

GUN SHY OLD JOE

By Paul M. Riley MD

On January 28, 1938 the Riley family arrived at Edwaleni Mission Station in South Africa. John Riley was put in charge of the Motor Mechanics Department of Edwaleni Industrial School. He was serving under the Free Methodist Church. He arrived with his wife Edna, sons David age 5, Paul age 3, and daughter, Lois, age 1. In October 1938 son Thomas was born in Port Shepstone Hospital forty miles from Edwaleni.

On July first, 1939, Thomas developed Intussusception and underwent emergency surgery at Port Shepstone Hospital. On July 7, John's diary says he went with the principal, J.S. Rice, to Punzi to get a dog. Punzi is an isolated Country Store about ten miles from Edwaleni. On July 10, baby Thomas came home from the hospital with a long scar on his abdomen.

John Riley found out why he was asked to go with Bro. Rice. Joe was a huge Great Dane with a few hang-ups! Joe was already looking old and grizzled. It soon became evident that Joe was deathly scared of guns! He was even scared of the Riley kids' popguns that shot corks attached by strings. He would crawl under the house and hide. If he heard a car backfire, thunder, or distant explosions, he would run and hide for a day or more. Obviously Joe must have had an awful experience involving a gun.

The Rileys soon found, that Mabel Rice, the matriarch of the mission, was also very scared of guns. She would confiscate the childrens' toy guns. Nineteen old Eleanor Rice would find where they were hidden and give them back when her mother wasn't looking! Mabel Rice would not allow any guns on the Mission Station. Years later the Rileys learned that several years before they came, a missionary killed another man in a hunting accident. The missionary was devastated and left the country. The Mission and Church had a lot of negative publicity because of the accident. Mrs. Rice was making sure that there would be no more such accidents!

Old Joe soon found a comfortable spot on top of bags of peanuts that were piled on either side of the covered entrance outside the back door leading into the Rice's kitchen. The Rices' home was located about fifty yards from the Riley house. The Pondo farmers from across the Umtamvuna River would sell or trade bags of corn and peanuts to the school. Old Joe would only permit the Rileys, Rices, and their children access to the peanuts. Some of the children hit, kicked, or pulled Joe's tail to get him away from the peanuts, he suffered all this abuse in silence, but with strangers Joe was very intimidating! He had a very loud growl and a bark that could be heard all over the mission station!

Old Joe loved to "sing". A few days after Old Joe arrived, the Rileys heard unearthly howling from the Rice's front porch. There was Joe with his nose to the ceiling, trying to sing along with the Rice family who loved to sing every morning at family worship. When Joe would start howling, Lowell, Eleanor, Carl, or John Rice would come out and chase Old Joe back to his place at the back door. At the school chapel when there was any singing Joe would magically appear and start howling so loud he would drown out the singing! He would be chased back to the house, only to return with the next song!

Joe would come to the front of the house to greet any visitors. He knew they were coming because he had heard their cars grinding up the steep hill to the mission. Anybody who came to sell their produce would be kept at a distance until they were called. If anyone showed any hostility toward the missionaries, Joe's hair would stand

straight up and he would let out a loud growl and show his huge teeth, he would then resemble a lion! These people would quickly back off.

The Rices's twenty one year daughter, Eleanor, died in their house on April 8, 1941. She had leukemia. Her brother, Carl, had already left to go to College in U.S.A. in August, 1940. J.S. and Mabel Rice left with their son John for the U.S.A. on July 12, 1941. Their oldest son, Lowell, who had just completed medical school in Johannesburg, was left in charge of Edwaleni. He was married on July 30, 1941. He expected his dad to return the next year. With the help of his wife Marjorie, Lowell Rice opened a medical clinic in the basement of their home. Old Joe made sure that the patients were seated in the grass back away from the house. He would not let them wander or snoop around while the Doctor was busy in the basement. Seven year old Paul Riley watched "Uncle Lowell" put an infant to sleep and remove a large bead from his ear. As the mother left with the child, she saw a large snake on the concrete steps. Dr. Rice quickly grabbed the bottle of ethyl chloride spray anesthesia and sprayed the snake, freezing its head to the cement step! He then took his scalpel and cut off the snakes head! He also showed Paul parasites under the microscope, sparking Paul's medical interests. Dr. Rice took an interest in Paul, even taking him fishing after midnight, after the last patient had been treated! He became Paul's mentor!

Two days after Pearl Harbor, on Dec. 9, 1941, Edwaleni was hit by a violent storm. The reinforced concrete workshop over one hundred feet long and fifty feet wide was destroyed along with several cars and expensive equipment. The Rileys lost half the roof of their house. Fortunately all the students had left for their vacation two days earlier than expected to meet bus and train schedules, otherwise there would have been over a hundred students in and around the shop when the storm hit! This was a miracle!

Old Joe was scared out of his wits; he only re-appeared several days after the storm! Lowell then had to spend most of his time trying to get a new building built in wartime. Then on August 28, 1942 his father, Bro. J.S. Rice dropped dead from a heart attack in McPherson, Kansas. Lowell had to wait until after the war to get a new principal for Edwaleni! He hadn't planned to wear so many hats!

After the war, Luther Kresge, the new principal, came to Edwaleni and Lowell Rice moved to Greenville Mission Station where a Hospital was to be built. Old Joe went along and kept law and order there. Grace Allen had retired from Fairview Mission and sailed on the same boat with the Rices. She left Lowell her .410 shotgun she had used to kill the poisonous snakes that were numerous at her Fairview Mission Station. Lowell was careful to keep his gun hidden from Old Joe. Lowell had to use the gun to kill snakes and varmints attacking the chickens but was able to keep Joe locked in the basement when he had to do any shooting. Meanwhile Old Joe was starting to show his age.

Finally Old Joe stopped eating and appeared to be in constant pain. Lowell put him in a wooden crate. He then poured in two cans of Ether and nailed the crate shut. The next morning the gardener dug a deep grave while Lowell opened the crate. The smell of the ether was very strong! What a surprise! Out staggered Old Joe, still alive! Old Joe stood there, with his eyes closed, swaying unsteadily. Lowell ran and got his gun, he wanted to finish off Old Joe while he was still groggy! Lowell sneaked up behind Joe and pulled back the hammer. Joe recognized that sound! He opened his eyes and looked back in terror; then he saw the gun pointed at him. He fell over stone dead without a shot being fired. His fear of guns had killed him after Ether had failed to do so!