

This Week
MAGAZINE

MAKING OF
A HERO -

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Dear Contributor:

We regret to inform you that your story does not fit our current fiction needs and we are returning the manuscript. Because of the large number of stories we receive each week it is not possible to give a personal comment, but you may be sure the story has been carefully considered and that we are grateful to every writer who submits fiction to THIS WEEK.

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Approximately 2000 words

MAKING OF A HERO
by Joseph Ishikawa

That circumstances make heroes is an undisputed fact; and while it is true that heroic natures are best prepared for feats of heroism when circumstances demand them, it is also true that quite ordinary natures are sometimes made to appear heroic by chance. This applies to dogs as well as to human beings, and it was quite by chance that a nondescript mongrel named Rags, who was the despair of his master, became a hero.

Rags was one of a litter of five pups. His mother was a clever, alert dog who performed numerous tricks; she was wholly devoted to her owner's little son and on one occasion saved him from drowning and on another pushed him out of danger when he toddled out in front of a speeding automobile. Rag's father was also brave and strong, but was suspected of being a chicken thief; however, nothing was ever proved. Rags was the largest and strongest of the litter, and Mr. Price thought that he would make an ideal

MAKING OF A HERO
by Joseph Ishikawa
page two

pet and companion for his little son, Bobby, who was just beginning to walk.

Mr. Price thought of the tricks that Rags' mother was able to do and set about training Rags. Rags, however, proved to be a slow pupil, and Mr. Price had never trained a dog before. He stood before Rags with a little bit of meat in his extended hand and spoke sharply. "Sit up!" he commanded. Rags had just eaten and wasn't interested in the meat that Mr. Price had. However, he was puzzled by the strange new tone in Mr. Price's voice and didn't know what to make of it. He wagged his tail tentatively, spraddled his hind legs behind him, put out his forepaws, cocked his head in bewilderment, and wriggled on his stomach toward Mr. Price. "Sit up, Rags!" Again the sharp command. Eager to please but still uncomprehending, Rags thumped his tail and squirmed on his stomach. "Come on, Rags, sit up!" this time the voice had an even sharper edge on it as Mr. Price was becoming impatient. This frightened Rags, and he squirmed toward the safety of Mr. Price's shoes, his tail no longer wagging.

Mr. Price looked at the frightened puppy and immediately felt pity. He thought, "Well, as long as Rags is down on his stomach, I'll at least teach him the command to lie down." So he squatted to stroke Rags' head and spoke soothingly, "That's right, Rags, lie down." Hearing his master's normal voice, Rags' joy and relief knew no bounds. His tail began wagging furiously, and he leaped up with his forepaws on Mr. Price's knees. "No, no, Rags, lie down." Mr. Price was making an effort to be patient. At the continued gentleness in his owner's voice, Rags tried to put his forepaws on Mr. Price's shoulders and lick his face, but he was far too short. Mr. Price gave up that

MAKING OF A HERO
by Joseph Ishikawa
page three

training session.

After reading the pet columns in the local newspaper and delving into all the material he could find at the library, Mr. Price learned some new techniques of teaching and eventually taught Rags to sit up, lie down, roll over, and fetch things. He also broke Rags of barking although ~~he~~ ^{the dog} still howled when he heard a train whistle nearby. Rags, however, had much too exuberant a spirit to be bothered with learning the disciplines and was much too clumsy to learn the more complicated tricks such as those that made his mother famous. Whenever some stranger would stop to admire Rags while he was out walking with Mr. Price and Bobby, Mr. Price would sigh sadly and tell about the exploits of Rags' mother. Before he had given up Rags' training, Mr. Price had often visualized such encounters and had looked forward to being able to put Rags through his paces. But the few ordinary tricks in Rags' repertory seemed hardly worth showing off.

At that, Rags was an amiable companion for little Bobby. As a little Puppy, he made a comical sight rolling around with the little child who was just barely able to walk. As Bobby became surer of his steps Rags grew bigger and stronger but not any less clumsy. One day when Bobby had just turned three, Mrs. Price, unable to find the child about the house, became panicky until she saw Rags and Bobby turn the corner. Although doubtful of Rags' intelligence because of his inability to learn tricks, Mrs. Price seemed to feel from that point that Bobby would be safe in Rags' care.

At least she had confidence in Rags until a few weeks later when the Price family went on a picnic outing. After the picnic dinner, Mr. Price got ^{out} his fishing equipment ~~out~~ and went out to the creek to try his luck;

MAKING OF A HERO
by Joseph Ishikawa
page four

Mrs. Price set about putting away the remaining food and cleaning up, while Rags and Bobby went exploring along the creek bank.

Mr. Price had just settled himself comfortably against a tree growing along the bank and had lazily tossed his baited hook out into the main current of the stream when he heard a splash. Looking up, he saw that Bobby had fallen into the creek about fifty yards up from where he was fishing. As he scrambled to his feet, he saw Rags dive into the water. Even while worrying about Bobby's safety, he felt his heart swell with pride at Rags' bravery. "Stout dog," he said to himself while running toward the boy and the dog.

Rags, however, upon seeing Bobby fall thought that Bobby had a good point in jumping into the creek and immediately followed suit. He was splashing around thoroughly enjoying himself as a badly scared but unhurt Bobby clambered out of the creek into his father's comforting arms. Rags had muffed what might have been a brilliant rescue scene, but fortunately no one was hurt. However, Mrs. Price no longer felt that Rags would protect Bobby from accidents and therefore tried to keep a closer watch of Bobby.

During the next half year, Rags did not grow any less clumsy, but he remained an amiable companion to Bobby. Mr. Price made one last attempt to teach him some advanced tricks but finally gave up in despair.

And then a wave of burglary broke out in the neighborhood. All the evidence pointed to the fact that the crime wave was the work of a lone prowler who was exceedingly clever. As yet no house on the block in which the Price's lived had been molested, but Bobby insisted that they let Rags

MAKING OF A HERO
by Joseph Ishikawa
page five

sleep in the back porch so that he wouldn't be stolen. Mrs. Price tried to convince Bobby that the thief wasn't interested in stealing dogs and Mr. Price was quite voluble in voicing his opinion that it would be a good thing if the burglar would steal "that dumb, no-good mutt." Sensing that he was being talked about, Rags wagged his tail happily. In the end, Rags was allowed in to make Bobby happy.

The very first night that Rags was let into the back porch, he heard a scratching noise at the outside door. This seemed odd to him as everybody had long since gone to bed. He sat on his haunches and cocked his head, looking at the door expectantly. Presently after hearing some cursing, he heard a satisfied sigh and saw the door slowly pushed open. There was a strange man with a flashlight which shined in Rags' eyes. Now Rags had never met a bad man in his life. Mr. Price spoke sharply to him once in awhile but was never mean to him the way some dogs and most cats were. Therefore Rags wagged his tail when he saw the man at the door.

The burglar for his part thought of making a hasty retreat when he saw the dog, but noticing the tail's frantic motions, he crouched down, snapped his fingers and whispered softly, "here, boy." If Rags hadn't been broken of barking, he would have yipped with glee over this unexpected attention. As it was, he moved forward and nuzzled the man's hand. The man patted Rags' head awhile and decided that the dog would not create a commotion. He stood up then and moved toward the door into the hallway followed by Rags. The burglar tried in vain to make Rags go back and then, noticing the heavy carpeting, decided that Rags' paws would not make any noise. Forgetting

MAKING OF A HEROE
by Joseph Ishikawa
page six

about Rags, the thief went through the hallway and crept stealthily into the dining room. Rags blissfully trailed him.

Suddenly Rags let out an involuntary "Ki-yipe" and leaped into the air. He had stepped on a sharp burr that Bobby had brought in from the fields. When he came down, his weight was again put on the burr and another "Ki-yipe" rent the air. At the same instant, in his clumsy way he knocked himself against the burglar and in gritting his teeth in pain, he clamped them on the burglar's pantleg. The burglar was momentarily paralyzed by the unexpected noise, and then turned to run out of the house. However, Rags still in pain had the intruder's pantleg between his teeth, and the burglar tripped and fell heavily as Mr. Price came running out of the bedroom snapping on the hall light. Mr. Price was a big man and had little trouble in subduing the burglar, who was slightly stunned in the fall.

Mrs. Price called the police to come pick up the thief. The neighbors on either side and one from across the street came over to investigate the commotion. Only Bobby remained asleep. Mr. Price kept beaming at Rags, petted him often and made a big fuss over him. To the neighbors, he bragged about how the "bright dog" had single-handedly captured the burglar. Everybody then made a big to-do over Rags, who didn't know what all the fuss was about but was happy to get the attention. He wagged his tail furiously and sniffed in a friendly manner at every admirer. He even went over to lick the hand of the burglar who would have slapped or kicked him if he hadn't been trussed. Finally the police came, and everyone left. Mr. and Mrs. Price each gave Rags a final pat, put him in the back porch, and went back to bed.

MAKING OF A HERO
by Joseph Ishikawa
page seven

The next day the police reported that most of the loot had been recovered and would be returned to the rightful owners. Newspaper photographers came to the Price home and took several pictures of Rags; some of these were distributed throughout the nation by wirephoto. Overnight Rags became a hero; some of the people in the neighborhood even talked of getting Rags a medal, but nothing ever came of it. Whether or not Rags' reputation had anything to do with it will never be known, but there were no more burglaries in that neighborhood.

After that ^{whenever} some stranger would stop to admire Rags while he was out walking with Mr. Price and Bobby, Mr. Price would expand and beam and go into great but inaccurate detail describing Rags' feat in capturing a dangerous criminal single-handedly. "Why without Rags," he would say, "we might all have been murdered."

Sensing that the conversation was about him, Rags would wag his tail with unrepressed joy and no modesty whatever.

The end