



DOG
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GOD
Spelled
Backwards

A Memoir

Clark Malcolm Greene

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Clark Malcolm Greene

© 4/2004

Clark@ClarkMalcolmGreene.com

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Wait for Me

By Clark Malcolm Greene

Pockets stuffed with memories, I run
back in time and place, trying to catch up with
a black and tan dog whose feet leave dusty detonations
on long ago country roads and old new sown fields.

Bounding dog, bouncing through tall marsh grass.
Vigilant to her boy, whose legs can't quite keep the pace.
Wooly Bear Dog chasing rabbits, or deer,
or butterflies, the same for one as another.

Big Dog, strong enough to carry us to other worlds,
and get back home in time for supper.
Rowdy Dog to strangers, man or beast, who get too close,
she lies quiet as I pull cockleburs and stickers who hitched our travels.

Sweating cheeks and panting tongue tell tall tales
far better than any boy words at dinner time when,
smells of Dog mixed with soap-scrubbed hands and meat-loaf
and bread pudding while she waits for Mom to look away.

Guarding Dog, on my bed lies in wait for dark dragons,
and dreaming of tomorrow's Indians and antelopes.
We sleep our way to sunrise,
knowing we have endless days to go.

One grows up, the other grows old,
while the man still runs to catch up.

Wait for me, Patch.



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by **Clark Malcolm Greene**

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DOG

Chapter One

First Breath

I wasn't really born on December 1, 1946. Despite the notice of Gerald and Dorothee's, 9 pound, 10 ½ ounce, "Little Tarzan" in the local paper, I drew my first real breath on March 2, 1950.

Our family hadn't yet reached its full complement of four children; the additions of another brother and sister were still years away. In the spring of 1950 much of my energy was directed toward being a boy and it took every minute I had to do a good job. As the only boy in a family, I had distinct advantages, one being that parents were constantly trying to figure out how to keep me from pestering other members of the family.

We lived on the fringe of town and had a few animals: free roaming chickens kept for eggs, a few rabbits in cages kept for the meat they provided and one goat kept for the heck of it. When I was tired of causing the chickens to stop laying eggs, wearing the goat to a frazzle or trampling the garden, my energy could always be directed at my sister Carole. The best thing I could do was to make her holler. Carole, who'd be seven in September, called the activity being obnoxious.

I can still hear the piteous wails.

"Moooooooooooooooooom, Clark's bothering meeeeeeeeeeeee!!!!!!"

I had turned three that past December and we were still living in my hometown of Manchester, Michigan. When my father didn't have to work we sometimes went for rides on the weekends, so I wasn't too surprised when the order came for us to all "pile in" the car.

This Saturday would be one of those "let's take a ride days." Mom packed up a lunch of ham sandwiches, cold baked potatoes, with an apple for each of us and a glass bottle of milk wrapped in a towel to share. Off we went. We piled into the family car, a Plymouth as I recall, and set off through the Irish Hills of Michigan. We stopped by the

lighthouse at Big Silver Lake for lunch, enjoying the sweet spring air. The trees around the lake had begun their transformation already and fringed the shores with that new pale green of spring. Set against the crystal blue of the lake from up on the hill, it was a beautiful jewel of colors.

Lunch was over quickly just because I was three and a half. It was time to go when the only thing I could think of to do with my apple core was to put it down the back of Carole's blouse. Actions like this always worked to get the family moving and I thought we were going to head back to the house. Instead we started off in another direction, drove through a small village marked with a sign "Michigan Center" and I was pretty surprised when we stopped by a farmhouse I didn't know.

I was already reading by then, early some said, but to me it almost came naturally and I read everything my eyes grabbed onto. As we turned into the dirt driveway, I saw nailed to one of the fence posts a sign that read, "PUPPIES FOR SALE" with the both the S's backwards. I read it out loud in case anybody had missed it.

"Puppies, are you kiddin' me?" I almost shouted to the back of Momma and Dad's heads.

Momma turned in her seat as we pulled up and came to a stop, while Dad honked the horn. "Well Clark, do you think you'd like a puppy?" She asked, "Would you take really good care of one?"

"Yes! Yes."

Before the dust had settled, our car was surrounded by two large dogs and what looked like about a hundred black and tan puppies. The two big ones looked and sounded fearsome, deep and loud, hoarsely rasping in their warning barks. One of them put its paws on the car door to investigate through the quickly rolled up window and continued its loud announcement. Neither of my parents got out of the car until someone stuck their head out the backdoor of the house and hollered.

"I'll be right there. You dogs! GIT! GIT!"

The two adult dogs did, but the puppies kept up their barking and woofing, roiling around the car like overgrown ants from a disturbed anthill.

An overalled man walked out to the car and Dad rolled down the window as if to ask a question, but the farmer was already saying, “It’s okay, the big ones won’t bother you now. I’m out here.”

What did he mean? What did bother mean? If he went inside, would we be “bothered”? I thought. Those two big dogs were gigantic.

We cautiously piled out (for some reason the Greene family always “piled” in or out whenever a car was concerned) and were immediately engulfed by the horde of squirming, prancing and dancing, hind-end wriggling dogs.

“Where are their tails?” I asked, both enchanted and baffled.

Why, they had ‘em, but they were really short! I remember being astonished about this, but I didn’t have much time for more thinking. Slobber and spit, nails scratching, jumping up and down, couldn’t hang on to them, they were dervishes, wild and careening all over the barnyard. Teeth and tugs pulled on jacket and pant legs. Nips and practice bites.

“Ouch! Ouch! Their teeth are sharp!” I hollered.

My mother laughed.

“Oh Clark, you won’t bleed to death.”

They smelled of dog. Perfect. They were puppy-breath and something sharp; a mix of puppy poop and pee, their mother’s milk and straw and dust. Puppies and puppies had to be the best two smells God ever made. I was in heaven.

My Dad, meanwhile, was in deep negotiations with the farmer for what would be, in our family, a large purchase. Buying this dog would be akin to purchasing an appliance; it was expected to be of good value and to last a long time. My sister Carole put up with the chaos of the litter for a while but soon retreated to the car where she sat with the door open and her legs sticking out. She pulled her legs in and closed the door whenever one of the puppies went over to her and they soon got the message. She would like a puppy but it would always be on her terms.

Momma, good country girl that she was, had knelt down and was laughingly welcoming tongues to lick and noses to prod, her chin lifted to accept their kisses. Me

too, me too, but these puppies were more than I could handle; up on hind legs, they knocked me this way and that, a shoving match among friends. They just wouldn't slow down long enough for me to latch on to one.

What bundles of energy! Whenever I could stroke a flank or pat a neck as they skyrocketed by I could feel the mass of flesh and muscle, almost bursting through the silky black and tan curls. They were smooth, with soft ringlets of fur. I was later to find out that they had hair, a distinction that was important for some reason. They were Airedale Terriers and according to the adult examples that were keeping us under watchful eye, would get pretty big.

The adults had wiry, stiff curls and the male dog particularly was impressive. I was a pretty big boy for three and this dog was a lot bigger than me; at about 85 pounds, he was huge. The big dogs had come up and introduced themselves and after apparently finding no real threat, retired to the background. They didn't lie down but sat like sentinels, watching every move like guards, why like a..... guard dog! Heck, the big dogs were probably glad we were here, a puppy diversion to get rid of their offspring for a little while. These pups were wild! We had only been there about 15 minutes and I was tired already!

“Which one do you like, son?” Momma was asking.

How on earth could I tell? I hadn't had my hands on one for more than a few seconds. I did have at least nine teeth imprints to choose from but that wasn't much help. Mom and Dad were serious about this puppy thing! The pups were about ten weeks old and we could take one home today!

I was going to have to choose.

“Can I have them all?”

Everybody except Dad thought that was hilarious.

Momma said, “Choose one, son. We'll want a female.”

Female, I thought? I was going to have to get even more help here. How can I tell? I could tell you basic stuff, like color and size and number of feet and ears. Female? There ought to be a label. I hadn't a clue.

It's a good thing puppies soon wear out. As their energy flagged, they would plop down randomly in the dust or rustle in several small wind-blown piles of old hay. Several took advantage of the watering trough, came over to give us a friendly swipe of their wet muzzles and then collapsed. One snuck up on Carole when she wasn't looking.

"Mooooooooom," Carole keened from the car. "The puppies are getting my good dress all wet and slobbery."

"Oh honey," Mom soothed. "You're okay. Slobber will wash out and you won't melt."

"Good," I thought. Now they were holding sort of still and I had the chance for study. They were all so much alike, some a bit bigger, but they were black and tan, with quick eyes and big feet. Momma and Dad were doing some figuring too. As Dad followed her, Momma picked up each puppy and wow, looked right at their butts! I would have gotten in trouble for that. Parents can surely be a puzzle sometimes. They even discussed each butt briefly, either nodding or shaking their heads, before moving on to the next.

Suddenly, one of the puppies was through with its break and gamboled over to where I was kneeling in the dirt, grabbed firmly on to the cuff of my coat and gave a pull. It was one of the ones that got an affirmative nod. Nodding heads were always good in my book, though I didn't know for sure what it meant about puppies.

This pup growled in a language I understood perfectly, "Rrrrr, rrrrr." Lets go.

Momma asked, "It looks like you've been chosen, son. Do you want her?"

I got a little puppy rumble to tell me she wanted play, that I needn't be afraid, and an extra tug indicating my expected obedience.

"RRRRrrgh!" Now.

She deepened her throaty growl for emphasis.

"RRRRRRRRrrGH!" I said c'mon!

Yes, yes, I understood! A second language and I'm only three!

She helped me to my feet and I followed the gyrating, on again, off again, punctuated pulls of her teeth. I allowed myself to be lead in whatever direction she chose, never mind about the coat.

Momma and Dad both laughed at me.

THIS puppy was the most beautiful one of the bunch: tan legs and feet, with a black saddle in the middle of her back. The black extended over top of her tail, but her sides and soft belly were a sandy tan. Her coat was soft, soft, soft as only a puppy's can be. She had the start of some whiskers on her muzzle, a wet nose and a wondering look on her face when she cocked her head to peer at me. She gave me some good long licks when I bent down to look in her eyes. I liked that, so I licked her back. She liked it, too! Mom said her tail had been docked.

"Like with a boat?" I asked.

"No son, in this case, docked means cut off. Airedales are supposed to have their tails cut short, although sometimes they're left long," Dad said knowingly. "Only idiots leave their Airedale's tail long."

"Ow! Does it hurt?" I asked, horrified at the thought of cutting, but glad I wasn't going to be considered an idiot.

"Son," my mother instructed me. "The animal doctor, a ve-tre-nar-i-un, always gives them shots in their tails to take the pain away before they get cut. Now you say ve-tre-nar-i-un."

My mother seldom missed chances to introduce us to new words. Okay, got it; short tails means docked, animal doctors and no idiots here.

Dad gave the man some money, the puppy gave me the slip, dashed over and slathered several of her littermates with a lick and a bite goodbye and she was off to the races once more. She did not say goodbye to the mommy and daddy dogs, but ran straight back to us, standing now by the car.

This pup knew something. I'd have to find out what it was.

"Take her out in the field and have her go potty. You'll have to get her away from the other puppies so she doesn't get distracted," my mother directed.

Boy “taking” puppy really means getting the puppy to chase the boy.

“Run away from her son. She’ll follow you if you just run,” Momma instructed. As I turned, the pup did too and soon we were moving in the same direction, side by side.

But more importantly, at the moment I didn’t have a hint about this potty thing. Was there a button? I secretly looked, but didn’t see anything obvious. I’d ask later. I didn’t have to wait very long, because the pup seemed to know what was required. Soon she squatted daintily and yep, went potty like a good girl. Phheeww! I hadn’t pushed anything, and she did something, so I didn’t have to sound dumb asking that question. Why, this was gonna be easy!

My puppy ran around in a couple of circles to indicate she was ready for something else and we headed back to the driveway.

She got in on my side, behind Dad, took to the car readily and wasn’t scared or hesitant once we started off toward home. I think she even piled in just like the rest of us. She was however, a real handful in the back seat. She investigated everything; Carole, the car seat, the picnic basket. She grabbed used napkins and waxed paper, licked mayonnaise from the paper plates and made a general mess of the picnic remnants.

“Moooooom, Clark’s dog is chewing the napkins,” Carole bleated.

“Carole Beth, instead of complaining, help your brother,” Momma directed. “Besides, she’s a family dog.”

“Momma!” I yelled mightily. “I thought you said she’s my dog!” I was righteously indignant. “I had to choose her and everything!”

“Don’t forget Clark, she chose you.” Momma stated as she looked right into my eyes. “Yes, she’s your dog, because you’re going to learn how to take care of her, but she is also a family dog and she needs to like everyone.”

“Even Carole?”

“Moooooom, he’s going to make his dog not like me,” she wailed.

“She’ll like you just fine if you’re nice to her,” Momma admonished. “Now Clark, don’t let her chew those napkins. Carole, help him.”

“Don’t make me stop this car, you two,” Dad menaced from the front seat as the commotion grew.

“Yes, honey, do stop the car and put the picnic basket in the trunk.” Momma said patiently.

Dad finally had to stop. My puppy didn’t have a collar on and was impossible to hold. Better the basket in the trunk than the dog. Dad grumbled, Momma just thought it was funny and Carole might have, too. My puppy then proceeded to get stuck, butt up, under the front seat. It looked like a passage and a place to crawl but it wasn’t. Fortunately, she had really only lodged about half way. This dog was hilarious! Carole managed to pull the pup back out from under the seat, but then wouldn’t give her back to me. I made pinching threats with my fingers until she finally handed her over.

Momma noticed the pincers too. “Let’s see if we can figure out a name, you two.” My mother’s suggestion was more of a command. “Do you have any ideas?”

The puppy crawled up in my lap to hear the outcome.

All of the Greene family pets had names that began with “P.” My Uncle Dave insisted that since the word pet begins with a “P”, all pets’ names had to as well and it had become a family tradition.

Momma had a canary named Piper, our goat was named Petunia, the chickens (yes the chickens too) were Pete the rooster, while the hens were Pat, Polly, Pam, Priscilla, Penny, Priss, and Pot-luck. My Dad named the last chicken. (You could tell where his thoughts were.) I never knew which chicken was which, but Momma did. Our rabbits were Peter Rabbit and Pollyanna, Prince and Princess, two breeding pairs, though sometimes Peter Rabbit was put with Princess and Prince was put with Pollyanna. Besides, the males were mostly kept in separate cages until some special day known only by Momma. Who can figure with rabbits? We never bothered to name any of their baby rabbits as they were destined for the freezer as soon as possible.

Okay, my puppy needed a name. Had to be a girl’s name too. I suggested using Grandma’s first name: Phoebe, but only Dad got a kick out of that idea. Mom thought not.

“Okay, lets see,” I started naming. “Pepper, Panther, Paper, Pip, Penny, (nope that was a chicken) Paula, Pot, Potato. What about Pocket?” I thought and thought, but couldn’t grab any more ideas. “Man, there just aren’t that many good “P” names left.” Old Carole couldn’t come up with any.

She and I started on names with “P” in them anywhere.

“Apple, Lippy, Sloppy...” No, those are dumb sounding.

“No,” Mom interjected. “Her name has to start with the letter “P”.”

I was stumped.

I think it was my mother who said, “Well, she does have a black patch on her back.”

“Blackie!” I shouted.

“No silly, with a “P”,” she laughed. “How about Patch or Patches? Patch sounds pretty good to me.”

Hey, it sounded great to me. I was way out of “P” names. The newest member of the family had been christened. While we were working on names, Patch or Patches had fallen asleep again. All this new family stuff was exhausting. I thought a nap was a great idea and scrunched up on the big back seat with her in my lap. When I woke up as we pulled into the driveway back in Manchester I found her still there. Patch or Patches was home. We ended up calling her both.

I had no ideas about dogs. My mother on the other hand, had plenty. Momma had all sorts of ideas about little boys, too. Training a puppy is really training a child, which in this instance, was a three and one half year old boy. Oh, the puppy learns something for sure, but the knowledge that is required and must get transferred to the boy is staggering.

First rule: Animals come first. Always.

Second rule: Feed, water, take puppy outside. Puppy is up from the puppy’s nap, take puppy outside. You’re up from your nap, take puppy outside. Feed, water, the puppy goes outside. Take puppy outside, wait till puppy poops. Wait. Keep socks and shoes out of puppy’s mouth. Take dirty clothes out of puppy’s mouth. Don’t let puppy chew

father's slippers. Take puppy for walk. Don't let puppy jerk on leash. Don't let puppy chew on leash. Don't let puppy jump up. Don't let puppy bite Grandma. Don't *make* puppy bite Carole. Don't feed puppy from table. Don't let puppy lick your spoon. Teach puppy to sit. Teach puppy to lie down. Teach puppy to stop barking. Don't wait to take puppy outside. Come see what your puppy did. That's why! Take puppy outside!

Most rules started with "don't". All the words following "Animals Come First" are the second rule.

There were accidents and transgressions to be sure. Shoes were chewed, socks partially digested. A few times we didn't get outside fast enough. It didn't happen many times though because I had to be the cleaner upper if she was the depositor. Nobody starts out perfect. I was a great example of that. Practice is required for all things and Patch was going to be an inside and outside dog. It meant that if she and I perfected her outside activities and timing she could stay inside until she had to go outside. We sometimes struggled to maintain her permanent residence in my room. She got swatted with the paper and I got swatted with the hand. We would do better. I promise, Momma.

I recall so very little else about our house in Manchester, except that the lessons for the boy and dog took place on the long front porch with pillars on either side of the steps leading up. Mom taught both boy and dog to come, sit and stay. Patch was much better at remembering the last two but I had had my butt swatted enough to look for who was calling me when "Claaark!" rang out. I knew about "stay" from being sent to my room, although I often got confused about how long it meant. Patch followed me around as if tethered, but the only strings we had were those we wanted.

Patch grew up lots faster than I did and a year later, in 1951, she was big, a really large dog. She had gotten her large size from her sire, and while still growing, now weighed in at 70 pounds or so, quite big for a female and formidable in appearance. She had a large head, flat and broad across the top, with eyes and ears that perked when I called her. Her coat had turned from silky soft to coarse curls and had grown thicker. Her sharp little puppy teeth were replaced with wolf teeth, a set of canines that sported an extra one; doubles on each side. Patch was thick and heavily muscled in the chest and

hindquarters and her strength was amazing. If she had a stick or rope in her mouth, you got it only if she wanted you to have it. Patch came equipped with an innate sense of territory, and learned to stay within the confines of our yard. She seldom crossed this invisible barrier unless we accompanied her. She stayed in the yard lots better than I did too.

Patch possessed a knowing but wary disposition and was gentle with the family. If she had been introduced, you were considered okay. Visitors and people walking down the street were another matter, and if the family wasn't around she always viewed strangers with growling suspicion. Most folks walked on the other side of the street even though they were never in real harm's way. When salesmen, the postmen, meter readers and visitors came in the yard or to the door they always did so with a healthy portion of fear. I can't recall her ever biting an innocent visitor but there would be times in the future when the not so innocent wished they were elsewhere.

Mother was a mainstay. A beauty to boot. Pretty enough to have been a movie star, instead of going into films, Dorothee Phoebe chose directing the saga of us.

Mother was a singer and bringer of light to our lives and while there were a few times when I thought she would drive me nuts and once when I'm sure she did, she was an awesome molder of my character.

Her examples led and pushed and sometimes threw her family into the breach of life. She was destined to become first, second or even third mother to many more children than her own brood, yet she did a pretty good job with all. Mom made the rules up for the family, but enforced them equally with friends or neighbors, too, and monitored everyone's compliance. Mom modified her rules to suit the situation and on a few occasions threw them completely away, but I never saw her back away from a conflict. Her adversaries, occasionally including her children, quickly learned just how formidable her stature.

Our minimum number was six, two adults and four children. Five of us, my father included, continually revolved as satellites around the central core of my mother. The quantity of spinning children and adults varied as new lost souls were discovered or lead to salvation, but most changes increased rather than reduced our numbers.

My father would have been a tyrant if Mom had allowed. Even though she couldn't stop his continued attempts, Dad was mostly held in check whenever he got carried away. Gerald Godette Greene's face reflected the many frowns and quickly lit anger which sparked regular spankings. I spent a great deal of my early years being frightened of his fearsome temper. His laughter was often at someone's expense and he seemed too busy or caught up in something, almost as if he denied himself a complete good humor. Dad grew up during the Depression and that experience may have molded him into a fairly inflexible man. He inherited the disposition from his father and grew up to be a somewhat skewed version of the example set for him, but he always made himself available when I was more than I should have been or less than I could have been. He was a small man who always wanted to be bigger. When I got into or made trouble for myself, I pictured him as Goliath.

My sister Carole Elizabeth is four years older than me and lovely, though I didn't care to admit it. When she was my mother's only child, Grandma Phoebe told her she was the most beautiful and perfect child in the world and Carole believed the description. My mother spent Carole's entire life attempting to dissuade that notion and never won the battle. Carole was musically gifted on piano and organ and possessed the most perfect singing voice I had ever heard, head turning in its beauty. I sort of liked her when she sang in church; to be present when she sang was enough for any mortal. But Sunday was only one day a week and all other times we seemed to be in some sort of conflict with one another.

My brother Gerald Godette II (actually Chip) is four years my junior and while I didn't think much of him initially, I did learn that having a little brother could be an advantage. It took Chip overlong to develop but I managed to beat and tease and torment

him until he became tolerable. As soon as he could keep up he followed me around just like a dog.

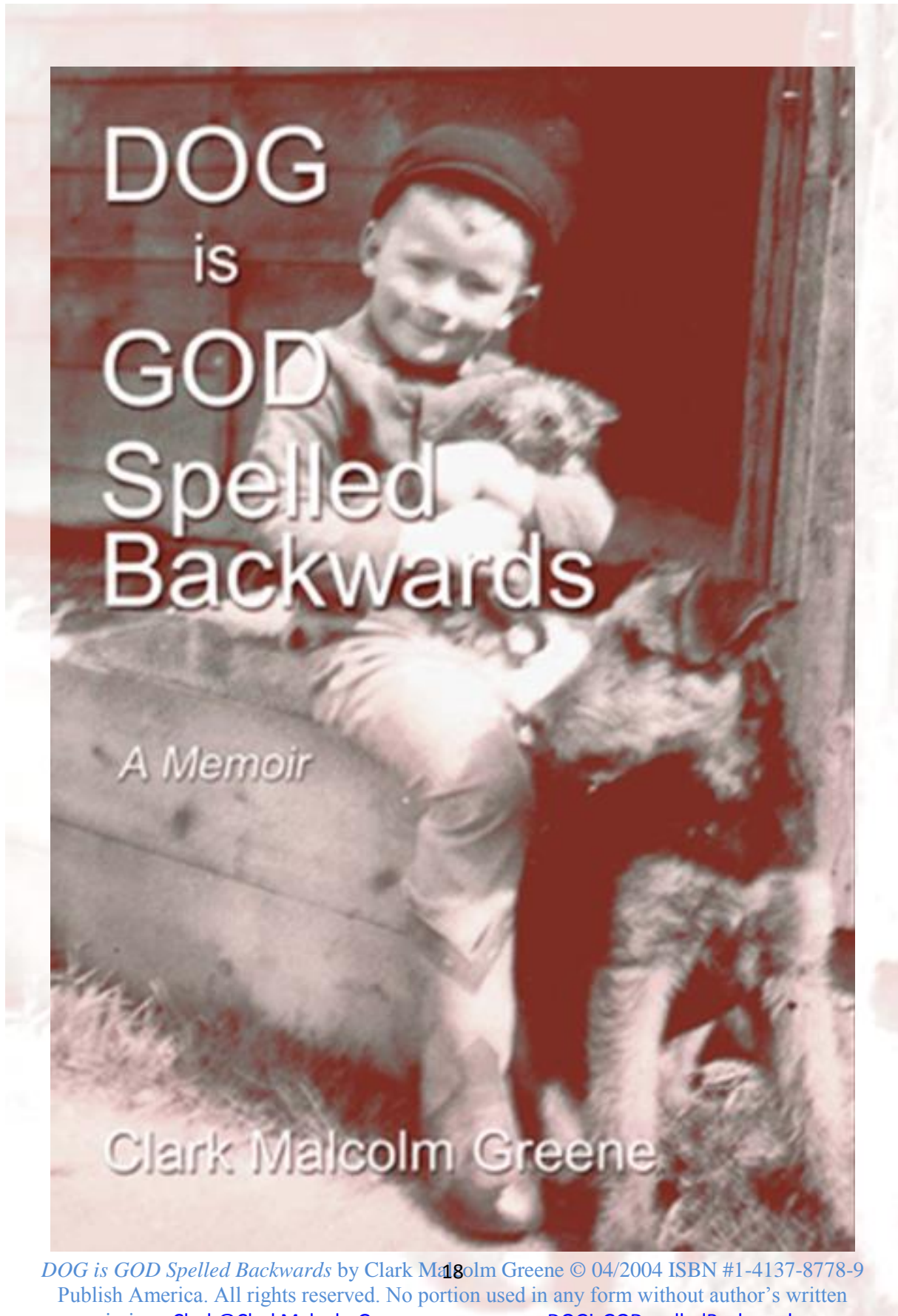
Chip was my shadow and my constant companion if I couldn't figure out how to lose him. He could and would scream like a banshee at the slightest provocation, and sometimes even with none. We had a hundred adventures that other siblings only get to imagine. Chip was my confidant and confessor and more than a few times my betrayer as well. My brother got me into more trouble and conflicts and we had more fun together than five regular brothers were allotted. I loved him then as now with a ferocity reserved only for my brother.

The youngest Greene child was Phoebe Erma (in reality Peg), the object of my immediate affection and eternal devotion. Peg was born on Christmas Day when I was six and from the first moment I just knew she was related to Jesus. When my father carried her through the door I was smitten. She was blonde, brown-eyed and cute as a button.

Peg was named after both grandmothers, although they had to pretend to spell Grandma I.G.'s first name with "E". Peg's initials wouldn't have been quite as charming with "I" for Irma and we sure couldn't have used them as her nickname. Mom kept her in pink and white dresses and her hair in fat sausage curls just like Shirley Temple. As soon as Peg could talk she made up extraordinary tales of flying skunks and a boyfriend named Charge who dyed his hair a different color every day. She eternally enchanted every person she smiled at, for once graced by Peg's pleasantries, people were promised eternity. I pampered her and loved her, and as a boy, who had just turned six, quickly knew it would be my privilege to die for her if the need arose.

I was just a mediocre kid who had a great place to grow up. Even with the extraordinary influences of parents and relatives I'd not have made it far without some other help.

Patch was the other member of the family. It's a good thing she came along when she did.



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