

## Shep - Billy

Shep was the ABSOLUTE BEST DOG EVER! I'm not sure how old I was when Dad got him, but I was glad he didn't get another beagle which he used for rabbit hunting. Shep was a pure bred Collie - and smart as a dog will ever be. From the day he came to our house on Springfield Rd. I knew we were kindred spirits. He may have been acquired to herd our chickens and goats, but he was my co-conspirator when it came to teasing my sister Ruth, (with crude twine I attached the owl's beak to his face & he chased my sister from one end of our farm to the other); he was our sandlot mascot, fetching our baseballs when they accidentally landed on ole man Charlie Gibbs' property; he was my confidante and I could tell him anything knowing he'd keep my secret; furthermore he was a MALE, something once my Dad took ill we needed more of at our house; Shep was my best friend and even allowed me to cry into his fur - something I would never let my Mom or sisters see me do and unfortunately became an all too frequent activity when I learned that my Dad was dying...

Now, my Mother wasn't ever too fond of our dogs and insisted that they sleep on the back porch or in the barn. Pop'em on the other hand loved Shep. I often overheard her tell my Mom (her daughter), "Rosella, let the boy bring Shep into the house, look at him, he misses his Father, this is the least we can do - it'll bring a smile to his face." I remember more than once Pop'em helping me sneak Shep into my bedroom at night- "Essa Billy Essa" (that meant hurry in German) "now, this is just between us Jimmy, and you have to promise to let him back outside before your Mother wakes up" Then she'd sing me & Shep one of her German Lullabies, kiss me on both cheeks, (never just one!), and quietly close my door.

The night after my Father died I didn't think twice - I simply opened the back door and called him in... from that day on Shep always slept with me and my Mom never said another word about it...