



It's kind of interesting the way we perceive our animals, especially pets, these days.

I am not making fun of anyone – My Beloved and I absolutely spoil our dogs shamelessly. But this is a little odd, because I don't think either of us was raised that way.

In our house, dogs were meant to live outside and be useful, productive members of the family. In fact, back in the day, the family bird dog enjoyed greater stature than most children, as evidenced by my grandfather's habit of letting his bird dog ride in the front of his pick up truck while my three uncles who were working for him at the time rode in the bed of the truck, rain or shine. Granddaddy reasoned that any idiot can dig a ditch but it takes real genius to find a covey of quail hidden in broom sedge using only your nose.

Even when I was growing up, one was so much as pretending to make, much less sell, dog food designed for canine digestive tracts and maximum dietary needs. The closest thing I remember to that was some canned dog food company trying to tell the public their product was as good as meat from the butcher shop. They even had this commercial, featuring some creepy guy wearing a butcher's smock and holding a meat cleaver in one hand and a can of the dog food in the other. He would flash the camera this unnerving smile, slam his cleaver into a chopping block, and intone, "It's meat made complete."

Whether that meat came from cows or missing hitchhikers is a question I've often pondered over the years, mostly during bouts of incurable insomnia.

At our house, it didn't matter anyway. The dogs lived in a pen and ate the cheapest dry pellets available in bulk, along with table scraps and the occasional scoop of pure bacon grease.

"It'll make their coats shiny," Dad would say.

With that diet, they would usually live to be about 10-12 years old.

We now know such dietary practices to be a heathenish, unenlightened, and harmful because the people who sell expensive designer dog food told us so. Fortunately, thanks to them and all these newfangled, carefully prepared and thrice as expensive dog foods they sell us, our dogs now can live to be about 10-12 years old.

Times and attitudes change. I'm sure it has more to do with affluence more than enlightening attitudes toward animal welfare. Back in the day, most folks lived in the country and nothing, but nothing went to waste. You were good to your animals because your life depended on it, not because you considered them family. If you've ever heard the story of the Yankee who saw a farmer feeding a pig that had a wooden leg, then you know what I'm talking about.

Even my parents have childhood memories of the family flock of chickens scratching around the back door patiently waiting their turn to be the centerpiece on the Sunday dinner table. In fact, one of my uncles never ate chicken his entire life, not because he thought the practice cruel but because he saw one digging out and eating huge worms from around the outhouse.

But the true family classic is a story from my father's childhood, one that neatly sums up the title of this column.

Once, when my father and my aunts were still kids, there was an old battle-scarred, one-eyed rooster in the family flock named Butch. Apparently, Butch became something of a pet; he was always coming up to the children and letting them scratch his comb or eating seed corn out of their hands.

Alas, one day it was Butch's turn to take up residence on Grandmother's good china platter, and the mood around the house was right somber. The children took their seats around the table,

eyes misty, lower lips a tremble. My Grandfather told them to bow their heads to say grace.

Then he looked at the platter, a gluttonous glint in his eye, and with a big grin said,

“Well, hello there, Butch!”

Needless to say, Granddaddy didn't have to share that day.

[Read more Reflection & Refractions](#)