dogs were not really vicious. They thought the chickens were a new kind of plaything. The climbing dogs were then banished to another cousin's orchard, each leashed to its own tree.

The following morning, the orchard owning cousin offered us his pickup, equipped with a camper shell, to use until our car was repaired. By that time we were eager to get out of town before anything else happened, so we loaded the dogs into the camper and left. The trip to Montrose was uneventful and we turned our menagerie into my sister's back yard with a sigh of relief.

During the next month, however, we learned they really could climb. They climbed a wire fence, and a rock well covered with a matted vine. Fortunately, we always found them before they met with the dog-catcher or a speeding car.

As we entered the last week of our stay, things seemed to be working out better. There had been no recent breakouts, the decorating was in its last stages, and we had sold two puppies

for enough to ransom our car. Then we received a phone call from relatives at home. Our house had been robbed. We no longer owned a TV or VCR.

Of course, the news shook us up pretty thoroughly and our first impulse was to rush home immediately to assess the total damage. However, considering that the crisis was past, the police notified, and the insurance would take care of the loss, we calmed down. Also, it was less than a week until our granddaughter's wedding which we had anticipated for over a year. We decided to stay.

It was a lovely wedding with a handsome groom and a picture-pretty bride. Naturally, I cried.

We spent the next day packing and left in the evening, driving all night to get home at dawn. After resting a day we drove to Kingman, without dogs, to retrieve our car and return the borrowed one. It was a quick trip and our car purred home in grand style.

A happy ending? I suppose so, at least we made it home.

Right now, our car is sitting in the driveway with a broken ignition switch, the water bed sprang a leak last night and the clothesline broke this morning, letting all the wet clothes down on the ground.

You see, that's how I found out what happened to Joe Btspflk. I haven't seen him yet, but I know he's here somewhere on our property. I surely hope he decides to move on, because if he doesn't, it looks as if we'll have to leave town.