

## "Dog vs. Babysitter"

When I was growing up, we always had pets in the house, especially dogs. My favorite was our poodle, Sinbad. He was not a cute poodle, the kind you dress up like Jon Benet Ramsey for a beauty contest, but a troublemaker and my partner in crime.

Even though I was an only child, I never felt like one, not when I was around with my bro who just happened to have a tail. My babysitter Sheila was terrified of Sinbad, even though he only weighed about 20 pounds.

Whenever she came over to sit with me, Sheila always asked my mom, "Is Sinbad locked up?" My mom would assure her that Sinbad was safely locked away in her bedroom, and he was, until my mom left. I would sneak to her room and quietly crack the door just enough for Sinbad to open it all the way with his black wet nose.

Seconds later, he'd be running towards the kitchen where Sheila was cooking dinner. She'd go into a panic at the sound of his little toenails tapping against the hallway floor, coming closer and closer. The seventeen-year-old would quickly climb a bar stool in our kitchen where Sinbad would "tree her."

While she squirmed and yelled at the top of the barstool, he'd jump, click his teeth, and try to bite her feet. She'd call for me to help, but I would feign fear, "Gosh, I don't want Sinbad to bite me." While Sinbad had Sheila treed on top of the barstool or kitchen counter, I would stay up late and watch TV.

Those lovely moments brought me a great deal of joy, but for some odd reason Sheila stopped being my babysitter. In her place, I got an old cranky woman named Mrs. Brigg, who wasn't afraid of fierce poodles.

To make matters worse, my mother gave Sinbad away. Maybe she was afraid of being sued. Once, he ran over to the next-door neighbor's yard and bit our elderly neighbor on the foot. But in Sinbad's defense, our 80-something neighbor did wear an eye patch, so it's possible that he may have mistaken her for a pirate.

When mom gave Sinbad away, it was more than just the loss of my dog; it was the end of my tender childhood. Seemingly overnight, I went from kid to baggage handler.

I say "baggage handler" because it seemed like, after a certain age, I was always carrying luggage for a visiting relative (we lived in Orlando, next Disney World, so that happened often). Fortunately, that era of involuntary servitude ended when I decided to unionize myself and asked for wages and a tip.

But I'll never forget those precious moments with Sinbad, who gave this only child an amazing childhood. Sinbad showed me that you could make your own fun. You didn't need video games or an iPod to enjoy life. Kids today, who are wired to pre-packaged entertainment 24/7, just don't know the fun they're missing.