

1937 Article : Chico, Heroine or Faker



This story has been sitting in my stash donated by Mary Counihan for some time. Below you can see why I put off posting it as it needed some real work to make it readable. The beautiful artwork on it's own was worth the effort and I was also able to bring out enough contrast on the text to finally be able to read it for the first time myself. What a great story this is. Thank you so much Mary for this very unique find!



A Weekly Seattle Star Feature-----

1937

CHICO: HEROINE OR FAKER?

Tales of Real Dogs . . . By Albert Payson Terhune

This is another tale of a mourning dog. But I can't summon up the same sympathy for Chico as for Shep and Buster and Greyfriars Bobby and other dogs whose hearts and lives were wrecked by the loss of their owners. Indeed, I can't decide in my own mind whether Chico was a grieving heroine or a very clever faker.

Decide for yourselves. Here is her story:

She was a high-quality red chow. ("Chow-Chow" is the technical

name for the breed.) She belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Hill R. Dane, of Rockland, Maine.

Mrs. Dane and the chow were devoted to each other. Chico was fond of Mr. Dane, too, but her self-elected deity was his wife. Woman and dog went everywhere together.

Chico grew to know the various places where Mrs. Dane might be found when she had left home for a few hours without taking her dog along. And she would call at each of these residences or hotel or hop, in turn, until she caught up with her mistress.

The last destination to which Chico followed Mrs. Dane was the Knox hospital, whither the woman was taken when she fell desperately ill.

Below the Window

Whenever Chico was turned out of the hospital for the night, she would trot along the pathway outside the building, until she was directly below the window of her mistress' sickroom. There she would lie, till she was allowed indoors in the morning.

After a long illness, Mrs. Dane died, at the hospital. Chico knew well that her mistress was dead, that she no longer was at the hospital, that her body had been taken back to her own home for the funeral services.

So I can't understand the dog's next move, except on the ground that the visitors and the employes at the Knox hospital always had made a great fuss over the faithful chow's devotion to her sick mistress and had fed and petted and sympathized with the disconsolate

Went to Hospital

For, instead of staying at home with her bereft master, Chico went straight back to the hospital and took up her abiding place outside its walls. She spent her nights lying, as before, just beneath the window of the room Mrs. Dane had occupied so long.

Day and night she hung around the building, with a heartsick aspect that appealed to the sympathies of everyone who saw her. On the coldest and snowiest nights, all winter, she would sleep on the flagstones of the path under the sick-room window.

So far, so good. Perhaps Chico really was mourning whole-souledly for her dead owner. Or, perhaps her vanity was appealed to by the wholesale attention and feeding and petting which were showered upon her by the hospital people and by the public at large.

The newspapers printed much about Chico and her photograph became a familiar sight to all local readers. The public flocked to see the mourning chow, and to bring dainties and flattering attentions of all kinds to her.

A Big Hit

That kind of thing makes a tremendous hit with the average vain dog. Chico had won such treatment by professional loyalty to her mistress' memory. And she kept it up, thus insuring further attention and petting and food.

I infer this, from the fact that she became presently only a part-time mourner, altho always she would come back to the hospital for an hour or more each day, and on mild nights she still slept under the same window.

At other times she would accept the hospitality and the excellent food offered her by Mrs. E. M. O'Neill, proprietress of the Thorn-dike hotel on Main street, a former friend of Mrs. Dane's.

On cold nights she took to sleeping in the warm lobby of the hotel on a comfortable mat, instead of out on the flagstones of the hospital path. At various times during the day she would drop in for a square meal supplied her by Mrs. O'Neill.

Many Benefactors

Gradually Chico broadened her list of benefactors. By clever ob-

servation and a good memory, she learned what restaurants and markets and groceries were profitable ports of call, those whose proprietors or patrons would grow soft-hearted at the presence of the woe-ful mourner and would hand out palatable food to her.

When she was thru with her daily vigil outside the Knox Hospital, she would make a round of these places and would revel in the pity and the victuals lavished on her.

Meanwhile, Mr. Dean tried in vain to keep Chico at home. She would not stay there. At home there was no admiring circle of

people to caress her and to applaud her devotion to her mistress's memory.

Nor in any one home could there be such wholesale abundance and variety of food as at the numerous restaurants and markets which she honored with her daily presence. There was no place like home—to steer clear of. Elsewhere she could find infinitely more people and things to feed her vanity and her stomach.

Fond of Mr. Dean

She was as fond as ever of Mr. Dean. She would gallop up to him and greet him in ecstatic friendliness whenever he and she happened to meet or when he went to the hospital to try to coax her into coming back to his house with him.

But she was mighty well content with her own career as a public character and as a recipient of much food and of more praise and petting.

She had no intention whatever of giving up all these delights, just for the sake of becoming a home-body once more. And she let Mr. Dean understand this, very clearly indeed.

She developed a police-complex, too. Patrolman Charles Emery had met her several times on his beat or in the restaurants she cadged from. He and she became good friends. Chico ever had a craze for uniforms and for bright buttons.

Accordingly, every night, as Emery set out on his patrol duties, Chico was at the station house, waiting to accompany him. In gay self-importance she strutted at his side.

His Night Off

In less than a month she learned which was his one night off each week. On that night she did not go near the station house. Dogs are cleverer than most humans may suppose, in learning some special day in the week. (In my childhood, a farm "churn dog" near

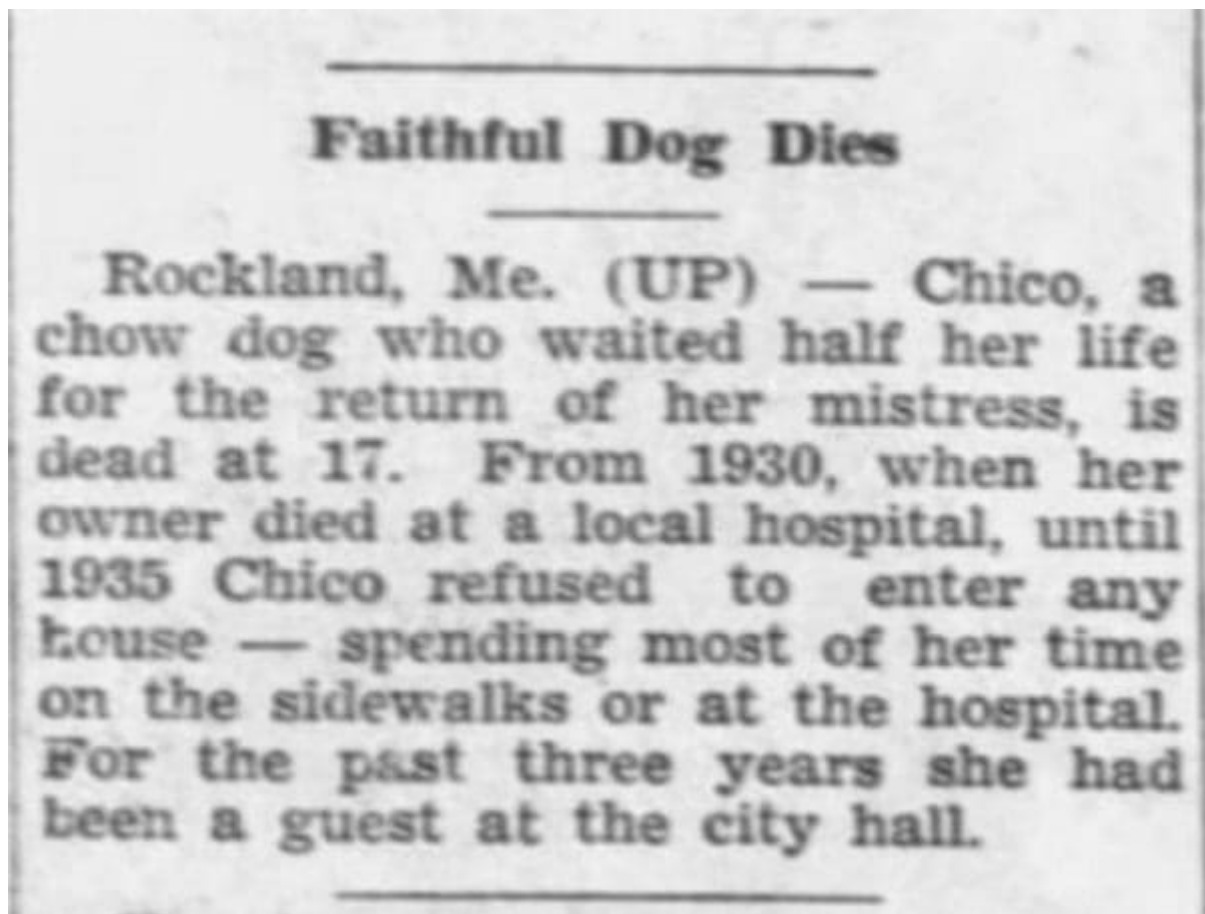
Sunnybank always ran away at earliest dawn on churning day.)

But it was when the local Legion Posts held a convention at Rockland that Chico was in her glory. I have said uniforms always exerted a strange fascination over her. And now here was a town full of uniformed men!

The chow was almost crazy with joyous delight. She amused the visiting Legionnaires by constituting herself a volunteer Reception Committee. So thrilled was she that, for the time, she devoted herself to the uniformed veterans to the almost total neglect of her life job of Professional Mourner.

Now do you understand what I meant when I said I could not make up my mind whether Chico was a grieving heroine or a shrewd faker? Which was she? Or was she a little of both?

BELOW IS FROM A 1939 NEWSPAPER. BLESS CHICO'S HEART...SHE LIVED
TO 17 YEARS OF AGE!



AFTER MORE DIGGING IN LOCAL NEWSPAPERS I FOUND YET ANOTHER
WONDERFUL ARTICLE ABOUT CHICO WITH HER PHOTO!

Source: Rotary International Magazine November , 1935



"Everyone here in Rockland, Maine, wonders about me, but that is nothing—I wonder about myself. I'm a dog, one of those chowchows."

I AM CHICO. I am not very happy. Everyone here in Rockland, Maine, wonders about me, but that is nothing—I wonder about myself. I'm a dog, one of those chowchows. I think that as a race we're rather sad, but once I was more than happy. Then my name fitted me. Now it doesn't, and I cringe a little every time I hear it.

My story isn't important. I don't

know why I'm telling it, but it's a true story, and something urges me to finish it now that I have started it.

You can guess how sweet living was back in the old days. I had the freshest and juiciest beef bones two or three times a week, some of that toothful canned food every day, a brisk combing now and then, and a solid, though unpretentious little house of my own in the backyard. But a thousand times more precious than any of these, I had a mistress who would sometimes confess that she thought me a good dog, a mistress whom it was very heaven to serve.

We got along perfectly, and I could never find enough things to do to reciprocate her kindnesses toward me. And how often, on the way home from market for example, did I not reprove fate for making dogs so helpless. When my mistress was at home, my spirits were as blithe as a pup's. When she was away, they sank deep into the bogs of melancholy. If anyone had hurt her, I am sure that I—in spite of my love of peace—would have torn him into fragments. But it was not given me to prove my affections thus.

They took my mistress down town in a big, white automobile one day many years ago, and I tried to follow them all through the doorway of a great, spotless building, but they wouldn't let me. Then I stretched out in front of the place. There was nothing else to do.

I stayed there a long time. Other dogs went by. They bored me. People and automobiles passed. I could not think of them. Night fell and I must have grown hungry, but I took no notice. "She is in there, and if I wait here she will come out," I said over and over to myself. But she did not come though I

waited and waited for days and days.

"Chico, here! Up here!" I heard at last one morning, and in a window that I had not seen before was a woman. Was it my mistress? It *was* she. She waved and whistled faintly to me. We chows are reserved and do not like emotional display, but at that moment, out of sheer ecstasy, I let go of my restraint and must have done the wildest of dog dances. I barked. I was *more* than happy. When I stopped my foolishness and looked up, my mistress was gone from the window.

"She is on her way down now. She is almost as glad to see me as I am to see her," I thought. And so I waited. But she did not come. Now I have waited here five years and she has not come, and I do not know why.

Maine is a cold country in winter, and the snow which falls at night as I lie on the sidewalk often covers all of me but my nose. But there is always that hope, "She'll come to the window in a minute, in just one more minute." It keeps me warm.

Most people do not understand me. I go each morning to my mistress' home, trot up the steps, but, stopping on the porch, I turn quickly and go back down. Then I go to the big building where they took my mistress, and someone there

gives me a pan of meat scraps. Then I go to my spot on the sidewalk and there I stay all day. Sometimes I see my mistress passing down the street and dash after her in joyous panic. And then it is not she at all. And I am bitterly fooled. And so I go back to my post. It is so useless to say why I do these things. And I am growing so old.

Once, not long ago, a man whom they called "Paul" * stopped at this big building, and after a little while we saw each other. I think he may have nearly understood what I feel. At least, he always asks folks from this town about "Chico," and the answer is always the same, always "still waiting."

The kind man whom my mistress loved and married still lives in the old house. Many times he has asked me to come back to the scene of my happiest years. And when I turn away he knows it is not ingratitude that makes me do so. He knows I cannot come back—until my mistress comes back, too.

* Paul Harris, founder of Rotary International, on a visit to Vinalhaven, Maine, which is across the bay from Rockland, some years ago, stopped for medical treatment in the hospital where Mrs. Rae Dane, the mistress in this true story, died. At that time he saw the dog and learned its story for which THE ROTARIAN is indebted to Governor Alan L. Bird, 38th Rotary District.