

PATRIOTIC PALS TAILS OF THE CIVIL WAR

By Chris Stuckenschneider

CHAPTER 9: Fido, A Presidential Pooch

Lazin' around the house, warmin' my paws in a sunspot as Walt and I ruminat about what life would have been like in the 1860s for Fido, a Midwest mutt.

I'd forfeit my favorite chew toy to share a cup of Joe with Fido, the beloved pet of Abraham Lincoln, a backwoods, self-educated man smart enough to love dogs, as well as his fellow man.

Before Lincoln moved into the White House he lived in Springfield, Ill., with his wife, Mary, and three sons. Lincoln practiced law and got into politics there. He often walked to his law office or up the street for a cup of coffee, Fido by his side. Everyone knows boys appreciate "snips and snails and puppy-dog tails." Abe never outgrew his boyhood love of dogs and animals in general.

When he was sworn into office on March 4, 1861, Lincoln took right to the job. He had to, the next month the Rebels fired on Fort Sumter in the harbor at Charleston, S.C. Our 16th president was hurled headfirst into a four-year tragedy that lined his face, stooped his shoulders and added sleepless nights to a life that ended at age 56, when Lincoln was shot by John Wilkes Booth, an actor and Southerner rankled by the Confederate loss.

Our nation wept for Lincoln, as did Fido, who mourned the loss of his master, yet a second time. You see when Lincoln

moved to Washington, D.C., he opted not to take Fido along—he thought the mutt might be traumatized by the relocation.

There would be a lot of hubbub surrounding the swearing in ceremony and such at the Capitol, and Fido wasn't good at playing his brave cards. The retriever mutt-mix was dear to Lincoln's heart, and as spoiled as a lump of Limburger cheese left outside on a Missouri dog day. The mongrel was a Yankee Doodle Dandy, but courageous he wasn't.

So Lincoln set about finding an adoptive home for Fido, locating a Springfield resident to take care of the pooch in the manner to which he'd been accustomed.

I don't blame Walt—he's the best—but at my house, I have to settle for a simple board floor or slumber on a worn, foam-rubber bed covered with a red-plaid cover that doesn't hint of a sleep-number. Not Fido. His favorite place to catch a nap and dream of cats was a petite, horse-hair couch. The couch sounds lux, but I'm squeamish about the horsehair innards. Back in the day, some period furniture was stuffed with the hair of horses. "Nay, nay," I say.

To help Fido adjust to his new home, Lincoln gave the couch to his pet's new owners, with instructions that Fido was to be an inside dog, which he was until he died a year

after the war ended, and a year after Lincoln was shot.

Back in 1861, when the Lincolns took up residence at the White House, Abe hated to leave his dog in Springfield, a chum

he'd grown so close to. But Abe had a Union to preserve, and if he hadn't been elected, America might be totally different than it is today.

Sad to say, the president didn't see his old dog friend again, but Fido saw his master. When Lincoln's body was sent back to Illinois by train, Fido greeted mourners who had gathered to grieve their fallen president.

Loyalty, courage and service—that's what my story's been about—tales of incredibly brave people, and their canine sidekicks, who unselfishly laid their lives on the line for the greater good. Individuals, divided by their beliefs, were finally able to put their differences behind them and come together, hands outstretched in peace.

Let freedom ring and dogs have their day! Hip-hip-hooray, the Union blue and Confederate gray are joined today on the red, white and blue, a symbol of liberty that snaps and waves in the breeze just across the yard from the historic house Walt and I call home.

History is fickle—facts get altered as tales are passed down through generations. The goal of this story was to educate and entertain as accurately as possible. Some of the details were hazy, but the men's feelings for their mascots were crystal clear. Learn more about the *Patriotic Pals* children's book coming in 2013 at www.cstuckenschneider.com.

PAPER TRAINING

Unlike news stories, editorials in newspapers offer opinions on a subject. Now pretend you are Fido and write an editorial directed at pet owners who leave their pups behind when they move, or give their pets away when they grow too large, or become difficult to keep. Write this in people language, not bark!



Photograph of Fido taken on the day Lincoln's body was returned to Illinois in 1865. Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum.

