

# STINKY, THE SKUNK THAT WOULDN'T LEAVE

and Other Strange and Wonderful Animal Stories



*Compiled and edited by  
Joe L. Wheeler*



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# DEDICATION

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There is something uniquely special about working with a former student. Indeed, I must hasten to admit that during years past, when looking out over a classroom of energetic idea-generating students, wondering which of them might someday turn out my boss was the furthest thing from my mind! One reason why this is so unexpected is that all through the years, I fully expected to remain in the classroom until the end of my career. But God, in His great wisdom, planned a different scenario, and thus it is that I hereby dedicate the ninth book in *The Good Lord Made Them All* animal series to my long-ago English student at Southwestern Adventist University who is now the esteemed vice president of Product Development—and such a joy he is to work with!—at Pacific Press® Publishing Association:

**JERRY D. THOMAS**

**Other books in the series**  
**The Good Lord Made Them All**  
**by Joe L. Wheeler**

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*and Other Great Stories of God's Smallest Creatures*

*Dick, the Babysitting Bear*  
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*Smoky, the Ugliest Cat in the World*  
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*Tawny, the Magnificent Jaguar*  
*and Other Great Jungle Stories*

*Togo, the Sled Dog*  
*and Other Great Animal Stories of the North*

*Wildfire, the Red Stallion*  
*and Other Great Horse Stories*

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# INTRODUCTION

## STRANGE AND WONDERFUL

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*Joseph Leininger Wheeler*

As always, when choosing a theme for a book, I sought divine wisdom, for my own wisdom wells are so shallow. In this case, What should my theme be for our ninth animal story collection? After Dogs, Cats, Horses, Wild Animals, Animal Heroes, Small Animals, Animals of the North, and Animals of the Jungle, should I return to an earlier theme, or should I seek out another?

The process proved more than a little frustrating in that the answer was mighty slow in coming. I read, or reread, hundreds of animal stories before a pattern emerged. As I slogged through this long process of discarding one theme after another, I couldn't help but think of that fiendish highwayman of Attica in ancient Greece—Procrustes—who placed all those unfortunates who fell into his hands upon an iron bed. If they were longer than the bed, he cut off whatever lopped over; if they were shorter, he used a rack to stretch them out until they fit. He was eventually slain by Theseus. Hence the term “procrustean bed,” which has come to mean “a rigid standard to which conformity is enforced.”

Well, at times during this search for a ninth theme, I felt like I was using a procrustean bed to measure each thematic applicant.

But finally, my “Eureka moment”: the animal stories I would feature would qualify for inclusion by whether or not each one was sufficiently “strange” or “wonderful.” From that moment on, putting this collection together became exciting—exciting because it was such a new and unorthodox theme for a story anthology. It

was amazing how elastic those two words turned out to be. A number of stories qualified on both counts.

At first I worried I wouldn't find enough strong stories to qualify; later, I worried because I ended up having to leave a number of them out because there wasn't room for them all—which ones would lose out on my editorial procrustean bed? I consoled myself by reasoning, *Perhaps later on I could put together another collection of strange and wonderful animal stories.*

A number were written by contemporary writers (one completed only hours away from my submission deadline); others were spread out across a span of a century and a half—several appear to be even older than that.

I learned a lot—more than for any other previous collection—I hadn't known before. Some were so improbable that if I hadn't trusted the source I'd have doubted their validity. A very few were apparently fictional; however, I've learned that no writer ever writes in a vacuum: in a majority of cases an ostensibly fictional story is based on an actual occurrence. In fact, the reverse is often true: it is an axiom among writers that the more unlikely to be true a given story appears to be, the more likely it is to be true, for writers of fiction rarely incorporate narratives that deviate too far from verisimilitude—unless they are dealing with pure fantasy.

At any rate, the ball is now in your court. Do write me telling me what you think of the collection, which stores you like best, and why. I can be reached at P.O. Box 1246, Conifer, CO 80433. Or if you prefer, my e-mail is [mountainauthor@gmail.com](mailto:mountainauthor@gmail.com).

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# SQUEAKER, THE TRUCK-RIDING DEER

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*Steve Hamilton*

*In this journey we call “life,” once in every long while there comes an experience so incredible that it remains in conscious memory throughout life. Such a story is this, penned by my cousin Steve Hamilton, about our mutual grandparents Rollo and Ruby Wheeler and—well, I’ll just let Steve tell this most improbable of all improbable stories.*

\* \* \* \* \*

One of my earliest memories has to do with the summer of 1940 when I was two. Grandpa and Grandma had moved to Howell Mountain overlooking California’s Pope Valley and Napa Valley, where their six-hundred-acre ranch seemed to stretch away to forever, at least to me. In those simpler days of the Great Depression, those who had money used it; those who did not, bartered. My grandfather Rollo Wheeler had a big batch of kids who needed a college education; Pacific Union College in Angwin had a voracious boiler heating system that gobbled up a vast supply of wood. Since wood was something Grandpa had plenty of, he and the college met each other’s needs. And since one of his daughters, Ruby, married my father, Jay, I got to be there too.

When Dad worked in the woods, I couldn’t go out with him because I was barely two years old and it was far too dangerous, but when Grandpa went too, I got to go because he could watch out for me.

One unforgettable day, we arrived on the scene just as the men were putting the finishing touches on felling a huge bull pine tree about ninety feet in height. They'd already finished the undercut and were starting to cut the other side and insert the wedges guiding it to the exact place they wanted it to fall. They'd cleared the brush from the small knoll that they had targeted. But just as it started to fall, a giant whirlwind swirled out of nowhere and engulfed the tree, turning it about forty-five degrees to the right so that it missed the knoll altogether. It came crashing down with a thunderous sound and rolled down into a nearby ravine.

Miraculously, no one was hurt or killed—that was the good news. But the bad news was that they now had to cut the fallen tree into smaller logs and winch them up the steep bank, and this was going to cost them many hours of extra work.

The men all scrambled down the bank to inspect the tree and determine just what to do. Suddenly, they heard moaning and a high-pitched squeaky voice coming from under the downed tree. As it happened, a tragedy had occurred. Unbeknownst to them, a momma white-tailed deer had been giving birth to twin fawns down in what she thought was the protected willows and brush of the little creek running down the ravine. Sadly, a huge limb from that tree had fallen directly on her, killing her and one of the fawns.

Queenie, Grandpa's ten-year-old German Shepherd dog was on the scene in an instant! Grandpa and the boys had to call her off. One of the twin fawns had survived, and it appeared to have been born only minutes before. It still had blood-filled film and afterbirth all over it. Its head and nostrils were clear, however. My dad carried the fawn up to the truck (about two-hundred feet) and gently laid it down. Queenie was there immediately, and Grandpa was certain we'd have a hard time keeping her from injuring or killing the newborn.

Queenie was trained to chase deer and keep them out of Grandpa's twenty-six-acre apple orchard down by the ranch house, and occasionally she had injured and even killed deer that wouldn't immediately leave the orchard. The orchard was fenced on three sides away from the house and it was Queenie's job every night to keep all of the deer out, because a herd of forty or fifty deer could eat Grandpa's entire crop of apples in only a few hours, thus putting him out of business.

Grandpa didn't know what to do. He wanted to save the deer, but it would be impossible for him to keep Queenie away from it. While the men were talking it over, the little fawn started making its funny little squeaking sound, and from then on she was called Squeaker.

The fawn only weighed three or four pounds, and when no one noticed, Queenie quickly stepped over to it and started very gently, and almost affectionately, to lick the afterbirth from the baby.

## *Squeaker, the Truck-Riding Deer*

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Part of the story that has not been told was that Queenie had just delivered a litter of seven or eight puppies a day and a half earlier, but they were stillborn, dying during the birthing process. As tragic as that was, because she was ten years old (about seventy years old in human years), stillbirths are not all that unusual for dogs her age.

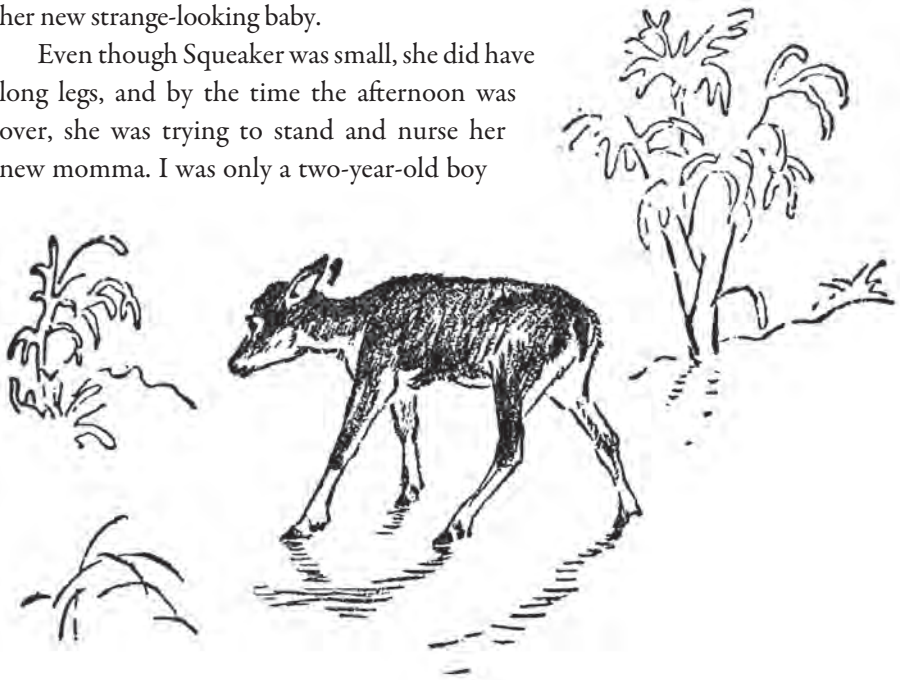
God has a wonderful way of providing. Queenie's nipples were bulging with milk, and our new baby fawn badly needed nourishment.

Everyone stood back and let Momma Queenie clean and nuzzle the newborn. We all watched in amazement for several minutes. After the men all went back to work, Grandpa helped Queenie to lie down and showed me how to gently squeeze her nipples to get drops of milk and feed them to Squeaker.

The truck gave us shadow from the warm afternoon sun, and I actually taught Squeaker how to nurse, just a little, and within a couple of hours two or three of Queenie's breasts were partially emptying.

My grandpa Rollo was absolutely amazed at how Squeaker took to Queenie. After all, the fawn was only hours, maybe even minutes, old when the tree fell; but after all, this was the only momma she knew, and her doggie momma had the much-needed milk. Queenie was an old dog, set in her ways and trained to dislike and maybe even kill deer; yet here she was falling in motherly love with her new strange-looking baby.

Even though Squeaker was small, she did have long legs, and by the time the afternoon was over, she was trying to stand and nurse her new momma. I was only a two-year-old boy



and couldn't figure how to make this awkward situation work. Momma Dog would lie down very cooperatively and when the fawn would lean over far enough, she would fall face down on top of Momma.

Grandpa arrived on the scene and with him was a large bale of barley straw in the back of the truck. Down came the straw and up came Momma, lying on the straw bale, and *voilà!* Squeaker was at the perfect height to nurse!

When we arrived back at the house, dog and deer were already bonding as momma and baby. My mom and Grandma both were amazed. No one in our households could even imagine such a thing taking place. Because I was only two and had been working at it all afternoon, I didn't think it was such a big deal, but Grandpa and my dad made me feel like I was a hero. Of course, I gladly accepted that status.

Squeaker got Queenie's pen and dog house, and Grandpa made the dog a new home out of bales of barley straw.

Grandpa always got up by 5:30 A.M., and on the nights I stayed with my grandparents, I got up too. Being the nursemaid was my special job, and Grandpa made me feel very important.

When Queenie was not available, Grandma fixed Squeaker some of my own powdered baby formula, and I fed Squeaker from a bottle. She did not like it nearly as well as her adopted momma's milk, though Grandpa solved that problem by taking me, Queenie, and Squeaker with him in the old Model A Ford everywhere he went. That way when Squeaker was hungry, we stopped, and down came the hay bale out of the rumble seat, and we waited until mealtime was over, then we resumed the journey.

I never thought much about it, but we did make a memorable sight. We drove down the road in a Model A Ford with Queenie sitting by the door on the passenger's seat with her head always out the window. A two-and-a-half-going-on-three-year-old Steve was sitting on the same seat but next to the gearshift toward Grandpa. Next, was Squeaker from her little space behind the seats, with her head and nose over Grandpa's shoulder, nuzzling Grandpa's ear. Then, of course, there sat Grandpa, proudly driving us down the road. We did really make a sight to behold when we were in Angwin or St. Helena. People everywhere wanted a peek, and Grandpa kindly consented, provided they kept their distance. Everyone wanted to know how the dog and deer got along so well. My grandpa would smile and say, "Queenie is Squeaker's momma." They all laughed in disbelief and Grandpa never explained as we drove on about our business. Most of the time we were delivering a few boxes of apples off the hay bale in the back to his regular apple clients.

## *Squeaker, the Truck-Riding Deer*

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Squeaker kept her reserve and held herself aloof from all but the very immediate family whom she saw on a daily basis. We had friends who would come to visit, and she'd run up to them, smell their clothes, and nuzzle, leaving little slobbers, but she didn't adopt them as friends.

One day at the creek house in Angwin, wealthy Uncle Worth and Aunt Marge came to visit. It was obviously a very special occasion as he was wearing a brand-new white suit with silk outlines on the pockets and the collar, black-and-white oxford shoes with perforated toes, and she had on a brand-new white dress and black-and-white heels to match. By now, Squeaker was four months old, a good-sized fawn. She still had lots of white spots on her honey-brown colored coat. Our little deer could now almost outrun her doggie Momma, and she could definitely out-jump her. When Uncle Worth and Aunt Marge drove into the yard, the dog and deer came running out to meet them. My dad, seeing how they were dressed to kill, called to Queenie to stop and not to jump up, but Squeaker didn't have such good social behavior. Remember, I said Squeaker liked to nuzzle your clothes and would slobber on them and leave brown spots. Dad hollered to Worth, "Clap your hands and she'll go away!" But Worth, thinking she was so cute, reached down while Dad was hollering, "*Don't pick her up!*" Too late! Laughing in his deep baritone voice, Worth had grabbed her and held her face-to-face in front of him. Her hooves were as sharp as razors and within a few seconds she had pawed his new suit and shredded portions of his coat and pants, ruining his entire ensemble. Dad was shocked! Worth and Marge were devastated, but like I said, Squeaker didn't make friends easily.

From about that time on, Grandpa wisely started keeping our little deer out in the barn up at the apple ranch and away from most people. He didn't want her getting used to any more people because he wanted her to eventually be wild again.

My dad was a teacher now, and we lived about twenty miles from the apple ranch. Because I didn't live with Grandpa Rollo and Grandma Ruby during the week, I usually saw them only after church on the weekends down at the creek house. When I did get to see Squeaker, she was still my buddy. She was so tall now that I could barely get my little arm over her neck, but she loved the little snacks Grandma gave me to feed her. Whether it was an apple slice, some oatmeal flakes, or corn bread, she loved them all.

After six or seven months, Squeaker was weaned from her momma's milk, and although she and Queenie were still buddies, they no longer played or slept together, and Grandpa didn't take Squeaker on his apple-delivery trips anymore. Grandpa and

Grandma made the deer spend more and more time alone out in the barn with the cow.

When she was a yearling and had lost her spots, Grandpa would take Squeaker about three miles away down to a lower forty acres called the Astrican apple orchard. Grandpa owned this place too, but it only had two or three acres of trees—and these were special apples that had fruit by the fourth of July. The apples never did get very sweet, but they were great for applesauce. It was a safe area and far enough away from other ranches so she could get acclimated to being alone with other wild deer.

My family moved to the Hilmar/Turlock area of central California, so we seldom saw Squeaker anymore.

One day when I was four, I was riding with Grandpa when we saw a white-tailed doe that looked to be about two years old. That would have matched her age. When we stopped the truck, she started walking over to us. She hesitated at about fifty feet from us. Grandpa was certain it was Squeaker but didn't want to confuse her by getting reacquainted. Grandma was sad but said she also knew it was best.

\* \* \* \* \*

Grandpa and Grandma Wheeler's place was absolutely the place to be on Thanksgiving. It was not unusual to have as many as seventy family members in attendance. There were cousins that I didn't even know I was related to, and we had a grand old time. Every third year, Cousin Joe and his folks would come home from Central America, where they were missionaries. We would team up with Cousin Billie, and at those times the woods surrounding Grandpa's were a dangerous place to be. Pirates, Wild West renegades, and overall bad guys secretly watched and plotted against society. But the plots were innocent, and the fun was unsurpassed.

On these Thanksgiving weekends, it was traditional for those of the group who were deer hunters to come up to Grandpa's ranch early in the week and try to fill their deer tags and finish out the season. Those who were successful always hung their deer in one of the apple sheds and dressed them out, wrapping them in sheets to hang in the cool night air. Grandpa didn't mind getting rid of a few more that he did not have to chase out of the orchard every night. The Queen Mother (Queenie) had passed on due to old age, and Grandpa had a new patrol dog named Buster. Buster was a huge dog, about 120 pounds, and he became Grandma's favorite companion. Buster's first job was to keep the deer out of Grandma's flower garden, and his next job was to chase them out of the orchard. He had taken over Queenie's jobs and did them both well.

## *Squeaker, the Truck-Riding Deer*

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Buster's allegiance was primarily to Grandma, and Grandpa didn't mind it at all. Grandma needed protection because she'd been deaf since she was twenty-two as the result of complications from diphtheria.

I was ten years old before I heard anyone mention anything more about Squeaker.

After the men would come up and shoot their deer and dress them out, Grandma would let us eat venison for part of Thanksgiving dinner along with some of the best food you could ever imagine. However, after Squeaker had become part of our lives, she'd no longer permit anyone to prepare or cook any deer meat in the house. It had to be barbequed outside.

When she spoke about it to Grandpa, she spoke in a very hoarse whisper. Even though she did not intonate the voice, she whispered so loudly you could hear her clear across the room. She would corner Grandpa in front of all the relatives just before we were to eat and, pointing to the venison, she'd say, "It's Squeaker, isn't it?"

"No, Ma, they were all bucks, no does!"

"Are you sure, Pa? We can't have the blessing and eat if it's Squeaker!"

"No, Ma, I'm positive these were boy deer." Then she would give the OK, and we could bless the food and begin the feast.

Who knew that Squeaker would have such an impact on the Wheeler household, even in absentia and for years after she was back in the wild? I have often thought, *I wonder if she ever mated and raised baby fawns of her own? If so, I wonder how many? I wonder how long she lived? I wonder where she lived? Did she remember us? Did she remember her doggie momma? I guess I'll never know!*

\* \* \* \* \*

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