

Shiner

My dog Shiner and I spend tons of hours on the banks of the Wisconsin when I was growing up in Sauk-Prairie, Wisconsin. My time in Kindergarten in Prairie du Sac grade school was a total of three days...the rest of the time, one would find us (Shiner and me), day dreaming on the banks of the river. Those days, in the 1930's were quite different than today...so when I wasn't in school, my folks didn't worry since they knew where to find me.

Shiner got his name from the black spot that covered his left eye. My family loved Dalmatians and this guy was particularly gentle and very polite, a wag of his tail at the right time tells of his understanding of what is going on.

The river was dark from the paper mills dye up north and had a pungent smell which I can remember even today, even after the paper plants stopped putting the bark in the river many years ago. It was a swift river...I found that out when I first launched my homebuilt boat that had an unforgettable initial voyage, but that is another story.

In grade school 6th grade I was going to the Sauk City grade school and walked the mile, on railroad tracks, to Water Street where Shiner would always meet me, at the point where the railroad tracks crossed Water Street. My folks grocery store was just a half block away and our house a little farther down the street toward Prairie du Sac.

It was on an early winter afternoon that I noticed Shiner was coming down the side walk to meet me but almost crawling. There was a trail of blood in the snow behind him. He looked up at me as he always does, and wagged his tail as he always does, then collapsed on the sidewalk. He stopped breathing and I knew he was gone.

I picked him up...his body was still warm...I held him close to me. I didn't give a thought to the blood on my clothes since my mother would always be so understanding.

The neighbor, Frank Eberhardt, had shot Shiner since Shiner was digging in his garden.

My dad reported this to the Sheriff but I don't think anything ever came of it. I was too hurt to be bitter and too young to really understand why someone would do this.

I visit the Wisconsin often, even today when I can, and when I need to. The spot where Shiner and I would sit and watch the river flow by, for hours, is where my destination for each visit is. The house where I grew up in, with Shiner, is gone. The old Catalpa tree is still there. My folks market is gone. Down at the river, the little pain of losing a best friend, deep inside, is still there.

I had a dog...his name was Shiner.