**A Dog Named Diesel**

By Nilah Turner

Diesel entered our lives as a yellow and white freckle-nosed cur puppy. Part collie, probably some chow, his remaining heritage a mix of well-mannered baron, likeable scamp, scoundrel, a hero and outlaw.

To everyone who knew him, he was Diesel -- an unusual name for an unconventional dog, named Diesel because a noisy diesel truck speed down the highway two blocks away.

From the beginning he watched over the boys. He was best at playing tag and hide ‘n’ seek, but he’d double as their horse, serve as a pillow at nap time or dig a tunnel to Dallas when they punched a hole in the ground.

When Diesel was about two years old he became a kleptomaniac. At first he stole every bowl, can and pan used to feed neighboring pets. After struggling home dragging a turkey roasting pan home in the wind he went into stealing laundry off cloths lines. He brought us so many orphaned towels, I worried I might get pegged a thief.

Soon he brought home the new Whitharral Baptist Church pastor’s underwear, probably mistaking the preacher’s size 50 shorts for a towel. For this offense, I shut him behind closed gates, and the two older boys sentenced Diesel to hard labor digging tunnels everywhere they punched a stick in my flower beds.

When we moved to the farm, like me, Diesel was driven to frustration keeping up with the boys as they rode their tricycles (and later bicycles and cars) in opposite directions.

He suffered from separation anxiety. When we took a vacation our nearest neighbors, the Kirbys, checked on his food and water. They’d beg him to eat, but he wouldn’t and lost weight. No doubt he wondered why we left him, and if were coming back.

We always returned to a skinny Diesel wagging his tail in forgiven delight.

Because of one of Diesel’s episodes, I never buy from a door-to-door salesman. A mattress salesman with a glib mouth and a money-back guarantee as long as our dog’s tail parted me from some money before he made his getaway. Soon I discovered my mistake and sent word I wanted my money back.

The salesman returned while I was working in the yard. I didn’t see the hair along Diesel’s back rise, his ears flatten and tail go stiff or I would have known he had picked up on my “if you don’t like him, I don’t either” tone.

With quiet stealth he approached the salesman from the rear and bit him where there was the most to bite. The fat man held his head with one hand, grabbed his posterior with the other, yelled, did a war dance and spoke in unknown tongues.

Later I learned the salesman got a tetanus shot and drove by our house every day for two weeks checking Diesel for signs of rabies.

I never got my money back, but then Diesel never returned the stock he took out in trade.

Many times I’d check on the boys only to see his tail wagging, but that was enough reassurance.

Diesel’s favorite sport was hunting rabbits, or rather chasing them, for he seldom caught one. He’d shake the shape out of irrigation pipes where chased rabbits escaped. He’d guard culverts and crevices for hours, his tail keeping four-four time.

His favorite rabbit hunting was from the bed of a pickup truck, his nose in the air, his ears pinned back by the speed and wind, tail wagging. When he spotted a rabbit, he’d bail out without regard for speed and safety. He dispatched this feat hundreds of times without a trip to the animal hospital.

Getting older, rather than retire from chasing rabbits, he tried chasing cars passing on our Farm to Market road.

 That day, he crouched at the roadside for hours, watching, waiting. At dusk, he struck.

 Instead of the car hitting him, he hit the ar. Afraid he would die, weeping, we brought him in the house. We set up a brigade to pet, pat, coax, feed, water and coerce. The next morning he could stand and move his legs.  Soon his vigor returned but he never chased another car.

 Later coming back from his twilight constitutional, he misjudged the distance of an approaching car. He suffered injuries, but was alive. The woman driver was shaken and apologized over and over. Again he recovered.

 Several eventful Diesel years passed as he grew older, his bones more prominent, and he had trouble jumping into the back of the pickup truck.

This night was biting cold, The next morning he was curled up in his favorite spot against a south wall, not moving. When I touched him, he was cold and stiff. He had died in his sleep.

 Diesel was lifted onto the pickup tailgate and driven up the slight incline to the irrigation well where he had spent so many frolicsome hours chasing rabbits.

 As they drove, Diesel’s tail waved as it always did when he was going on a rabbit hunt. The ground was littered with wet tissues, the boys nailed two stick together. After the mound was patted just right, they planted the cross at the head of his grave.

 You could say the blowing wind made his tail move. I know his tail waved goodbye. His last wave told us not to miss him as much as he missed us., but remember all his happy, eventful years.