

Reflections from Lost Horizon Farm — Dogs on the Farm (Part 2)

Barb Garvoille, *Columnist*

Each edition, retired dairy farmer Barb Garvoille brings her musings on dairy farm life from her own years of experience on Lost Horizon Farm with her late husband Vince "Mr. Farmer" Garvoille. This moving memoir focuses on 1980-2000, join Barb as she rises with the herd.

Queenie

Queenie was the closest thing we ever had to a fluid fence. Being a Border Collie, she was an overachiever. When there were no cattle to herd, she would busy herself with the barn cats and even the geese. She would focus her deep brown eyes in a locking gaze on some critter and "doggedly" move it from one place to another.

The herding instinct was so strong it sometimes got her into trouble. One time she decided to herd the heifers at night. Her nocturnal presence was frightening enough to the youngstock to drive them through a fence and half a mile down the county road towards the state highway.

From that notable evening onward, Queenie was tied up in the hay mow as soon as dark time arrived.

Queenie's sport was basketball. It was not at all unusual to be milking cows and have a basketball come rolling down the walkway. Queenie would find the basketball and with her muzzle, shoulder, and right front leg maneuver and roll it into position until she found someone who would play with her. Just the sound of a basketball being bounced on the earth or on the hay mow floor would bring her from anywhere on the farm. The best thing about playing with Queenie was that one could shoot hoops and never have to collect the ball. Queenie would bring it back to you!

The worst thing about playing with Queenie was that sometimes when the human would tire of the game, Queenie would roll the ball about a bit longer and then into the barn where it would not always stay on the walkway. Sometimes the ball would roll into the gutter to become a ball christened with manure. One time it was an undiscovered and "covered" gutter ball that traveled with the manure on the barn cleaner outside the barn and into the manure spreader. It then made a trip aboard the spreader into the field. That basketball moved right along with the manure toward the back of the now engaged machine until it hit the beaters of the manure spreader and exploded. Mr. Farmer thought he had punctured a tire; the sound was that loud!

Vocal and lip tricks were a part of Queenie's repertoire as well. She could "sing" on command. Her song was a kind of elongated, alto "OOOOOOOO". Queenie also smiled. Actually, she had two kinds of smiles. One smile was for the people she knew, and that smile was accompanied by great tail wagging. The other smile was for people she wanted to get to know, and it was often misinterpreted. We had several salesmen stop in the farmyard and remain in their vehicle because they saw Queenie as an angry dog showing its teeth.

Being a sensitive creature, I am certain Queenie would have felt badly knowing anyone thought of her as anything other than a graceful, loving animal. In fact, there were many times during a day when she would put her paws on something (you, the barn wall, the milking cart, a calf panel, a gate), thrust her wet nose under your arm and then push her face through just for a word of praise or reassurance.

Queenie's black and white hair coat was often flecked with mud and manure and her feathery tail stuck with burdocks; she simply would not stay still long enough for a good brush. That trademark look was my last recollection of Queenie. It was accentuated by the stainless steel of the veterinary examination table. After thousands of working days, Queenie had to be put down. She had developed a severe

case of heartworm.

Misty

"What is brown and white, hides on the staircase during any thunderstorm and pants?" The answer to this question would



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be Misty, the Rat Terrier. When Misty arrived at Lost Horizon Farm as a puppy, Peaches and Queenie were both aged dogs. They tolerated this new house dog as the nuisance that always wanted to disturb their rest and play. Misty had to find her own fun, and she did.

One fall morning, the neighbor had come to the farm to pick com for Mr. Farmer. There had been a breakdown of equipment, and Misty had been hanging around the two men busily repairing the New Idea Uni-Harvester. What she found in the machine shed had been irresistible to her. The neighbor's wallet had fallen out of his pocket as he contorted himself to reach a part deep in the harvester's interior. Misty had carried and tossed that soft prize in a path from the machine shed right to the house. How was this known? Mr. Farmer found a trail of bills in varying denominations lining the farm road from the shed right up to the house! Further investigation turned up a very wet wallet bearing the markings of sharp puppy teeth!

Being exceptionally cute and attentive, Misty was the sort of dog that would be tempting to hold. She did not like being picked up and would bite anyone (including her "family") who tried to do so. Mr. Farmer had to use his heaviest leather gloves to pick her up when transport to the veterinary was required. When Misty was carried into the examination room, the Velcro muzzle went right on!! In addition to shedding hair in an amount one would think would leave any dog naked, Little Mist's extreme fear would inevitably prompt her to deposit a very large amount of fecal material on the exam table. A vet visit with Misty was always an embarrassment.

As Misty grew old, her love affair with food deepened. During the time she could retain her position as the dominant house dog, she became quite rotund on Yetti's puppy chow. However, food nirvana ended the day she lunged at Yetti, slipped, banged against the stainless steel dog dish and knocked her front teeth out.

Misty was the greatest of all dog barometers. When there was even a hint of a thunderstorm (and the weather event could be miles away), Misty would begin to pant in the most intense way. When the real thing would arrive, Misty would station herself on the staircase until all threatening weather had passed. This habit was OK during daylight hours, but it was downright dangerous at night, especially if there had been a power outage, because a person never knew which step she might be on.

Yetti

Our Bernese Mountain Dog was to be called Yeti, after the name given to Tibet's abominable snowman. We put in one too many t's, and the misspelling stuck.

Yetti came to the farm from an Illinois breeder on an August day so scorchingly hot that a layer of ice packs was placed in the bottom of the dog crate to keep her pleasingly cool during the truck ride home. Lost Horizon Farm was blessed with a sort of double feature when Yetti arrived; we



Photo contributed by Barb Garvoille
Misty on Lost Horizon Farm

not only got a new puppy but also a new window air conditioner for the kitchen to keep her environs cool. A summer snapshot of Yetti would show a dog laying comfortably under the kitchen table, in the usual sleeping dog posture, but sometimes on her back with all four legs pointed upwards.

Yetti was an excellent canine alarm system for the farm too. Wherever she was: on the cool cement pad in front of the milk house, on the front steps, in the house, or in the truck; if someone pulled in, she would bark. If it was temperate weather and the front storm door was ajar, a visitor might be faced with the daunting proposition of facing a dog that, when standing with her hind legs on the ground and her front legs on the reinforced mesh of the screen door, was taller than most men!

Bernese Mountain Dogs are known for their devotion to a single individual or family, and Yetti was no different. Any non-family person had to wait for this dog to warm up to him. For the duration of her life, Yetti would give a yelp indicative of injury if a stranger attempted to pet her. She knew the pained sound would lead most people to withdraw their hand, and that was the way she liked it. Friendship was always at her discretion and on her terms, and she was a great barometer of character.

When Yetti was still a puppy, I had taken her with me to bring the cows home from the pasture. We had walked to the end of our valley to urge a group of lingering heifers home, when an exuberant and inexperienced Yetti raced ahead of them. The heifers, seeing this new "thing" in the pasture, gave chase. Thankfully, the thundering hooves of the running animals did not trample her, but the incident did teach her to travel behind livestock.

Yetti loved piles: piles of sand, piles of gravel, and, of course, piled snow. These were her mountains, and if there was one in the farmyard, she could be found on top of it. Great was her chagrin as the snow melted or the sand and gravel piles diminished when loaded out for some project on the farm.

Haying season sometimes offered Yetti round bales to summit. Pushed up together in rows along a field's edge, "rounders" offered a commanding view not only to Yetti but also to her canid brethren: fox and coyotes.

One spring day, posed on a side hill in the yard, I saw Yetti's gaze tum to the wood's edge. A very young fox kit had wandered out of the understory onto the lawn. Yetti loped down the hill to delicately touch noses with this creature. These two youngsters seemed totally inquisitive about each other. Once the nose contact had occurred, the kit slipped back into the woods, and Yetti resumed her sentinel post. The encounter was quiet, without aggression or chase, and completely infused with the curiosity of the young.

Yetti had some interesting quirks. In the summertime, Yetti liked drinking water straight out of a hose: in the wintertime she liked rushing alongside our toboggan and pulling people's stocking hats off! When she had to be left at home, she would express



Photo contributed by Barb Garvoille
Queenie on Lost Horizon Farm

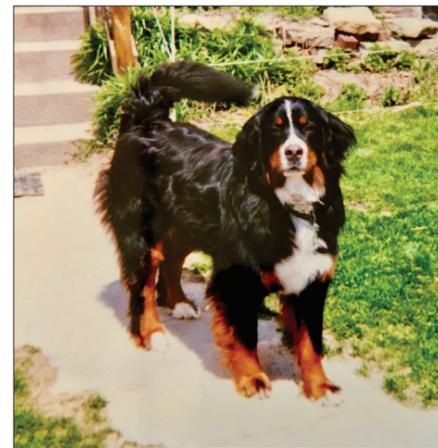


Photo contributed by Barb Garvoille
Yetti on Lost Horizon Farm

her delight at your return by running rapidly in ever widening circles around the yard. Yetti had a kind of crying whine too that she only vocalized on the rare occasion when was left alone for an extended period of time.

Yetti left a lot of memories at Lost Horizon Farm. No one could forget how her wagging tail plume would brush the top of the kitchen table like a feathery dust cloth. Her love for butter demanded that the butter dish always be taken off the table promptly and placed on its perch atop the flour canister at the far reaches of the counter top. (Out of habit, the butter dish is found in that place to this day!) If a person made the mistake of leaving something tempting within reach, Yetti would always eat the food item, but never break its dish. One German Chocolate Cake was a good example. Carelessly left on the table by one of her humans, she ate the entire cake, amazingly, with no ill effect. The carefully doggie-cleaned plate under the table was the only evidence left of its existence! The seasonal change from winter to summer was easily marked by the great chunks of Yetti underfur left on the floors. Static electricity would transport these fluffy, fibrous clumps onto one's clothing, wisps of it would cling to the base of appliances, and it was guaranteed to plug the hose of the vacuum cleaner.

Our farm dogs that were also house dogs were rarely permitted onto the carpeted areas of the house. Vince had built a dog gate that slid down between the kitchen and the rest of the house. It was made of a nice piece of stained plywood. He had used a hole saw to make a place where you could grab the gate to lift it up. Yetti used the hole to nose into the rest of the house. She knew it was off limits, but she was compelled to collect information nasally.

Yetti was perhaps the most beautiful dog ever to live at the farm. Her life of 10 years was a long one for the breed. She left her mark with her beauty, her serenity, and her loving character.

Barb has called Lost Horizon Farm, just north of Spring Green, her home for the past 42 years. She is fond of all creatures (including snakes). Her joy stems from being able to be outdoors every day observing and treasuring the plant and animal life on her small piece of this planet. She loved milking cows and is proud to have been a dairy farmer.