**Arbuckle Stories** 

 From Belle Vue Farm

Chapter 17

 “The Stray Dog**”**

 **By Jim Arbuckle**

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 This is a memory back when I was 12 years old. While there was a stray dog, most of the story is fiction; The story is based on William Stuart’s short story **“A Stray Passed by Here.”**

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 Does everything happen in spring time on Belle Vue farm? It seems as though it does! Winters are usually harsh, but full of memories. Summers are usually hot and full of days working in the hay. Autumns are full of cattle sales and making apple cider. But one spring, left a particular memory.

 Alex Arbuckle, his son Lockhart and grandson Jim were rolling up old fence wire one afternoon in late March when they heard Kate, the Border collie dog barking. Lockhart asked Jim if he knew what Kate was barking about. Jim had no idea and was as puzzled as his uncle and grandfather. No sooner had Lockhart yelled and told Kate to be quiet, than they saw a dark colored dog walking slowly off in the distance. The dog was too far off to tell its breed or color, but it appeared to be a large dog and it did not appear that it was bothering the sheep. After watching it for a few minutes and seeing it walking away in the opposite direction, all went back to work with the fence wire

 Two hours later the men were finished and four rolls of old wire sat tied on the trailer. As Jim climbed on the tractor with Lockhart, Kate jumped on the edge of the wagon with Alex as it bumped down through the pastures, of newborn spring grass. The ride would soon be much smoother as the tractor and wagon came out of the field and onto Arbuckle Lane. A mile later, Lockhart slowed down and then stopped in front of the pond.

 “What’s wrong – you thirsty?” Alex called out to his son.

 “Look!” Lockhart yelled pointing his finger.

 There standing next to a fence post was the same dog that they had spotted earlier. It was a brown dog and it looked tired and confused, and did not even attempt to bark as Lockhart approached. The dog did not appear to be injured, just tired and probably starved.

 As Lockhart picked the big dog up and put it on the back of the wagon, Kate was barking as Alex and Jim held on to the dog as Lockhart jumped back on the tractor and continued on to the barn.

 When Lockhart reached the house, Alex and Jim lifted the dog off as it slowly walked to the back yard.

 “For pity sake,” Carrie said. “Where did you get the dog?”

 “We found it wandering around, Nana!” Jim said rubbing the brown dog. “It’s a nice dog and I know he is hungry.”

 “He’s just a stray!” Alex said. “If he belonged to anybody he would have a collar. Get him some bread to eat.”

 “Mercy me, he does not look like an old dog,” Carrie said. “He sure is a big dog though. Jimmy, go in the pantry and get some old bread in the box. Alex, are you going to get her some water?”

 “It’s a he,” Alex laughed. “No, I’m going to barn and get ready to milk. Let Jimmy get the dog some water.”

 Jim soon took a liking to the stray dog. The dog ate all the bread and drank the water, but what he enjoyed most was Jim’s rubbing and talking to him as he lay panting in the grass. As Jim walked toward the house, the big dog followed him right to the kitchen door and then lay on the porch as if he felt at home.

 Alex and Lockhart had finished the evening milking when they spotted a white truck down at the house. Alex was glad to see that it was his good friend and veterinary, Jimmy Mann. But Alex was not very happy when he learned that his grandson Jim had called Dr. Mann to check the stray dog.

 “Oh calm down, Alex!” Dr. Mann laughed as he examined the dog. “I’m not going to charge you an arm and a leg.”

 “I’ll take it out of this boy’s hide!” Alex said looking directly at Jim.

 “The dog does not appear to have any broken bones,” Dr. Mann said as he examined him. He has no head injuries or fever. I guess the dog is probably four to six years of age. And I’d also guess that he a shepherd dog. He is not starved and by his temperament, the dog has an owner. He has no collar, but he could have lost it. He just needs some rest, a little love and some steady dog food. This dog belongs to somebody, but the question is, who?”

 “Well, I’ve never seen the dog before this,” Alex said. “I guess I could have Carrie to call around and see if anyone is missing a dog.”

 “Okay,” Dr. Mann said. “I’ll also put up a notice in my office, and maybe I can get it posted in the paper. Call me if you need me, or if the dog should begin to act strange. I’ll see you Alex.”

 “Where do you think you are going?” Alex asked as Jim led the dog to the porch.

 “I’m going to brush him,” Jim said. “Then I’m going to make him a bed in the chicken house with Kate. “I’ve named him Wander because he is a wandering dog”

 “I don’t care if you named him Thunder,” Alex said with a frown. “Where do you get off calling the vet to check that stray dog? I ought to make you sleep in the chicken house with the dog!”

 “I just wanted to make sure he was okay,” Jim said. “I’ll take care of him and he can eat some of my dog, Tippy’s food. He won’t be any trouble and I can pay you for the vet.”

 “Pay me for the vet!” Alex laughed. “You don’t have enough money to pay a beggar to beg! But you are going to help Lockhart and me around here to pay for your stupidity! And you are not going to keep that dog here forever!”

 As Alex headed back to the barn, Lockhart carried the last of the milk to the house. “Jimmy, come in here and turn the separator crank!” Lockhart yelled. “What are you going to do with your dog?”

 “Just keep it here and feed it,” Jim replied. “I don’t know why Dat gets so up in the air. It’s not hurting him!”

 “Well!” Lockhart said with a sigh. “You know daddy never wanted a dog around who never pulls its weight on the farm.”

 “Well, it’s my dog,” Jim said. “My dog Tippy never does anything to pull his weight.”

 “Go on and crank the separator!” Lockhart said. “Hurry up, so I can take mother some fresh cream.”

 “Jimmy sure has taken a liking to that dog,” Carrie said that night as she knitted in the dining room.

 “He has no business keeping that dog!” Alex said. “The dog does not belong here!”

 “Oh Alex,” Carrie laughed. “Show Jimmy some understanding and don’t be so upset over a dog.”

 “Understanding has to be earned!” Alex said. “I’m going to bed. We’ve got cattle to work in the morning. By the way, call Louise and see if Jimmy can come over here after school and help Lockhart and me for a few days. Maybe next time he’ll think twice before he calls a vet without permission! Goodnight.”

 In a few days, Wander was still wandering around the house and barn. Although Alex and Lockhart had reservations about the new dog he would run with Kate as they worked the cattle and sheep. But most of the time he was with Jim or running behind his horse when Jim would ride in the fields.

 Dr.Jimmy Mann phoned the next morning to say that he still knew of no one who had lost a dog, but that he would continue to post and keep his ears open.

 By mid morning, Jim and Wander went to the sheep barn to watch Alex and Lockhart dock lambs. After lunch, Wander followed Jim to the pond to fish. Jim was amazed how Wander would bring a stick back to him that he had tossed. But in ways the dog was shy. He seemed to shy away when Alex, Lockhart or any company that would come, but still he was always running, barking and wanting to play.

 When all returned from church on Sunday, Lockhart discovered that Kate had finally delivered her puppies. And when Jim went to the barn to see - there was Wander, sitting a few yards away, watching as Kate nursed her pups.

 Tuesday after school, as Jim rode to the farm, Carrie laughed when she saw Wander right behind. “Mercy me,” Carrie said. “Jimmy, I do believe you have found another dog. What does your mother and Thomas Alex say?”

 “They don’t care,” Jim said as he jumped off his pony and grabbed a stick on the ground. “Nana, watch! Watch Wander get this stick! Fetch, Wander! Bring the stick back to me, boy!”

 “Mercy me!” Carrie laughed as she watched the brown dog catch the stick in his mouth. “How did you teach him to bring the stick back to you like that?”

 “I didn’t!” Jim said as he threw the stick in the air again. “He already knew how to do it.”

 “Probably his owner taught him the trick,” Carrie said. “Jimmy, you know that dog belongs to someone.”

 “Why does everyone keep saying that?” Jim said. “Just because the dog is not wild, doesn’t mean that he belongs to someone. The dog was tired and dirty when he came here. He didn’t even have a collar. It doesn’t seem to me like anyone owns him.”

 For the next month, Wander was still at Belle Vue. There was no word on anyone missing a dog and that made Jim happy. Alex too had grown fond of the dog, and Kate seemed to like a second dog around. His bark was fierce for those he did not know. Running with Kate, Lockhart thought that he had all the makings of a good drive dog. And he was also a kind dog and always wagged his tail and showed love for the family. But he was happiest when the family gave him their attention.

 Alex and Carrie’s grandchildren Johnson, Jane and little Alex arrived after church on Sunday. They were surprised and happy to see and meet the stray dog. After a big Sunday dinner, grandson Davis came over, as they ran and laughed as they threw a stick. Wander, of course would catch it in the air and bring it back to them. Jim, later changed his clothes, saddled his pony and rode over to Belle Vue. And once he began riding in the creamery field, right behind him for the afternoon was Wander.

 By mid week, the big dog was on hand as Alex and Lockhart white washed the yard fence. “I guess Jimmy has adopted that dog,” Alex laughed as Carrie brought them some water to drink.

 It was a warm morning when Dr. Mann drove up to the barn. “Doc, did you ever find out what was wrong with my Southdown buck?” Alex asked as the veterinary got out of his truck.

 “Just old age!” Doc Mann laughed. “Is that stray dog still around?”

 “You mean, Wander?” Alex said with a laugh. “I think he went to check fence with Lockhart. Has anyone heard anything?”

 “I got a call this morning,” Doc Mann said leaning on his truck. “The dog’s name is not Wander, it’s Hans!”

 “Hans?” Alex said with a laugh. “What kind of name is that for a dog?”

 “I can’t answer that, Alex,” Dr. Mann laughed. “I can tell you that the owner has come forth.”

 “Who does he belong to?” Alex asked.

 “A family named Vandevender about 50 miles north of here,” Doc Mann replied. “It seems the dog jumped out of the truck when they were down in Lewisburg seeing a doctor. They tried to find him, but had no luck. The dog is 4 years old. Now the Vandevender’s were planning on leaving this morning, so they should be down here anytime. They have a son who is anxious to get the dog back, and I imagine you are glad too.”

 “Jimmy won’t be too glad,” Alex said. “He and the dog have really become close.”

 “I kind of figured that,” Doc Mann laughed. “Then I’ll give you the job of telling him. Good luck, Alex!”

 It was another hour before Alex found Jim, and he had not seen Wander. Carrie later told him that the dog had gone with Lockhart to scoop the small pond in the orchard. A few minutes later Jim rode in on his pony looking for Wander.

 “Hans is out with Lockhart,” Alex said rubbing Jim’s pony on the neck.

 “What did you call him?” Jim said with a funny look on his face.

 “The vet was out a while ago,” Alex said. “The dog is named Hans and he belongs to a family of Vandevenders up above Marlinton. He belongs to their son, and he jumped out of the truck when they were down here seeing the doctor.”

 “What kind of cock and bull is that?” Jim said with a worried look on his face. “The dog is named Wander and he belongs to me! This is his home and he is my dog!”

 “The dog belongs to them, Squirt!” Alex said. “They should be here anytime to pick him up.”

 Around 4 pm, an old pick-up came up the driveway, and a short, bald headed man got out. “My name is Laurence Vandevender,” the man said as he shook hands with Alex. “This is my wife, Claudia and my son, Eddie. I believe our dog is here?”

 “We have a dog here!” Jim said coming from the back yard. “But he is my dog!”

 “Young man!” Claudia Vandevender said. “Here is a picture of our dog! We know he is here!”

 “This is my picture of my dog,” Eddie said handing a photo to Alex.

 “That’s the dog alright,” Alex said. “The dog is up at the barn. Jimmy, go on up and get the dog! Go on!”

 “I’m not giving them that dog,” Jim said as all looked surprised. “I’ve been taking care of this dog, and I’m going to keep him!”

 “Stop acting like a nut!” Alex yelled. “Here, look at this picture. A blind man can tell that this is the dog we have. Now go on up to the barn and get the dog!”

 Still disgusted, Jim walked toward the barn to get the dog. A few minutes, little Eric yelled when he saw the big muddy brown dog running toward him. “H-a-n-s! Eddie yelled as he threw his arm around the dog. “You are covered in mud.

 “Where has our dog been?” Claudia yelled. “He is filthy!”

 “He’s been with my son,” Alex laughed. “He has been cleaning out a pond.”

 “Hello!” Carrie said as she walked over to the Vandevender’s. “Why don’t you come in the house for some refreshment before you start back? I know that you all are tired.”

 “Why don’t you boys clean the dog up?” Alex said. “I’ll get a wash tub, soap and a brush.”

 As the Vandevender’s followed Carrie in the dining room for some ice tea, Jim and little Eddie began giving the big brown dog a bath in the back yard.

 “I sure do thank you for taking care of Hans,” little Eddie said as he put soap on the dog. “I thought he was lost forever. We looked and looked after he jumped out of the truck, but we could not find him.”

 “How long have you had him?” Jim asked as he washed the dog’s legs in the wash tub.

 “Ever since he was puppy,” Eddie replied. “I was only five when we got Hans. I’m just so glad that we found him.”

 “How come you named him Hans?” Jim asked as he poured water over the soapy dog.

 “My mother named him,” Eddie said with a smile. “We are Dutch, and my mom said there was once a brave dog in Holland that saved a group of people in a storm. I don’t know too much about it, but the dog was named Hans, and that is why Mother wanted to name him Hans. What have you been calling him since he was here?”

 “His name was Wander,” Jim said in a low voice. “But I guess his name is Hans now.”

 “Do you have a dog?” Eric asked looking at Jim.

 “Yeah!” Jim said. “He’s a Collie dog named Tippy. He’s about a mile from here at my home. Say, Kate over there has some puppies at the barn. Would you like to go up and see?”

 “Oh boy!” Eddie yelled. “Hans is clean now! Let’s go up and see!”

 As the boys went to the barn to see the puppies, the Vandevender’s talked in the house with Alex and Carrie. “Mr. Arbuckle,” Claudia said walking over to Alex. “I want to thank you for caring for our dog.”

 “No thanks needed,” Alex said. “I’m just glad the boy found his dog. Luck to you all!”

 “I’m sorry that this grieves your grandson,” Mr. Vandevender said. “I know he has become real close to the dog.”

 “Oh, he’ll be alright,” Alex laughed. “He’s got a dog, so he’ll be okay.”

 A few minutes later, the Vandevender’s were ready to head home. They walked out in the back yard as Alex yelled for the boys. In a short time Hans and Kate came barking from the barn as Jim and Eddie followed. “Mama!” Eddie yelled. “Their dog has puppies, Mama! Jimmy said that I could have one! Can I, Mama?”

 “No, no!” Claudia said with a smile,” as Laurence, Carrie and Alex all laughed. “One dog is enough! “Now get Hans in the truck so we can head home.”

 “Will you write me, Jimmy?” Eric said. “If you do, I’ll write and tell you how Hans is.”

 “Sure!” Jim said. “I’ll write and send you a picture of my dog, Tippy.”

 “Thanks again for taking care of my dog,” Eddie said to Jim, as Hans jumped in the truck.

 “You’re welcome!” Jim said as he gave the dog a pat on the head. “Goodbye, Hans, and you be good.”

 All stood in the back yard and waved as the Vandevender’s old truck went down the road. Eddie waved as Laurence sounded the horn as they pulled on to Arbuckle Lane.

 “Let’s go and help Lockhart milk,” Alex said to Jim, as Carrie said that she would begin supper.

 “I’m hungry!” Jim said. “Nana, can I have some cookies first?”

 “Eat!,” Alex laughed as he grabbed a milk bucket. “If that boy worked as much as he ate, all the work would be done.”

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 Written by Jim Arbuckle in 1990

Come with me in Chapter 18 and learn about Arbuckle Fort and Chief Cornstalk. This is Jim Arbuckle and I hope you enjoyed.