

A JOYFUL NOSE
By
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The five of us kids poured out of the old Ford station wagon. Excitement crackled in the air as we headed into the park for Dad's company picnic.

I spotted the gargantuan stuffed dog from a distance. He was deep pink with white shaggy tufts and a satin ribbon tied around his neck. His eyes were covered by hair, sheep dog style and his nose was black, like a dog's nose should be. He had to be three feet tall. And he smiled, or at least he smiled at me. His tongue hung out of the side of his mouth all pink and sloppy. Love at first sight!

"Dad, Dad! Who is the pink dog for? Is it one of the prizes? Which race is it for?" Persistence worked best with him.

"Hold on to your horses, Maggie. Let me ask the fella in charge of the races." He whistled as he ambled off.

I stood staring at the shaggy dog. He was sitting there so dignified among the other prizes. I had always wanted a sheep dog. The prize had to be him. I had to win!

Dad came back with a twinkle in his eye, which meant good news.

"How old are you this year?"

"C'mon Dad, you know I just turned ten! Tell me, is it for my race?"

Dad winked and said, "Looks like you're in the running. The shaggy dog is the prize for the ten to twelve-year-old girls."

“Thanks, Dad! I’m going to win!” I boasted.

He shook his finger at me and said, “Maggie, don’t go counting your prizes before you’ve won them.”

I saw one of the other girls approaching the table. My heart did a tailspin. I had forgotten about Darlene, who was twelve, and a head taller than me. She made me feel like a midget! Darlene had blue eyes and blonde curls that fell softly around her face. My brown hair hung straight down, when it wasn’t pulled back into a ponytail.

We didn’t speak, then she broke the ice. “Isn’t that pink dog so very pink! It must be a prize for one of the races.”

“Yeah, it must,” I muttered. Her father was the top salesman in the company. Dad said he made the most money. He wore a gold ring with a diamond in the middle of it.

“Why don’t you go ask your dad?” I suggested.

“Good idea!”

The afternoon stretched on, with the men’s softball game taking forever. I managed to eat some fried chicken, and washed it down with two bottles of orange soda. After that the children’s races began. There was a shoe scramble, a three-legged race, and a potato sack race. The eight and nine-year-olds hopped like giant grasshoppers across the field.

Finally, we were called to the starting line. The man in charge stood in front of us holding an empty glass cola bottle. He grinned, wide and toothy.

“Each of you girls will be given an empty cola bottle. The object of the race is to push it across the field to the finish line.” He pointed way across the field.

Okay fine, I thought, we got a weird race. What was the catch?

“Watch me, girls!” The man dropped down on his hands and knees and placed the empty bottle sideways on the grass. He angled his large nose in the center of the bottle and gave it a forward push. It rolled, but not far.

I blinked in disbelief. My hopes were sinking fast.

The mothers yelled, “No, no, the girls will hurt themselves!”

Some girls were yanked out of line, and my mom was heading straight toward me! Before she could reach me I was on all fours and had my nose in position waiting for the start-up signal.

Mom hollered, “Maggie, give me your glasses!”

Darn! I was all set to use them as the buffer between the bottle and me. I ripped the glasses off my face, and got back into position, quick!

BANG! We were off. Everything was a blur. I didn’t look up, just kept that bottle rolling. Soon, I couldn’t feel my nose.

Someone yelled out, “Come on, Maggie, you can do it!” Others were calling out too. I didn’t have a clue where the finish line was so I followed the voices. I hoped they were shouting from the finish line.

I passed a girl who was crying and holding her nose. I turned to see if help was on its way and instead saw Darlene crawling fast and furious. Time to steamroll!

Oh no, a fat bumblebee hovering over a clover. I swerved to the left then to the right, trying not to lose my bearings.

The next thing I knew, I was closing in on the finish line. Everyone was screaming, “C’mon, Maggie, C’mon!”

I blasted forward with all my might! Cheers exploded all around me as I crossed the finish line. I couldn't believe that I made it. Not only that, I was the only one that had! I stood there stunned.

"Your nose is turning purple. I hope you haven't broken it!" Mom scrunched her face up while she examined my nose. My bangs were plastered to my forehead and my chin felt gritty. But it didn't matter, I had won!

Across the field girls were crawling helter-skelter everywhere. Poor Darlene had done a complete turn around and was heading back to the starting gate!

The coveted prize was placed into my arms. I smiled for photos then sank my face into the soft pink and white fur. He was mine!

I walked past the other contestants. Some were whimpering. I felt bad that they had lost. I used my dog to shield me from them. Darlene was sobbing so hard she was shaking. Grass stains ruined her once-white pedal pushers. Her hair hung in bedraggled wisps, some sticking to her moist face. I winced to see her such a mess. Her family surrounded her, sympathizing with her loss.

What could I say to make her feel better? Should I give her the dog? It would be a really hard thing to do, but I couldn't stand to see her cry.

"I'm sorry, Darlene," I said softly.

Her head spun around in my direction. She looked at me accusingly as if I had done something terrible.

"Sawdust!" she said pointing at the dog. "My dad said the dog was made out of sawdust."

Her father put his arm around her and said, "Don't cry, honey. I'll buy you a

much better one.”

Hmm, I said to myself, don't think there could be a better one than mine!

I named him Dusty.