Third Honorable Mention - Short Story

My Friend Fred

by Phillip Lemmo

I first met Fred about one and one-half years ago. I was working in the yard, at the apartment complex that I manage. Fred just walked up to me. I could see at a glance that he was not from a privileged background. As a matter of fact, he appeared to be one of the many homeless of this country. It was also apparent that he knew how he looked, but he did try to keep his appearance up. He was clean and neat.

During the day Fred just stood there watching me work; to the casual observer it would have appeared that Fred was the supervisor. He watched me work for over three hours, right up to lunch time. By this time we had become somewhat accustomed to his watching and me working. Although Fred tried to help on several occasions, the work was beyond his ability.

Lunch time came. I asked Fred if he was hungry, but I knew he was; just the mention of food made his mouth water. We ate lunch; I ate a light lunch, Fred ate all I gave him and looked like he could go on eating forever. Lunch was over, I went back to work. Fred came along.

I was somewhat amazed that Fred would have the patience to watch me work for an entire day. Finally, the day was over. I went home, I was surprised that Fred had the nerve to walk to my apartment with me, walk in and lie down on the sofa. Sometimes I am a soft touch. I could see that he was tired and as he had no place to go, I decided to let him stay the night.

Fred was a little strange; for example, he would get up in the middle of the night, cry, get a drink of water and then go back to sleep.

I think Fred decided to stay after that first night, because the next day he went everywhere I did, and watched me work again, all day. By this time I had figured out that Fred was looking for a place to stay. Now, I had to decide if I wanted a roommate. I decided to give it a try.

Fred moved in; since he had no personal belongings, it didn't take long. Fred was my roommate.

Although I did not give Fred a job, he took on the responsibility to help control visitors parking in the apartment lot. That responsibility I let him have, and considered it payment for room and board.

As time went on, it seemed that Fred was getting more and more friendly towards me. Not that I minded, but when he tried to get into my bed with me one night, I drew the line. Fred was a little hurt but understood that he could not sleep with me.

Finally, I would like to describe Fred to you, so if you see him you will know him. Fred is relatively short, no more than one and one-half feet tall, about two feet long, lots of hair on his face, most of it brown with some black around the eyes. He has razor sharp teeth, but the most important thing to know about Fred is—he is my dog.