

NICK MEETS KNOBBY

By Felix Mayerhofer

Chapter 1: A Whimpering Cry

It was a gloomy morning as Nick Kincade headed home. Nick had just finished his paper route and was breathing hard as he peddled against the wind and rain. Thinking he heard a noise at the side of the road he stopped to listen. There it was again! He got off his bike and made his way down a small hill to investigate. A whimpering cry led Nick to the base of a leafless tree. Lying on a pile of fallen leaves was a wet and exhausted dog. Carefully approaching, he quietly said, "Where did you come from old dog?" Nick patted him on the head and the dog gave him a weak lick.

"I'd better get you to a warmer place," said Nick. He had trouble lifting the wet dog but managed to carry him up the slippery slope. Trying to hold the dog under one arm and controlling his bike with the other was a big problem, but he finally made it home.

His parents heard him struggling to open the door. Running to help, they were surprised to see him carrying a dripping, wet dog.

“Hold it!” his mother said. “Let me get a towel before you get everything wet!” As Nick dried the exhausted dog, she asked, “Where did he come from? Is he hurt?”

“I found him down the road,” answered Nick. “He doesn’t seem to be hurt, just tired and hungry.”

“Set him by the fireplace while I get him something to eat,” his mom said.

Nick laid the dog down on an old rug in front of the roaring fire. His mother brought a leftover hamburger patty that the dog instantly gobbled down. He then curled up like a soggy ball and was soon sound asleep.

“Can we keep him?” Nick asked his father.

“He must belong to someone,” answered his dad. “We’ll put an ad in the Lost And Found section of the newspaper, contact the county animal shelter, and see what happens.”

Nick stoked the fireplace all day to keep the dog warm. Late in the afternoon the dog awakened from his deep sleep, yawned, and shook himself. Nick’s mom carried in a bowl of stew. The dog devoured it as though he hadn’t eaten in weeks. When he finished, Nick petted and brushed him down. He noticed the dog had a long and different looking tail with a knob on the end.

The rain stopped and Nick took the dog outside. He tossed a Frisbee into the air. Leaping high the dog grabbed it in his mouth. “That’s incredible!” Nick exclaimed. Both the boy and dog had lots of fun and in no time became great friends.

Chapter 2: The Talented Tail

The next morning after delivering his newspapers, Nick left for school, which was directly across the street. He made sure the gate was closed so the dog couldn't follow. "I'll be back," he said to the sorrowful looking dog, who watched him through the chain-link fence.

The school day seemed long for Nick who was anxious to get home. When school let out he raced to the street and looked in the direction of his house. There was the dog sitting in the same spot where he had left him that morning.

The dog wagged his tail and jumped up and down when he saw Nick. They played for a few minutes before entering the house. He asked his mom, "Did Dad find out anything about the dog?"

"He telephoned the animal shelter," she said, "and no one's reported a dog like that missing."

"Then can we keep him?" he asked, looking hopeful.

"We'll have to wait," answered his mom, knowing he was disappointed.

"I'm sure he's been dumped," said Nick.

When Nick went to school the next morning, the dog again waited behind the fence for his new master to return. In the afternoon his ears perked up when he heard strains of band music coming from the school.

The mailman who hadn't delivered any mail the previous day, opened the gate to Nick's yard and was surprised by a dog barking

and charging towards him. In his haste to escape he didn't realize he'd left the gate slightly ajar.

Not able to resist the temptation, the dog pushed the gate open and crossed the street. Scampering down the sidewalk alongside the school he found the room where the music was being played. Poking his head through the open door, he saw a man with a baton conducting a band, and Nick in the back row playing the bass drum. Sneaking in, the dog crawled on his belly, unseen, reaching Nick just as the group stopped playing.

"Dog!" exclaimed Nick, dropping his bass drum mallet in surprise when he saw him. "What are you doing here?"

Just at that moment, the band director, Mr. Staff, gave a downbeat with his baton for the band to start playing. Nick hadn't had time to pick up his bass drum mallet, but without missing a beat, the dog began booming on the bass drum in perfect time with his strange looking tail.

The drummers couldn't stop laughing! Hearing the commotion, Mr. Staff stopped the band and asked, "What's going on back there?"

Randy, one of the drummers, answered, "Nick's dog is playing the bass drum with his tail!"

"What dog?" exclaimed Mr. Staff, as he hurried to the back of the band. "Dogs aren't allowed in the band room," he said, as he bent down to study the tail. The dog licked his face, catching Mr. Staff by surprise, causing the whole band to laugh.

"Can we keep him here as our mascot?" asked Randy. "Knobby can be a part of our band, too."

"What did you call him?" asked Nick.

“Knobby,” responded Randy. “He was playing the bass drum, and with that knob on the end of his tail, it looks like a drumstick. So I think you should call him Knobby.”

“What a great name!” said Nick. “Knobby it is, even though he’s not officially my dog--yet!”

Looking down at Knobby, Mr. Staff said to Nick, “Your dog seems friendly. We’ll give him a chance. Just make sure he’s kept on a leash.”

Nick and the entire band were excited to have Knobby as their mascot.

Chapter 3: Knobby Finds A Home

As Nick and Randy were leaving school with Knobby on a rope, Randy said, “I know that dog had to have been with a circus or carnival!”

“I’ll bet you’re right,” answered Nick, “I sure would like to know where he came from.”

At the dinner table that evening, Nick’s parents were astonished when he told them about Knobby playing the bass drum with his tail.

“It’s been a few days since I put that ad in the newspaper,” Nick’s father said, “but I still haven’t heard a word from the animal shelter.”

The following week Nick found out how close to the truth his friend Randy had been. An officer from the animal shelter telephoned Nick’s father and said, “The dog belonged to a man with an animal act. A judge sentenced him to a month in jail for being cruel to his animals, and then ordered that they be taken away from him. But before the dog was handed over to the animal shelter, he escaped.”

“That’s why he was in such terrible condition when I found him!” exclaimed Nick.

“You’re right,” responded his father, “but here’s the good news! Once he gets his shots, the dog is yours.”

“I can’t believe it!” yelled Nick, as he excitedly hugged Knobby and said, “you’re mine forever and ever!”

Knobby went to the band room every day wagging his tail. The band students loved him. One day, Nick decided to stay after school to practice his snare drum parts. Knobby hit the bass drum with his tail while he waited. Nick noticed that Knobby began playing a different rhythm on the bass drum other than his usual boom-boom. Moving over to the bass drum with a mallet, Nick imitated what Knobby had played. Knobby answered with something different, then Nick answered back. The longer they played the wilder the rhythms became!

“Amazing!” laughed Nick. From that day on, he and Knobby played the bass drum every chance they got.

The school band was preparing for an important local parade and band review. They practiced marching up and down the field everyday. Knobby stood tall alongside his master, Nick, who was keeping the band together with a steady marching beat on the bass drum.

The dog loved following the drum majorette as she walked through the ranks keeping the lines straight. Knobby became the third in command after the drum majorette and Mr. Staff. Running past the trumpets, he'd let out a little yip if he saw a player out of step. “You're doing a better job than I am,” laughed Mr. Staff. “Maybe you should be the band director?” Knobby was like the sheep dog of the band, keeping his flock together.

The band looked good, and the day before the parade, the students were given their uniforms.

The Green Valley School Band was ready for the competition.

Chapter 4: Knobby Gets His Vengeance

That night after diner, Nick took Knobby to the school's soccer game at the city park. Nick sat in the first row of bleachers next to the team and Knobby laid between his legs to watch the game.

It was a close game and Knobby fidgeted constantly. As the game neared the end, the star player of Nick's school ran by kicking the ball trying to tie the score. Knobby jumped up and sprinted past the player, hit the ball down the field with his tail, chased it, then hit it again. The game came to a screeching halt! The coach went crazy! The crowd loved it and yelled for more. Mr. Tweet, the head referee, was not amused. He came over and personally escorted Knobby and Nick off the field.

An excited Knobby bounded out of the gate into the parking lot. Hearing two short whistles, Knobby came to a sudden halt. From his long period of training with whistle commands, Knobby obediently trotted to a man a short distance away. The stranger threw a choke chain around his neck. Knobby growled and tried to pull away, but he'd been trapped--by his former owner!

Looking for Knobby as he and the referee left the field, Nick was shocked to see a dark figure dragging Knobby towards a truck.

"Knobby! Knobby!" Nick yelled, as he ran towards them. The man dropped the dog's chain and raised his trainer's stick to strike Nick. Knobby, seeing Nick was in danger, sprang through the air, and with

his weapon-like tail buckled the trainer's legs, causing him to fall backwards!

Mr. Tweet couldn't believe his eyes! There was Knobby with his paws on the man's chest, and a vicious growl coming from deep in his throat.

"He was trying to take my dog!" exclaimed Nick to the referee.

"Call the police!" Mr. Tweet yelled to the park security guard, who had come to help.

After the police arrived, they handcuffed the criminal and took him away.

When the excitement died down, Mr. Tweet came up to Nick and said, "Knobby can attend the soccer games anytime. As far as I'm concerned he's a hero!" Nick had quite a story to tell his parents when they arrived to pick him up.

Chapter 5: Knobby Is A Winner

The following day was the “Big” parade and the weather was perfect. The sides of the street were lined with sitting and standing families. Vendors pushing carts sold ice cream and cold drinks to the hungry and thirsty spectators.

From a distance the sounds of music and the pulsating drums could be heard as the bands approached the judge’s stand. The cheerful crowds and excited children waited enthusiastically for the bands to pass.

Knobby strained at his leash held by Nick’s dad walking alongside the Green Valley Band. He wanted to make sure the lines were straight, but the band didn’t need his help this time. They looked magnificent and sounded even better.

Band after band passed the judge’s stand and Mr. Staff and the Green Valley School Band were next in line to be judged. As they approached the judge’s stand, Knobby saw pieces of wood flying through the air. There was Nick, helpless, with the broken stub of the bass drum mallet in his hand. To Nick’s father’s surprise, Knobby jerked the leash from his hand and dashed in front of Nick. He began hitting the bass drum with his drumstick-like tail. Without missing a beat, they proudly walked past the judge’s stand.

The judges were very impressed with the appearance and sound of the group, and were completely amazed by the drum-playing dog. At the conclusion of the parade, the judges held a short meeting, making

the decision that a dog playing the bass drum was not against the rules. The official announcement was then made that the first place trophy and winner of the competition was the Green Valley School Band.

An excited Mr. Staff called the band together after the victory and handed out first place medals to everyone. There standing at the end of the line was Knobby. As Mr. Staff came up to him, he patted him on the head and said, "I've got one for you, too, Knobby." Pulling out a collar-like ribbon with a medal attached, Mr. Staff said, "Since it was your bass drum playing that helped win the trophy for us, we present you with this medal, making you an official member of our band."

Knobby stepped out and proudly began prancing around, displaying the medal to the applause and cheers of the band.

Nick's friend, Randy, said, "A dog that can catch a Frisbee, play the bass drum, hit a soccer ball, and catch criminals, deserves a medal!

Knobby barked his approval and wagged his award winning tail.

COMING SOON: NICK & KNOBBY GO DIGITAL