



JRB ART
AT THE ELMS
Pasco Arts District

THE FIRST MAN I EVER LOVED

By Joy Reed Belt

When I was born my father was completing his doctorate at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Family lore has it that he was totally besotted with his new daughter and took me everywhere, even pushing my carriage around Churchill Downs while memorizing Greek and Hebrew. My mother told me that I never cried when I was with my father, not even as an infant. While reflecting on Dad this past Father's Day weekend, I was struck by the enormous influence he and his memory have been throughout my life.

Dad was an intelligent person. Both book and street smart, he was also quick witted, curious, and decisive. All and all my Dad was a vital and energetic man with a great sense of humor and very strong opinions which he readily and frequently shared. He was not a bit concerned if his daughter wanted to hear his opinions. He shared.

My father was a risk taker who was interested in many things. Dad was a wonderful amateur photographer, who spent many evenings documenting places and things that were of interest to him. He had a good eye for composition and gave me his favorite camera, a Range Finder Leica. One of my father's other interests was breeding dogs. He helped develop the AKC standard for the American Foxhound and became an AKC dog judge. One year, after judging in the Westminster Show at Madison Square Gardens, he suffered a massive heart attack on the plane and never regained consciousness.

Despite being named after a confederate general, my Dad was not a racist. When I was really small, he taught me the song: "Jesus loves the little children. All the children of the world. Red, yellow, or black or white, Jesus loves the little children of the world." Last week when I decided to close the Gallery on Juneteenth, I thought about those lyrics and about my father.



Personal Collection of Black and White Photographs in JRB Gallery Restroom

While I inherited my love of art and design from my lovely and sainted mother, it was my Dad from whom I got my love of books. An inveterate reader and collector of books, it was he who opened a charge account for me at the local bookstore in the town where I attended college and again in the first city to which I moved after graduation. However he would always admonish the owner of the book shop to try make sure I only bought “good books, not the crazy ones she likes to read.”

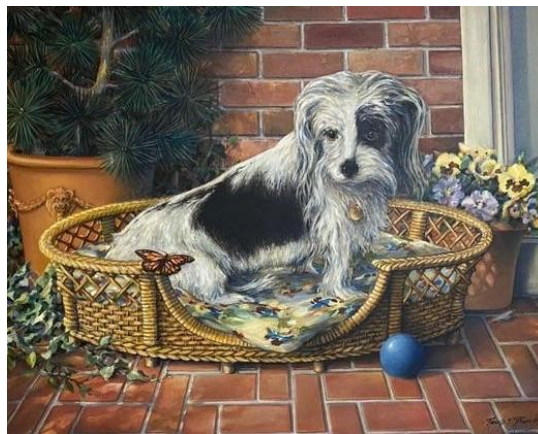
But there was not always sweetness and light in our relationship. As I began to mature, Dad and I didn’t seem to agree about much of anything. I thought he was too strict and demanding; that his standards were too high. Once I remember accusing him of “ruining my life by not letting me do what ALL the other girls were doing.” He looked at me and very calmly said, “You think I’m ruining your life? Really? I thought I was behaving rather well, because what I really want to do is lock you in a closet until you are 30 years old so you will be safe.”

Dad was disappointed when I exhibited not the least bit of interest in showing horses or dogs. In fact, I kept falling off the horses no matter how fancy the saddle. But I did learn to love dogs of unknown origins, which I continue to rescue.



"Joy Joy,"

Commissioned from Behnaz Sohrabian,
JRB's rescue dog, Joy Joy,
NFS



"Destiny,"

Commissioned from Ron Roberts,
JRB's rescue dog, the late Destiny,
NFS

When I accused Dad of intimidating every young man I ever wanted to date. He snorted and said that maybe I should spend more time finding young men who he couldn't intimidate. Fast forward many years, many young men and many relationships later. Finally, I brought John Belt home. John walked toward my Dad with his hand out and called him by his first name. Everybody in the room gasped. No one called my Dad by his first name. But John was not the least bit intimidated. He and my father met as equals and always enjoyed each other's company. Although neither Dad nor John are still with me, I think of them daily. On special days, I think of them a lot. Here's to you Dad. You were the first man I ever loved.

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