



Bulldog Baines

Young WILLIAM ODOM sees Spot run in the family

Illustration by GERRY O'NEILL

During my childhood, one person in the community figured ominously as the most hated, feared man of all. Adults liked him, found him quite useful. Not us. He was the town dog catcher. Named, appropriately enough, Bulldog Baines. You never knew when you would hear it: "It's Bulldog Baines! Bulldog Baines!" Whew! Better watch it, dogs. He'll get you!

Bulldog Baines looked like a bulldog. He was tall and wide, built like a Dempster Dumpster, and in the face he was ugly. Dressed always the same: blue pants, blue workshirt, wing-tip shoes, and, on his head, a commodore's hat, to look more official, I guess. He kept a .38 jammed into his belt for the more obstreperous animals he encountered.

One sunny weekday morning, we kids frolicked merrily out on the schoolyard. A frisky dog gamboled onto the campus, a big mutt. It didn't matter. We played. Fido played. Who cares, right? But, evidently our principal

cared. She didn't put up with much.

And so a vehicle pulled off the road straight onto the school grounds. It was a pickup truck with a big cage in the bed, kind of like a paddy wagon for criminal canines. And behind the wheel — who else? — Bulldog Baines. Strong. Determined. He knew what he had to do, and do it he would. He got out of the truck eyeing the stray with hawk-like intensity. We just stood there, open-mouthed and silent.

Bulldog Baines had a kind of choke leash. He approached the uninvited furry beast like a hunter, well-versed in the ways of this jungle. It didn't take long. He lassooed the dog and began pulling it to the truck. Of course, the dog did not like this turn of events and desired its freedom. It jumped up left and right. It growled and bared its teeth.

Did Bulldog Baines care? Not on your life. He didn't even use

He got to the pickup, opened the door to the cage with his left hand and slammed the dog in with one movement.

Now, it so happened that Bulldog Baines had a son — Tar Baines. Used to carry our newspaper.



A graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill, William Odom is a little-known philosopher who makes his home in Raleigh. His story "Low at the High" was published in the July 2003 Urban Hiker.

two hands, just yanked the dog with one. He got to the pickup, opened the door to the cage with his left hand and slammed the dog in with one movement. Then he jumped behind the wheel of his truck, scratched off on the soil of the playground and drove away with pride. The victor. What would happen to the captured one? Who knew?

We all looked at each other. Golly! What a big, mean, ugly man! Sometimes at night I would lie in bed, think of Bulldog Baines, and shiver.

Now, it so happened that Bulldog Baines had a son — Tar Baines. Used to carry our newspaper. Tar Baines was tall and skinny with black hair and really white skin, and wore horn-rimmed glasses. Although 17 or 18 years old, he still delivered on an old red Paperboy Special, with baskets on either side. He wore a T-shirt, tennis shoes, and dark socks. He looked kind of like Buddy Holly in Bermuda shorts.

And, boy, could he sling those papers. He would pedal through a block of houses, through yards

without fences, throwing with ferocity and accuracy. He had the same devotion to work as his father. The papers would land exactly at the doorway every time. We would yell at him, "Tar Baines! It's Tar Baines! Yeah!" But he never paid us any never-mind. He just kept pedaling and throwing, intent on his job.

Now it so happened that the boy across the street from us, Henry Wordsworth, had a full-sized collie dog named Lady. Beautiful animal. But, sad to say, Lady was a mean dog, and one day Lady bit Tar Baines. He shook her off in our front yard. His papers all fell out of the baskets and there he stood, wounded.

My mother, civic-minded as always, came out to help the bitten paperboy. She put some Mercurchrome on the leg bite and a Band-Aid on top of it. She helped him put the papers back in the baskets and he set off for the rest of his route.

Years went by. One night, a knock came at the door. My mother answered. A man and a woman stood in the doorway. The man was Tar Baines, now grown up. He said the woman was his wife.

"I just wanted my wife to meet the lady that was so nice the time I got bit by that dog, he said. "I never forgot it." •

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