LITTLE TYKE

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Little Tyke and her mistress, Margaret Westbeau.

Introduction

Born to a bewildered and frustrated mother on a bleak September morning, Little Tyke set the world thinking anew. She was to fire the deepest thoughts within us and to remind us of biblical prophecy. She was to bring out the heartfelt tenderness within us in a most unsuspecting manner.

As I write I think of the beautiful letters from thousands of wonderful people whom I have never had the pleasure of meeting personally. To one letter I give particular attention, for it reads in part: "I would advise you to stick strictly to the facts, for even then it will seem like a fairy tale."

THE AUTHOR

Hidden Valley Ranch,
Auburn, Washington

A hungry orphan cub finds a friend.

Chapter 1

Raising a Lion Cub

We stood with taut hands clutching nervously at the huge iron bars of the escape cage as we realized our inability to cope with the vicious, raging beast that was pacing to and fro within. Her pain-ridden amber eyes defied our presence at scarcely a yard's distance. With bared claws and glistening fangs she roared and flung herself at us and clawed at the bars which separated us from certain death. As the moments crept slowly by, I wondered why I had consented to analyze the behavior of this raging mass of defiant fury.

As the curator of the zoo and I stood anxiously waiting in the lion house, my momentary fears suddenly faded and I grew strong with sympathetic pity, for I realized that this frustrated and bewildered lioness had a definite plan for her babies, who were about to be born.

The plywood wall which we had hurriedly placed around her cage afforded privacy—not quite complete, and much too late. Yes, she had definite plans with which I almost agreed. She was planning to repeat what she had done in the

past—as the little cubs were born she had crushed them in her powerful jaws, tossed them into the air, and thrust them against the heavy iron bars to fall in little crumpled and lifeless heaps.

This raging lioness, about to become a mother for the fifth time during the last seven years, fought frantically at the prison bars where she was caged so we human creatures could peer curiously at her from "a safe distance."

Apparently, this mother felt no security behind those cold, iron bars. Human beings had placed her there. They had teased and tortured her, watching her agony, and they were as capable of destroying her.

Some had said she was a born killer, but I didn't think so, for I had seen mothers of the wild stand over their newborn dead and give that heart-rending, empty wail as though they tried to call their babies back to life. This mother may have had her "reasons" for destroying her babies. There might be a chance that her lion cubs had been born cripples; animals sometimes kill their cripples. I had to find out, and this was my chance. Suddenly there was a scramble, as a newborn cub was thrown toward me. With split-second timing I grabbed and stood with a new ward that was to change my life and teach me many things. The mother's quick and powerful jaws had left their mark on the cub, and its right front leg dangled helplessly. Many thoughts flooded my mind as I held the tiny cub close to my cheek, but all I could say was, "You poor little tyke."

Being thrust into the role of sole benefactor to the offspring of this raging lioness had been farthest from my mind when I had consented to make a study of the expectant mother. My only recompense was to be the satisfaction of pouring out upon this wounded cub my inexplicable love for animals. This love had been a part of me for as long as I can remember.

In fact, the first reprimand I received as a child came as the

result of such a love. I was about four years old. I can remember that it was an autumn day when I followed a crippled squirrel deep into the forest, hoping it would let me bandage its injured let. When darkness overtook me, I curled up in a beautiful bed of colorful dry leaves and, flanked by a huge, friendly cedar log, fell asleep. At dawn the next morning, I became slightly panic-stricken, for I realized I was lost and hungry. In the forests lived my friends, but there were also dangerous creatures—bears and cougers.

I eventually found my way home to the cabin where I lived with my pioneer parents, together with ten brothers and sisters. I shall never forget the warm friendliness of the old wood-burning cookstove in the kitchen. The crackle of the burning wood echoed throughout the cabin as I crawled behind it and fell into an exhausted sleep. I was too tired to ask why the cabin was deserted. But I was to find that the rest of the household were combing every inch of the forest for some trace of me. That was the reason why there was no one to greet me but the friendly, warm cookstove.

This was a day many years later, when I drove home with the torn and bleeding "little tyke." The brisk winds were scattering the clouds and whisking multicolored leaves from the branches. Some floated lazily on the emerald waters of beautiful Green River as it slowly wended its way to the sea. For more than two miles the river's sparkling waters flow through Hidden Valley Ranch. They were calm and unperturbed, but I was excited and expectant as I handed a three-pound bundle of soft, downy fur to my wife, Margaret. Curious peacocks lined the housetop, while our kittens peered through the white picket fence. Our two terrier dogs danced happily about as my wife fondled the helpless little creature. But to those new, blurry eyes, seeing daylight for the first time, this was a big world, and—well, her greatest concern was a bottle of warm milk.

From the first, Little Tyke, the lion cub, was to learn freedom without fear, and love was to be her guiding light. Here she was to meet, and be a part of, the various animals of Hidden Valley Ranch. Here she was to grow up to be healthy and strong.

After careful examination, veterinarians suggested that we amputate the injured leg. We learned that the gland which lubricates the elbow joint had been ruptured by the mother's cruel fangs and that this fluid seemed to cause the skin and flesh of the foreleg to slough away. We placed Little Tyke's leg in splints, swathed the wound with modern miracle drugs, and bandaged it as firmly as possible. But to this little foundling, born into this world with two strikes against her, life was cruel; and she tried her best with her tiny teeth and claws to free the damaged leg.

Then my wife came up with an ingenious idea. She patterned a vest with one sleeve for this tiny cub. This she cut and sewed from fresh, clean linen, and we slipped the injured and bandaged leg into the sleeve. It worked, but after two days the draining wound saturated the bandages and vest. We carefully applied new medicine, bandages, splints and vests, but these frequent experiences became excruciating ordeals for the helpless little cub. I realized she would soon learn to associate us with this terrible pain and, in turn, it would certainly have a tendency to make her vicious as she grew older. Something had to be done; some psychology had to be applied. This paramount question rose before me as I slept fitfully between the three-hour feeding periods at night. Then an idea came to me. I had previously noticed an old woolen bathrobe of mine hanging in the basement. I retrieved the old bathrobe, and we were ready for a new approach.

My wife and I had become very dexterous with the repeated tasks before us. Pads of gauze were cut to the right

size and miracle drugs applied to the leg. Strips of adhesive tape were torn and the ends stuck to a handy rack above the dressing table. Everything that might facilitate matters was prepared in advance in order to shorten the painful operation. Then with a quiet swish I flung the old bathrobe over the sleeping cub and gently rolled her into it. I pulled the injured leg through one of the moth holes in the bathrobe while Margaret firmly held both ends of the fighting and squirming little bundle. With surgical shears I ripped the old dressings off and quickly applied the new. We never spoke during the dressings, but immediately after the last bandage was taped into place, we began calling, "Where's the little tyke? Where's Little Tyke?" while we unrolled her and made the "rescue." We were both eager to see the results of our new technique. Margaret and I stood in silent thanks as the little cub licked our hands in appreciation for the "rescue." The previous resentment in her pain-ridden eyes was missing, and we realized our plan had worked.

Days passed quickly, and twenty-four hours did not seem long enough for all the work that had to be done. There were cattle, horses, peacocks, chickens, and many other birds and animals to be cared for. Unfortunately, the revenue from our animals was not great enough to pay for hired hands. In fact, the ranch did not pay. However, we had a small business in the little town, but that, too, was not big enough to pay for extra help. It took much hard work every weekday from nine in the morning until six at night, along with waiting on many customers; so, needless to say, we were two very tired people each night as we closed our doors.

We were fortunate in that we had living quarters at the rear of the business, and all our weekday meals were prepared and eaten there, as well as the daytime meals for Little Tyke. While we were out in the front part of the store, we left the radio playing softly for her, and I think that is how she

acquired her love for music.

After our business hours we had many chores at the ranch. Dressed in a little red sweater to keep her warm and to protect her injured leg, the little cub was carried with us constantly. During pleasant days we placed her on the soft grass as we worked, but soon we heard a pitiful whine and whimper. She had learned that with an, "OK, Little Tyke!" we would whisk her up into our arms again, perhaps to a bottle of delicious, warm milk.

We learned, through constant study, that in the animal kingdom the mother usually has a solution for all problems. We learned, for instance, that in a case of constipation in lion cubs, the mother gently licks their little bottoms until the desired results are obtained. When we were confronted with this problem because of the cub's inactivity, I used a bit of soft tissue dipped in tepid water, and this helped me regulate Little Tyke's system, with the result that she never had a messy bed. With the application of sulfa drugs and antibiotics the leg began to heal, and the cub was on the road to health.

Then tragedy struck, and my wife was rushed to a hospital in the city for a major operation. Now there were more problems. With so many creatures depending entirely upon me and with a business in which a new employee could not be trained in less than three weeks, I undertook the task alone. My day began at five in the morning with chores of feeding and caring for our numerous animals and birds. At seven o'clock I drove to the hospital in the city to see my wife. Then I hurried back in order to open our place of business at nine. This business was a cold-storage plant, and customers and their problems came first. Whenever the telephone rang during the day, it startled me terribly, for I feared it might be bad news from the hospital. Then at six o'clock I closed the doors of the plant; repeated the chores at the ranch, and

again raced more than twenty miles to the hospital.

During all this rushing excitement, the little lion cub slept and ate regularly until I left her in the car while I visited Margaret. Being left alone, she began whimpering and crying. My wife was worse and needed a blood transfusion, so of course I immediately presented myself as a donor. I had given blood many times heretofore, but during all this hurry and anxiety I had forgotten that I had eaten a sketchy breakfast. After the ordeal of a "slippery" vein, which had to be probed for several times, I gave the pint of blood. The nurse told me to lie quietly for about twenty minutes. Twenty minutes to me was an eternity, with all that had to be done, so as soon as the nurse left the room I tried to slip quietly out and on my way. It didn't work, however, and I slumped into a helpless heap on the floor. My mind was clear, but my legs would not hold me up. The cold-storage plant opened late that day, and Little Tyke in the car had cried until she had gone into spasms. Somehow I managed through the day, and that night I fell into a tired sleep with the little cub in a basket at the side of my bed. I didn't need an alarm clock, for every three hours her lusty voice told me she was hungry.

During my next visit to the hospital, I left the cub with the veterinarian's wife, but that didn't work too well either, because Little Tyke had become accustomed to my voice. When she didn't hear me she began crying frantically and would not eat. Something had to be done. My wife was getting better, and I could think more clearly now; so I purchased a little kit resembling a doctor's bag, and lined it with several paper diapers. I placed the cub snugly in it. When I reached the hospital, I rushed in the door and up the stairs to my wife's room. I opened the bag, picked up the cub and a bottle of warm milk which I had prepared, and fed Little Tyke. This went along smoothly for a few days until one morning at Margaret's bedside I was caught off guard by the

nurse, who had slipped in so quietly I had not heard her. I will never forget my surprise as she inquired, "What have you got there?" I looked up from the chair where I sat holding the nursing cub, and replied quietly, "It's a little lion cub."

I expected to be thrown out right then and there, but the startled nurse began to smile. Sometimes a smile can mean so much. The word spread like wildfire; and for the next half hour the patients in the other rooms on that floor received less attention than usual. The nurses were in my wife's room, watching and patting the nursing cub. Then, someone shouted, "Jiggers! Here comes the superintendent!" This, I felt certain, would be the proverbial "boot," as I tucked the still hungry cub back into the bag.

But the news was out. It had spread through the hospital; and here stood the superintendent in the doorway. With her "What is this I hear?" I pulled Little Tyke out of the bag again and tried to regain my composure as she came over to the corner where I was standing, trying to get the cub to nurse on the bottle. To my astonishment, the superintendent smilingly took the cub from my hands and gave Little Tyke the bottle like a veteran. I sighed weakly and slumped into my chair.

From then on, the cub's regular visits were the hospital's special secret. After several weeks Margaret returned home, and more weeks went by until chores and business settled down to a normal routine once more—well, as normal as a topsy-turvy ranch could be, where tame raccoons played with a dozen varieties of pheasant, peafowl, and chickens; where even the deer and Canadian honker geese came up to the door for a handout. Even Petunia, the skunk, waddled up and waited patiently for her tidbit.

I tried to imagine Little Tyke's future as I visited the zoos and gazed upon these three-and four-hundred-pound monsters roaring their defiance to the world. I tried to imagine this little creature when she would be a full-grown lioness

playing about the house with me. I'll have to admit that merely thinking about it left me worried at times. Then as I put the cub down onto the soft rug of our living room, I became panicky over the thought that she might not grow up at all because of those two big strikes against her.

She was now able to hold her head up from the rug for a few moments at a time, and she tried to make her way to me by pushing the splinted leg in front of her. She seemed very small and helpless as she struggled, and as I caught her up to my cheek, I heard myself saying, "So you're the 'king of beasts,' you Little Tyke!"

Bandages and dressings were now applied every other day, followed by the usual psychological "rescue" from the old moth-eaten bathrobe, and a bottle of warm milk.