

## FLASH

*By Valerie Crichlow*

Julius and Evita Fields lived their first eight years of married life on the family property at Wallenville. During those years, Julius, dutiful son that he was, continued working alongside his father on the plantation. But Evita was not happy there. She felt oppressed by Julius's relatives. For his wife's sake, Julius left Wallenville to seek their fortunes elsewhere. He then worked in the oilfields of Brereton for many years. During these years, they lived at Princeville, about twenty miles from Julius's workplace. It was here that their children Jem and Jerri were born. The children passed many happy years at Princeville.

One day, a small, meagre-looking puppy wandered into the Fields' home from the road that ran at the front of the house. This happened on the very day that Jem celebrated his eighth birthday. Immediately, Jem lay claim to the unattractive animal. The puppy was so thin, and his big round eyes so forlorn, that Jem wanted to care for him right away. He persuaded Mother to keep him, and promised to care for him faithfully. Mother consented, reminding him of all the responsibilities that would be his.

"Oh boy! thanks Mother...you'll see how good I'll look after him!..."

Jem was overjoyed. A great relationship began between boy and dog. Jem bathed him, scrubbing him tenderly, until his coat shone. He fed him, and played with him. He did this each day. The pup blossomed under all of this love and attention to which he was not used. Soon, he became a lovely brown animal of "pothound" mix. He gave delight to everyone with his curious pointed ears, bright eyes, quizzical nose, and fluffy tail. He could caper to and fro with such ease and agility, that Jem named him Flash.

As Flash grew, he became a good playmate. He was good at "Catch" and "Hide and Seek". He would chase the children around the house at top speed. When he caught up with them, it would be amidst peals of laughter, and a roll in the grass. They would hide the ball in the bushes and he would retrieve it. He would come bounding back with it secure between his teeth. He would stand on his hind-legs, placing his fore-legs on Jem's chest.

"Good boy Flash...good boy," the children would laugh, patting him on the head. He was such great fun.

About fifty yards away from the Fields's home in Princeville, there was a river. It was about twelve feet wide and skirted the entire town. In the dry season, it was barely a trickle. But during the rainy months, this river often became swollen and would sometimes threaten to overflow its banks. During these times, Jem and Jerri loved to stand and look at the brown water moving steadily along. As Flash grew, he enjoyed these times. Jem and Jerri would toss dried sticks into the moving water. Flash would plunge in, swim skillfully across, grab the sticks with his teeth and return to land. It was a beautiful sight to behold. Sometimes the children held their breath, for the current looked so strong.

"Good boy, good boy...go for it Flash," Jem encouraged.

Flash was really good in the water. He always did this trick well.

The main road ran in front of the Fields home, and was quite busy. As a grown dog, Flash sometimes broke through the fence, and took off down the road. Perhaps he went in search of other dogs, or, just adventure. Jem did not worry about this much.

"Well, he is a dog...he could look after himself," he would say confidently. When Jem was ready for him to return, he would stand at the gate and shout at the top of his voice,

"Flaaaash...Flaaaash..."

Before long, the dog would obediently appear, charging towards him.

One afternoon, Jem missed Flash. He didn't come for his customary after-school games around the house. Jem called several times, but to no avail.

"Maybe he got lost or something," cried Jem, his face full of concern.

"Don't worry, he'll come back," Mother consoled him.

For hours, Jem sat on the front steps, face cupped between his hands. It was at dusk when Jem spotted Flash trotting along the roadway on his way home. He seemed like his usual jolly self.

"Look him coming at last!" Jem was relieved.

"Come on boy!" he beckoned to him.

Flash suddenly bounded across the road towards Jem. But, alas, just then, tragedy struck. An oncoming car swerved sharply away, and screeched to a halt, trying to avoid the dog. But, it was too late.

"Boom!" went the impact. The dog yelped, and fell over onto the roadway.

"Flaaaash!" Jem screamed in horror.

Miraculously, the dog picked himself up, and ran into the yard, wagging his tail, and panting. By now, everyone had rushed out of the house after the loud disturbance. Flash greeted each person in turn, his fore-legs planted heavily on their chests. One by one, they stroked his head.

"Flash, poor boy," Jem cried, hugging the dog close to his heart.

The dog licked his young master's face.

"Gosh man Flash, that was close," whispered Jem, stroking his friend.

But Jem was wrong. Flash suddenly slipped from his arms onto the ground. He lay there panting. He had been fatally wounded.

"Bring some water quick!" Mother called to Jem.

Everyone watched in amazement as the dog seemed to breathe his last. Jem brought a bucket of water, which was splashed over the dog in an effort to revive him. But it was to no avail. The dog was dead. He had bid everyone goodbye, faithful to the end.

The tears rolled down Jem's cheeks, as Father dug a hole at the back of the house. The family was very sad as Flash was lowered tenderly into his grave. Then, earth was piled atop him.

"Let's get some flowers," Jerri whispered to Jem.

The children gathered buttercups, ixoras, hibiscus, crotons and bougainvillea, and these adorned the grave. They would miss him so much. Jem and Jerri would remember that parting look in Flash's eye for a long time to come.