

WAITING AT THE BRIDGE

The sentimental legend of the Rainbow Bridge conjures up the scene in my mind of the Gene Kelly and Van Johnson discovering the bridge that leads into the beautiful and eternal Scottish village of Brigadoon. The story embodies the belief that love endures forever, and by faith one can choose to live in the land of forever love.

Is the Rainbow Bridge really real? Do dogs go to heaven? In poetry and prose through the centuries, dog lovers have expressed what we all feel about this question.

And if there's no heaven for love like that,
For such four-legged fealty—well!
If I have any choice, I tell you flat
I'll take my chances in hell. (Edmund V. Cooke)

And as someone else put it a bit more crudely, "Heaven would be a hell of a place without dogs!" Scottiedom's resident poet, Lee Netzler, has composed four-lines that say it all:

A heaven without dogs
isn't where I'd care to be.
If heaven's not for him,
then it's surely not for me.

Even I have clumsily tried to express my feelings in a similar way:

Black nose, brown eyes, velvet ears,
a familiar sight for many years;
Heart and soul my own is bought:
How will I live when my dog is not?

There are those who seem to know without a doubt the answer to our hope. In one of the chapters of his book, *Dog Stories*, a dying old woman asks author James Herriot if her dogs and cats will go to heaven. He tells her that her pets will go to be where she is. "That is what you really believe, isn't it?" the old woman responds. Dr. Herriot, a British veterinarian, then said, "With all my heart I believe it. If having a soul means being able to feel love and loyalty and gratitude, then animals are better off than a lot of humans." Robert Louis Stevenson wrote: "You think dogs will not go to heaven? I tell you, they will be there long before any of us."

These sentiments are heard and felt by all ordinary people who have experienced the sublime pleasure of canine companionship and suffered the profound grief of their loss.

Love is so crucial to Christian doctrine, the thought that there will be no animals in heaven is untenable for many believers. We cannot conceive of a heaven without the creatures whose love in this life is such an incomparable enrichment to our existence. Many veterinarians who see the interaction between people and their animal companions close up and personal, express the belief that they themselves expect to find animals in heaven.

Who can doubt that the dog, whose faculties in many ways are superior to our own, in sight, smell, hearing, intuition, instinct, love, honesty, fidelity, and forgiveness, will be admitted to the higher state of foreverness? Myths and legends usually express either our deepest hopes or the truth. The Rainbow Bridge is our entrance to Brigadoon, the eternal village. Is it surprising that heaven looks a lot like the homeland of our beloved little terriers?

