

A Vietnam Vet's Tale

M.D. Smith, IV

I've got memories from the Vietnam war that I wish I didn't have. Wishin don't mean nothin. Bad memories after I got home too that ain't much better. I couldn't keep a woman or a job and found myself homeless, living on the streets and under bridges in Nashville.

I been down pretty low. Several times, specially in the winter, I thought I'd end it all. Came pretty close. That'd be the end of ole Frank Engle.

Soon after I had one of the worse times, a ray of sunshine came into my life. He weren't much at all. Just a scruffy tiny mutt that looked part Maltese and part something else. He was mostly bones with a tad of skin the day I found him whining behind a few cardboard boxes in an alley. He could barely walk, staggering when he tried.

Well, I had some scraps of food to give him, and I found more in garbage behind some eating places I knew. Nursed that matted ball of fur and bones back to health.

As the days warmed, I'd sit and tell my little dog about the fun I had when I was a kid. He's a good listener and turns his head when I talk to him.

I said, "*My pappy would sing some old ragtime songs and we sure had some fun. My momma could play the piano and we'd sing 'Rufus Rastus Johnson Brown. Whatcha gonna do when the rent comes round?'*"

Then, I had a good idea. I remember my eyes lit up.

"Hey, dog, you ain't got a name. By golly, your name's Rufus."

I carried Rufus in the pocket of my too large old overcoat. I'd gotten an old brush and comb and got him right presentable lookin' so as he wouldn't scare little kids. They liked to come up and pet him in my pocket and he had an eager lick on the face for any kid that got close enough.

I remember when that TV news car pulled up alongside me and asked if they could they do a story about me and my dog in my pocket. I told them, "*I suppose so.*" I think it ran on their news that Friday night, and I heard tell all that weekend. Guess things were slow for news.

Well, damndest thing happened. People started stopping when they saw me. Wanted to take a picture of me and Rufus. Lots of them gave me money. Cops tipped their hat to me. Then a newspaper man stopped by and before I knew it, I was offered a job, a place to stay that'd allow my best buddy, and my days with Rufus have been pretty dog-gone sunny ever since.

"So, Rufus, I guess I owe you a lot more than you owe me for putting some meat on your bag of bones," I told him. *"I don't know if I saved you or you saved me. Probably both."*

He just barked and licked my face.

John E Carson: This story is for you. On the occasion near your birthday, all the class appreciates your time and efforts to help us become better writers.

M.D.