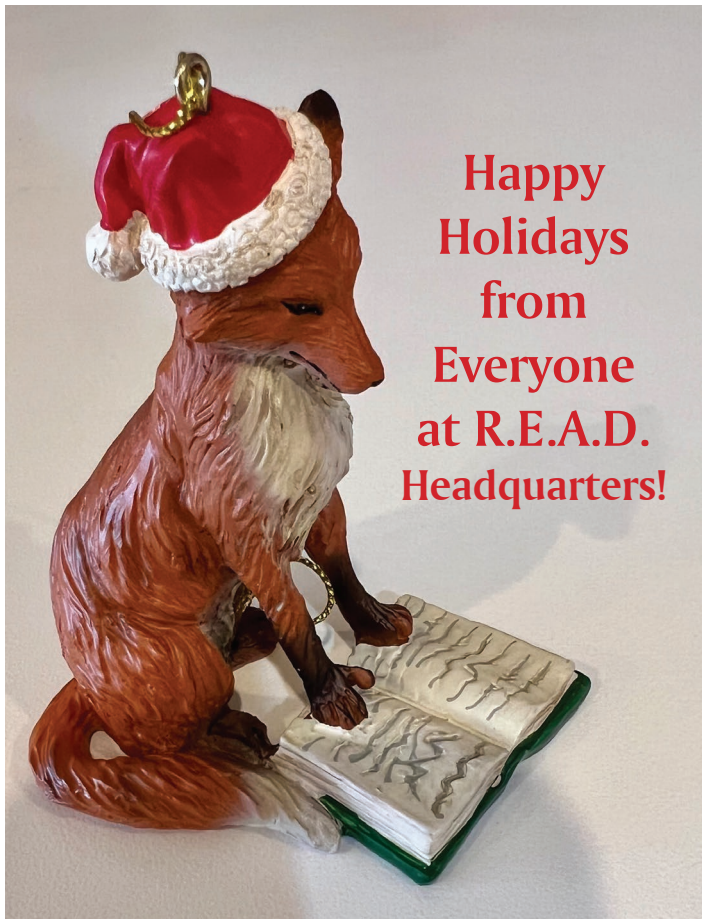


## Ending the Year on a Softer Note



*If I have any belief about  
immortality, it is that certain dogs  
I have known will go to heaven,  
and very, very few persons.*

*- James Thurber*



# A Small Dog Demonstrates the True Spirit of the Season

by Lola M. Autry

*{ED NOTE: This story has been around for quite awhile, but it's a true one, not a fable, and always a lovely reminder.}*

**M**y 11-year-old cocker spaniel, Casey J., often goes with me to the mailbox. We enjoy those walks, and as friends, we also have our own ways of communicating. On one particular day, which happened to be Christmas Eve, Casey J. seemed more loving and protective than ever. Often she would run ahead, then look back and wait for me to catch up. Not this time. She seemed to be troubled.

As we approached the road where my mailbox is, I noticed a scrawny, white-haired bird dog standing beside the road. He was thin and seemed exhausted, but his tail wagged a constant, friendly greeting as we approached, and I saw for a moment that there was a dog smile on his face.

Casey J. moved cautiously toward the white wraith.

Oh, no, I thought. Not another stray dog.

Quite often, people who no longer want their dogs drive out onto country roads, turn the dogs loose, then race away. The poor creatures are left homeless, confused, afraid and hungry. Still, there is a limit to how many strays one family can take in.

I can't take care of another one, I thought as I shooed him away. But he wouldn't shoo. He simply stood there, looking at me and shaking. I called Casey J. and turned away. The white dog did not follow us.

Back at the house I put the dog out of mind and went about my work. Late in the afternoon I went out to feed Casey J. The big white dog was lying in some leaves about 40 feet away. He watched as I put food into Casey's dish. He probably smelled the food but made no effort to come for some, and I didn't offer him any. I thought that if I didn't feed him, he'd go to some other house where maybe the occupants would want him. I left it at that.

But Casey J. looked from her food dish to the place where the unwelcome visitor rested. She turned her back to me and walked straight to the big dog, wagged her tail a few times, then turned toward the house. Her friend got out of the leaf bed, slowly and stiffly, and followed Casey J. I watched as my little dog led the big one to the food dish, then stood aside while her guest ate all the food.

The Bible says, "And a little child shall lead them...." This time it wasn't a little child, but a little dog who led the way.

I named my new dog "Christmas," because it was that time of the year. I was reminded that I could furnish room for him. I could adopt this castaway and honor Casey J., who brought my attention to his need.

Surely the Babe in the Manger would approve.

*Lola Autry is a writer and music teacher in Hickory Flat, Mississippi. The white setter she named Christmas lived for only three weeks after appearing at Autry's home in 1999.*