

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Storm

from *Woodsong* by **Gary Paulsen**



Siberian Husky
by Scott Kennedy.

Read with a Purpose

Read to find out what qualities make a dog named Storm very special to Gary Paulsen.

Build Background

"Storm" is taken from *Woodsong*, Gary Paulsen's account of his adventures in northern Minnesota. There he ran a team of sled dogs. Paulsen later ran the Iditarod (y DIHT uh rahd), the famous—and dangerous—dog sled race between Anchorage and Nome, Alaska.

It is always possible to learn from dogs, and in fact the longer I'm with them, the more I understand how little I know. But there was one dog who taught me the most. Just one dog. Storm. First dog. . . .

Joy, loyalty, toughness, peacefulness—all of these were part of Storm. Lessons about

life and, finally, lessons about death came from him. **A**

He had a bear's ears. He was brindle colored¹ and built like a truck, and his ears were rounded when we got him, so that

1. **brindle colored:** gray or brown and streaked or spotted with a dark color.

A Read and Discuss What has Paulsen told us so far?



Stromberg © 2014

they looked like bear cub ears. They gave him a comical look when he was young that somehow hung on to him even when he grew old. He had a sense of humor to match his ears, and when he grew truly old, he somehow **resembled** George Burns.²

At peak, he was a mighty dog. He pulled like a machine. Until we retired him and used him only for training puppies, until we let him loose to enjoy his age, he pulled, his back over in the power curve, so that nothing could stop the sled. **B**

In his fourth or fifth year as a puller, he started doing tricks. First he would play jokes on the dog pulling next to him. On long runs he would become bored, and when we least expected it, he would reach across the gang line and snort wind into the ear of the dog next to him. I ran him with many different

dogs and he did it to all of them—chuckling when the dog jumped and shook his or her head—but I never saw a single dog get mad at him for it. Oh, there was once a dog named Fonzie who nearly took his head off, but Fonzie wasn't really mad at him so much as surprised. Fonzie once nailed me through the wrist for waking him up too suddenly when he was sleeping. I'd reached down and touched him before whispering his name. **C**

Small jokes. Gentle jokes, Storm played. He took to hiding things from me. At first I couldn't understand where things were going. I would put a bootie down while working on a dog, and it would disappear. I lost a small ladle³ I used for watering each dog, a cloth glove liner I took off while working on a dog's feet, a roll of tape, and finally, a hat.

He was so clever.

2. **George Burns** (1896–1996): American comedian and actor with large ears.

3. **ladle**: cup-shaped spoon with a long handle for dipping out liquids.

B Literary Focus Figurative Language What two similes has Paulsen used to describe Storm? How do the similes help you understand what Storm was like?

C Read and Discuss What have you learned about Storm?

Vocabulary resembled (rih ZEHM buhld) v.: was similar to.



Analyzing Visuals

Viewing and Interpreting What does this image

suggest about the bond between Paulsen and Storm?

Eager to Run by Scott Kennedy.

When I lost the hat, it was a hot day and I had taken the hat off while I worked on a dog's harness. The dog was just ahead of Storm, and when I knelt to work on the harness—he'd chewed almost through the side of it while running—I put the hat down on the snow near Storm.

Or thought I had. When I had changed the dog's harness, I turned and the hat was gone. I looked around, moved the dogs, looked under them, then shrugged. At first I was sure I'd put the hat down; then, when I couldn't find it, I became less sure, and at last I thought perhaps I had left it at home or dropped it somewhere on the run.

Storm sat quietly, looking ahead down the trail, not showing anything at all. **D**

I went back to the sled, reached down to disengage the hook, and when I did, the dogs exploded forward. I was not quite

on the sled when they took off, so I was knocked slightly off balance. I leaned over to the right to regain myself, and when I did, I accidentally dragged the hook through the snow.

And pulled up my hat.

It had been buried off to the side of the trail in the snow, buried neatly with the snow smoothed over the top, so that it was completely hidden. Had the snow hook not scraped down four or five inches, I never would have found it.

I stopped the sled and set the hook once more. While knocking the snow out of the hat and putting it back on my head, I studied where it had happened.

Right next to Storm.

He had taken the hat, quickly dug a hole, buried the hat and smoothed the snow over it, then gone back to sitting, staring ahead, looking completely innocent.

D Read and Discuss What new information about Storm has Paulsen given us?



Never Alone by Scott Kennedy.

Viewing Visuals **Viewing and Interpreting** How accurately does this painting show the relationship between Paulsen, Storm, and the rest of the dogs?

When I stopped the sled and picked up the hat, he looked back, saw me put the hat on my head, and—I swear—smiled. Then he shook his head once and went back to work pulling.

Along with the jokes, Storm had scale eyes. He watched as the sled was loaded, carefully calculated the weight of each item, and let his disapproval be known if it went too far.

One winter a friend gave us a parlor stove with nickel trim. It was not an enormous stove, but it had some weight to it and some bulk. This friend lived twelve miles away—twelve miles over two fair hills followed by about eight miles on an old, abandoned railroad grade.⁴ We needed the stove badly (our old barrel stove had started to burn through), so I took off with the team to pick it up. I left early in the morning because I wanted to get back that same

4. **railroad grade:** rise or elevation in a railroad track.

day. It had snowed four or five inches, so the dogs would have to break trail. By the time we had done the hills and the railroad grade, pushing in new snow all the time, they were ready for a rest. I ran them the last two miles to where the stove was and unhooked their tugs so they could rest while I had coffee.

We stopped for an hour at least, the dogs sleeping quietly. When it was time to go, my friend and I carried the stove outside and put it in the sled. The dogs didn't move.

Except for Storm.

He raised his head, opened one eye, did a perfect double take—both eyes opening wide—and sat up. He had been facing the front. Now he turned around to face the sled—so he was facing away from the direction we had to travel when we left—and watched us load the sled.

It took some time, as the stove barely fit on the sled and had to be jiggled and shuffled around to get it down between the side rails.

E Reading Focus Author's Purpose How does this detail help you determine the author's purpose in telling this story?

F Read and Discuss What's going on with Storm?



Through it all, Storm sat and watched us, his face a study in interest. He did not get up but sat on his back end, and when I was done and ready to go, I hooked all the dogs back in harness—which involved hooking the tugs to the rear ties on their harnesses. The dogs knew this meant we were going to head home, so they got up and started slamming against the tugs, trying to get the sled to move.

All of them, that is, but Storm. **G**

Storm sat backward, the tug hooked up but hanging down. The other dogs were screaming to run, but Storm sat and stared at the stove.

Not at me, not at the sled, but at the stove itself. Then he raised his lips, bared his teeth, and growled at the stove.

When he was finished growling, he snorted twice, stood, turned away from the stove, and started to pull. But each time we stopped at the tops of the hills to let the dogs catch their breath after pulling the sled

G Reading Focus Author's Purpose How is Paulsen letting you know that you're about to get another amusing example of Storm's personality?

and stove up the steep incline, Storm turned and growled at the stove.

The enemy.

The weight on the sled. **H**

I do not know how many miles Storm and I ran together. Eight, ten, perhaps twelve thousand miles. He was one of the first dogs and taught me the most, and as we worked together, he came to know me better than perhaps even my own family. He could look once at my shoulders and tell how I was feeling, tell how far we were to run, how fast we had to run—knowing things I did not. **I**

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Literary Focus Symbol

Storm and Paulsen, What did the stick represent?

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doing a thing that would stay with him—with us—until the end. We had gone forty or fifty miles on a calm, even day with no bad wind. The temperature was a perfect ten below zero. The sun was bright, everything was moving well, and the dogs had settled into the rhythm that could take them a hundred or a thousand miles.

And Storm got bored.

At a curve in the trail, a small branch came out over the path we were running, and as Storm passed beneath the limb, he jumped up and grabbed it, broke a short piece off—about a foot long—and kept it in his mouth.

All day.

And into the night. He ran, carrying the stick like a toy, and when we stopped to feed or rest, he would put the stick down, eat, then pick it up again. He would put the stick down carefully in front of him, or across his paws, and sleep, and when he awakened, he would pick up the stick, and it soon became a thing between us, the stick.

He would show it to me, making a contact, a connection between us, each time we stopped. I would pet him on top of the head and take the stick from him—he would emit a low, gentle growl when I took the stick. I'd "examine" it closely, nod and seem to approve of it, and hand it back to him.

Each day we ran, he would pick a different

stick. And each time I would have to approve of it, and after a time, after weeks and months, I realized that he was using the sticks as a way to communicate with me, to tell me that everything was all right, that I was doing the right thing. **J**

Once, when I pushed them too hard during a pre-Iditarod race—when I thought it was important to compete and win (a feeling that didn't last long)—I walked up to Storm, and as I came close to him, he pointedly dropped the stick. I picked it up and held it out, but he wouldn't take it. He turned his face away. I put



the stick against his lips and tried to make him take it, but he let it fall to the ground.

When I realized what he was doing, I stopped and fed and rested the team, sat on the sled, and thought about what I was doing wrong.

After four hours or so of sitting—watching other teams pass me—I fed them another snack, got ready to go, and

was gratified to see Storm pick up the stick. From that time forward I looked for the stick always, knew when I saw it out to the sides of his head that I was doing the right thing. And it was always there. **K**

Through storms and cold weather, on the long runs, the long, long runs where there isn't an end to it, where only the sled and the winter around the sled and the wind are there, Storm had the stick to tell me it was right, all things were right.


I realized that he was
using the sticks as a
way to communicate
with me, to tell me
that everything
was all right. 

J Literary Focus Symbol The stick became a symbol for Storm and Paulsen. What did the stick represent?

K Read and Discuss How does this information connect with what you've learned about the stick?