**JACK**

Jack was the name of our dog; a white curly haired cairn terrier. He showed up in our house one day, out of the blue, a little baby pup that could fit into a cereal bowl. I was surprised that anyone would take a pup this small from their mother! I had to hand-raise him from the day he appeared, so, naturally, we grew pretty attached.

This was in Lusaka, Zambia, the capitol. Actually, we lived outside of the city about a mile, off the national highway that runs north and south through the country, from Cairo, Egypt to South Africa. So our location is quite ideal, not in the city center but not far from all the shopping malls and merchant stores that practically serve the country.

We bought our property from a Lebanese Muslim above market price, as we found out later. Land is cheap in Zambia, at least for not, and we could have gotten ten times the acres if we were willing to locate farther outside the city center.

Our property, as I mentioned, is off a dirt road from the national highway, with neighbors on all four sides separated by an eight foot wall of cinder blocks; a Greek Orthodox neighbor on one side with a lucrative business in *cinder* blocks, a Lebanese opposite side with a lucrative business in everything, but especially in *luggage*, an open land about three times the size of our property, and I know we have about four and half acres, with a care taker living there and a semi-truck repair space. The rest of the property is open bush infested with cobra snakes, more on that story later! A Muslim family lives there as the care taker. On the opposite side of our property from him is a road that is being subdivided into nice family homes, a lucrative project of an Hindi man.

We get a lot of fireworks throughout the years as each religion celebrates their holy days. The Lebanese like to shoot off their guns not only to celebrate, but to remind the thieves that they are armed, *so don’t mess with us!* Us Catholics don’t celebrate with fireworks, but I do know they celebrate extensively in Mexico, especially their Patronal Saints. We could celebrate our 4th of July, but that may not be a good idea to advertise that there are Americans living here.

You are wondering by now, what has all this to do with our dog, Jack? Be patient, I’ll tie it all in…some how.

We are a Catholic institution that trains young African men to join our Society of Mary, a teaching order, mainly, but we also work with the poor, the youth, and the disadvantage. Here in Zambia we run the nationally famous high school for boys, Matero Boys in the district of the capital Lusaka also called Matero. We have another secondary school in Malawi, and a very large primary school in the Njenga slums of Nairobi called *Our Lady of Nazareth*. That means we have young men from all three countries starting their religious life as Marianist Teachers here in Lusaka, Zambia in the district of Makeni. We may have at one time about ten or more young men in our ten month program. That means every year we get a new group of about the same size or less. So, if we get a dog, each year she has to get to know all these new faces, and see them leave, too.

We have some of our young brothers who join us for special programs that usually last about two or three months. Their program is with the local hospice center for AIDS patients in their last stages of the disease. Even with the medicine available, the patients as so far along because the families wait too long to bring them in, that they die within a few months and even weeks. Imagine our young men accompanying then on their last journey in life. It is always a powerful experience for them, and at the end of their stay, they are ready to move on...move away!

On one of my strips to the hospice center, I noticed that there were several dogs on the property that were friendly and usually greeted the patients. Normally, dogs in Africa are strictly used for alarms or guarding the compound of the owner. Rarely did the children keep them for pets, but never in the house. I asked the sister in charge what kind of dogs were they, and she responded that they were cairn terriers that were given them by a white woman that bred them, since they were certified cairn terriers with papers. All I said in response was that I was looking for that size dog, only bigger. I certainly wanted a dog that was friendly, like the ones I saw there, but bigger, since they were pretty small.

About two weeks later after I returned from teaching at the national major seminary, I found this puppy waiting for me in the house! This little cairn terrier pup had traits that were considered *undesirable!* How could anyone consider this little pup undesirable? The owner that bred them would normally get rid of them, even euthanizing them, since their traits would make them ineligible for breeding, and would put a strain on the mother raising them from pups. Jack was a curly and white haired pup, two straits that made him undesirable, but at this young an age, he was still pink!

As he was getting older and starting to walk more, I noticed that his back legs couldn’t move right. Most of the time he was dragging legs, as though they couldn’t keep up with the front part of his body. We had a very good vet in the area that I took Jack for his regular shots. He told me not to worry, they would get better, and they did.

If you ever raised a pup by hand, that means hand feeding him every day and taking care of what comes out the other end; it is like raising a child, always wondering if I was doing the right things. He was very playful and the guys were great with him. They loved to play with him and chase him around the house. They took their turns feeding him until he got bigger. Fortunately, he house-trained early. Most of the fun in playing with Jack was see him slide on the tile floor. It took him a while to learn to get up the traction to move fast, but was unable to stop quickly. Sometimes I think he bumped into the furniture and walls on purpose just to hear us laugh.

And he was a lap dog. Whenever we had meetings, he wanted to sit on my lap, but after awhile I made him find some other young man to sit with. Surprisingly, he knew not to come into the chapel whenever we had prayer, and was content to sit on a comfortable rug that we put there and became *his* rug. We all had to step over him as we left the chapel for dining room until the last person stepped over him, then he got up and joined us.

Jack was a great early warning system since his ears were very sensitive. No one believed me until after several times he could even hear a car approach down the end of the lane. Since our property was literally in the middle of four neighbors, our entrance was the length of one of them surrounded by eight feet of cinder blocks with a large electric-opening metal gate. The gate was so big that we had to make sure Jack was not standing in the path of the rollers or they could easily squash him. When the gate was left open during the day, she could hear the cars entering the property beginning at the end of our lane where it connected with the dirt road, which connected to the National Highway.

One of the problems with this long walled drive way was that snakes would get trapped in-between. Several times our guys would report that they had to kill a snake trapped within, and half the time they were cobras. The other times I couldn’t tell since they would pulverize the snakes beyond recognition. An interesting thing happens whenever a snake is spotted in Africa, sticks and clubs appear out of nowhere and a crowd quickly forms to kill it. All activity stops, even the Sacred Liturgy of the Eucharist, until the snake is caught and pulverized beyond all recognition. Then life resumes as though nothing had happened.

Here is my worry with Jack. How would she react when she saw here first snake? If it was a cobra, that could well be her last encounter. We thought of trying to train here to fear snakes, but without a real specimen, that was almost impossible. Well, it wasn’t long before Jack encountered her first snake. He had cornered the snake outside, on our wall. I hear her bark, and believe me, I knew right away that it was not her normal bark. Something was wrong! I went outside to see what was up, since we do get visitors that come unannounced into our house. About a foot up from the ground was a ledge on the walls that ran all around the house. Out the back door was an outside sink where we washed the vegetables and there, on a ledge of the wall that met the sink, was a baby cobra facing Jack.

Baby cobras can be just as dangerous as an adult, but more so, since an adult may bite as a warning and not inject venom. A baby cobra hasn’t learned yet to bite as a warning and will usually inject all of its venom, making it vulnerable to any other predator that might come along before it could renew its venom. Somehow, Jack new that this snake was dangerous, since he wasn’t barking wildly, and kept his distance. I couldn’t reach down to grab him since the cobra might bite me in the face. Surprisingly, Jack moved back to join me as the other young men quickly dispatched the snake with rocks this time. The young man who threw the rock that killed the cobra surprised us all, since he didn’t seem like a likely candidate. Both his rocks were right on!

Jack seemed to be growing much faster now, but he would never get very big. We raised rabbits, so I would bring him out to our rabbit house and get him used to them. I tried several ways to raise them. In Africa, the young boys raised rabbits and sold them to help pay for their education. We raised them for meat!

There were several ways to set up one a rabbit house, and since we didn’t have money for cages yet, we opted for the open house, which is a large room with several breeding boxed for the females spread around the perimeter. We had at this time about forty rabbits with four breeding females. We quickly learned that the cement floor of our rabbit house wasn’t constructed very well and several of the females had begun digging holes in the floor. But several of our neighbors said, that was OK, since it would be more natural to a rabbit out in the wild. The female digs a tunnel to her lair, which was rounded out in the ground. Rarely did she dig to escape. The males would, though. In regular rabbit cages the babies would regularly roll out of the nest, but generally the mother would not bother to move the baby back in and it would die in a couple of days unless one spotted it and moved it back. There would be that problem if the mother dug a circular lair in the ground. Our number of rabbits went up to eighty! They were everywhere!

Normally, Jack would behave for about the first few minutes, but once a male stomped his foot all the other rabbits would start to run for shelter. The hunt instinct for Jack was too strong for him to resist and he would set off the rabbits running in all directions. Some of the bigger males and females were not afraid of him when he was younger. I think they thought he was a rabbit himself. They would confront him by stomping their foot and then run up to him and hit him with their front feet, sort of like a dance. But rabbits can give a nasty bite if they wanted to, and this I wanted to prevent Jack from getting. He eventually learned to leave the larger rabbits alone. The problem was that all the females dug into the floor to make their lairs and Jack would send them all down their holes. When the time came for us to catch them, it was nearly impossible.

The undesirable traits of Jack were starting make an effect on him. His beautiful white hair was getting more and more difficult to keep clean. He had a habit to roll in the wet chicken manure or rabbit droppings to disguise himself. Wow, he could really roll in some nasty stuff, where we had to give him a bath immediately. He would never learn; bath or nasty stuff? And he hated a bath. I had the guys give him a bath, since I didn’t want to get bit. His curly hair was also a big problem, because he liked to run through the grass. At certain seasons of the year a particular type of grass would develop seeds that would stick to hair, clothes, anything that was fuzzy, and would be so difficult to remove. Jack would have these grass seeds in his fur and the only way to remove them was to cut them out with scissors. Sometimes the guys would cut his skin and he would bite then! After a while it was almost impossible to remove them, since his bites could be very nasty. Several times he could not see out his eye because of the grass; they had sealed his eyes shut!

The end of the year came and the guys would soon be leaving for their homes; Zambia, Kenya, Malawi. Jack liked to accompany them down to the end of the drive way as they went off to teach at the local school down the road from us, just a short walk. Fortunately, he always stayed on the compound. It was a wonder he was never kidnapped (dog-napped?)! His breed commanded a very good price.

The day after the guys left home for good Jack went looking for them. He couldn’t understand that they were gone for good. Where were they? Then next morning was a celebration for one of our teachers at school who was leaving Zambia and heading back to Kenya for further education. His farewell Mass and Celebration was the next day, Sunday. In the morning I was looking for Jack to put him in the house while we were gone, but he was nowhere to be found. Suddenly, our neighbor appeared around the corner carrying Jack in his arms. This was our friendly Muslim neighbor who came for water every once in a while, since they had problems with their water pump. He had seen Jack cross to the other side of the dirt road, probably looking for our guys. As Jack crossed the dirt road and car sped past hitting him and killing him on the spot. The car never stopped. The man knew it was our dog and brought him to us. I was speechless, but managed to thank the man for his kind act.

That Sunday I could barely get through the Mass and Celebration. As I sat quietly during the Communion Thanksgiving song, I couldn’t keep from crying, but I did manage to finish the Mass without incident.

At the Celebration meal Lynda, a wonderful woman who helps with the youth group, reminded me that there will be other brothers to replace him. I was embarrassed to tell her that I was crying for my dog that was killed that morning, not for Julius who we were celebrating. For once, she didn’t know what to say, since dogs are dogs.

Two weeks later she had gotten me another dog, just like Jack! I was surprised, this pup was smaller than Jack. I threatened to name the dog Jack-Lynda. Eventually we called it Jackie.