

Jeronimo

WALTER HICKS

Besides being my favorite pet, Jeronimo could also be classified as my "most unforgettable character." He was a part of my life for a relatively short period of time, considering the life span of man; but so many events occurred in that year that it seemed much longer.

Jeronimo came as a complete surprise to me. His father and mother were snow white, as were his previous brothers and sisters, but not Jeronimo.

Having expected the stork during the night, I rushed to the basement the first thing the following morning to see how many mouths I had to feed. From first appearances I had a healthy litter of five on my hands. On closer observation it flashed across my brain that there was something wrong. I look again — more closely this time and there, curled up and fast asleep, was a spotted rat.

All through his infancy Jeronimo was my favorite, although I tried not to show any partiality. While I was teaching this young generation to crawl up one arm and down the other, Jeronimo took a short cut down my back and into my right coat pocket where he promptly went to sleep. This show of intelligence touched me deeply, and I immediately resolved to give him private tutoring, so I let him stay in my pocket. Except during school hours, we were inseparable. Everyday I took great pains in preparing his ground corn, greens, cheese, and vitamin capsule to insure his perfect health.

Having made my right hand pocket his home, I became so used to his tense weight I often forgot for hours at a time that he was there. These were the times

when he would usually stick his nose curiously over the top of my pocket to see what the people of the immediate vicinity were doing at this particular time. Of course there would always be some timid, unsuspecting females in the vicinity who were partial to rats sticking their heads out of people's pockets; and would give forth with a hideous shriek or scream. This, of course, amused me no end and it was not long before the femal population of my unappreciative town voted me the individual with the most distorted sense of humor.

In spite of Jeronimo's untactful habit of scaring people he was very intelligent. He always awakened at mealtime, would never indulge in more than two drops of brandy a day, nor made his presence known when a dog or cat were near. I taught him to avoid traps of various natures — also to steal cheese from my mother's pantry when she was in another part of the house.

Jeronimo's death still remains a mystery to me. One evening he was happily scaring people to his heart's content and the next morning he was very much dead in his little box on my dresser. He was given the best funeral possible. I dressed him in cheese cloth and buried him in a casket made from a cheese box. Services were conducted by his very good friend, the future Reverend "Gooch" Van Alstine while another admirer, "Dunce" Verner played taps.

Many ardent friends, admirers, and yes even enemies sent flowers because Jeronimo had become a well known character in the city of Algona.