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On A Leash And A Prayer

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when she did a yodel in a cowboy disco beat. She said. "There was really nothing to it. A disco beat is just a takeoff from that old 'Osage Stomp' Bob Wills used to do."

When not being a housewife, mother and singer, Ramona is writing a book, her memoirs. She is writing her own manuscript, no ghost writer. To prepare for her project she enrolled and completed three semesters of creative writing at Eastern Oklahoma State College.

What about more recordings? "Yes, I

get an offer now and then," she replies. "But the only recording I would consider would be an album after I finish my book. And the contract would have to read that I would make no more than fifty appearances a year. All those one-night stands to sell records is a real killing life. I've been there."

Ramona Reed, even though she has received little publicity, is one of the true pioneers of Country-Western music, and her contributions are many. Few of today's female singing stars know that a

pretty little cowgirl from Oklahoma helped pave the road for their success — and that they are using a sound and style that she originated before they were born.

Then there are those Slim Whitman yodeling television commercials. Yes, he is using a yodeling style created by Ramona Reed when she was doing those Martha White Flour commercials on radio station WSM, Nashville, in 1949.

(All Oklahomans can be proud of Judge Phillips of Southeastern Oklahoma — including the author, a Western Oklahoman.)

On A Leash And A Prayer

— by Vera Holding



gitis, which destroyed the optic nerves. The 69-year-old Phillips had always led an active life and to be almost totally helpless caused him to suffer a terrific trauma. But a keen sense of humor and a great Christian faith helped him to weather this storm. With great determination, he looked around for a school for the sightless where he could earn a guide dog.

In a telephone conversation with a cousin, Beulah Phillips, in Oakland, California, she reminded him that his late uncle Grover Phillips had gone to the Guide Dog for the Blind Inc., in San Raphael, California, in 1942. She volunteered to call the school and request an application blank. They sent the application and after reviewing it sent a representative from the school to interview Judge Phillips. He was eventually accepted as a student at the school.

After the flight to San Raphael where he enrolled in the school, he was in training for two weeks when to his utter dismay he was told he could not continue the training. They contended he was not steady enough on his feet with the dog. He was not only sightless but was weakened by the Cryptococcus Menengitis, which caused his leg muscles to cramp while walking.

He had such high hopes of earning a guide dog that he had called a friend in Durant who had a dog run built adjacent to the Judge's home for the expected dog. When he was told he had failed in the school. . . . that he could not have a dog, he said he felt utterly crushed. He had never known such disappointment.

One day, however, he had a visitor who had read about him in an Oklahoma newspaper. He was Austin Hicks, who with his wife Alma, was visiting her brother in Hugo, Oklahoma. Austin Hicks

is a member of the Hemet, California Lions Club, which is near the Guide Dogs of the Desert School.

Austin had driven the 54 miles from Hugo to Durant to tell Judge Phillips about the wonderful school there. "I was a little leery at first, because I had been burned once, but I agreed to contact the school because this stranger had driven all that way just to help me," he said.

The Hickes got in contact with Bud Maynard, Executive Director of the school, which led to the formalities of Judge Phillips' enrollment.

On arriving at the school, Judge Phillips found the training was the same as he had undergone at the San Raphael school and most of the trainers had done their schooling there. However, there was a vast difference in the schools. The San Raphael school was a posh layout with private rooms for the trainee and dog, while the school near Palm Springs had only the bare necessities. In fact it was a "poor boy operation." No school veterinarian, cook, or private baths. It is housed in a 1400 square foot building with two students and two dogs to each small bedroom. There is one bath, living-dining room all in one area. It is located nine miles north of Palm Springs.

"Although they didn't have anything much, they had a lot of know-how, dedication, and heart. They seemed to have an understanding of handicapped people and animals," Judge Phillips said. The trainers help clean the kennels as well as walk the dogs.

Eileen Johnstone was assigned to Judge Phillips as his trainer. She was still a month away from her Guide Dog trainer's license. But she was heaven sent, the Judge said. Within a week after she had taken over his training, she told him he

It was a gala day in Durant, Oklahoma — a celebration for a returning hero when Associate District Judge John Allen Phillips II came home from a session at the Guide Dogs of the Desert School in Palm Springs, California.

Proudly waving her long feathery tail was Brandy, a beautiful part German Shepherd and part Golden Retriever dog. She walked beside Judge Phillips with great dignity and pride. Her brown eyes filled with love as she watched the judge being greeted so warmly by his friends, the townspeople. Evidently she felt that way too.

Phillips says he graduated from the school "Magna Cum Brandy." Though her name may sound a little strange in a Baptist Church where they both attend regularly, the congregation has accepted Brandy wholeheartedly.

Judge Phillips drolly remarked, "Her Retriever mother might have taken up with a beautiful white German Shepherd one day on a trip down the primrose path."

Judge Phillips lost his sight in 1977 from a rare case of Cryptococcus Menin-

would have no trouble in earning a fine Guide Dog.

However, he was afraid to build up much hope because of his earlier experience, but when Maynard introduced him to the Hemet Lions Club members, he said Judge Phillips would earn a Guide Dog without a doubt and the Judge believed him.

Judge Phillips, who has been an after-dinner speaker in Oklahoma and Texas, likes to relate one of the anecdotes related by sightless people. "One day a sightless fellow dropped the correct change in the money box at the front of a bus he was boarding. His keen ears picked up the loud whispers from two ladies across the aisle, 'I don't believe he is really blind. Look how he put the exact change in the money box,' one lady said. The man turned his head toward the sound of their voices and smiling broadly said, "No.. Ladies, I'm not really blind. I'm deaf!"

He feels that some of the talks in the Hemet, California, area helped the program. One club doubled its support from a contribution of \$5,000.00 a year to \$10,000.00. "The Bob Hope Desert Golf Classic also contributes a share if its charity funds to this program," Judge Phillips said.

All this helps a sore heart. He remembers in 1978 when there was an attempt by the Bryan County Bar Association to remove him from the bench because of his blindness.

However, in a hearing conducted by Judge Lavern Fishel, he said in his ruling



Arleen Johnstone, Judge Phillips and Brandy.



that "Blindness alone, is not a valid cause for suspension. Judicial decisions are based on evidence, not on whether or not the Judge can see the smiles or frowns of the litigants or witnesses."

When Judge Phillips later filed for office in the July 10, 1978 election and no one filed against him, he felt that was a vote of confidence by the same lawyers who had protested his serving because he was blind.

The Judge refuses to accept the fact that his blindness is permanent. "God has a purpose while I am blind," he said. I refuse to accept it as being permanent. Our God is one of reason and He always gives an answer. Sometimes the answer is 'Yes', sometimes 'No,' and sometimes 'Wait' but He always answers. I think the answer in my case is 'later.' I don't know the reason for the delay, but I know I will get my answer." This faith has carried him far.

His Guide Dog Brandy is not only a sweet-tempered, loving companion; she is almost humanly clever. When she comes in the house after being outside in the rain, she lies down on her back and holds her four feet up to be wiped off so as not to track up the house. Before she retires in the evening on a rug at the foot of the Judge's bed when her harness is removed, she stretches, wiggles and shakes herself in relief like any working lady who removes her girdle.

She has attended weddings with a pink carnation corsage on her green harness, at which time Brandy is photographed with the bride and groom.

Judge Phillips smiled as he recalled, "I not only received a dear friend in getting Brandy when I was in the school, but I also received a hug from Lucille Ball."

The Judge said it came about when a

distant cousin, Chuck Collins, who lives in Palm Springs, took him to his home one evening where he was introduced to "Lucy." When he found out it was Lucille Ball he told her, "Well! I'll really have something to tell the boys down at the pool hall when I get home!" Lucy jumped from her chair and went over and gave him a big hug. Then she said, "And you can tell them something else. I love you too!"

"And who doesn't love Lucy?" Judge Phillips added.

Not long ago, his trainer from the school, Eileen Johnstone, came to visit the Judge and Brandy and was delighted with their continued progress.

With Brandy as a comfort and guide, Judge Phillips continues to serve on the bench without sight not only as a fair-minded jurist but a very capable one as well.

