

FABULOUS TALKING DOG OF KELLEYS ISLAND By Rob Beer

*(Editor's note: The following story is reprinted from the Ashland, O., Times-Gazette, having been written by Robert M. Beer, president and treasurer of the Ashland Printing Co., publishers of the newspaper.)*

Did you ever hear a "shaggy dog" story? In case you never did, I should tell you that they are usually gags about talking animals that speak a punch line ... usually off color and good for a belly laugh. The story I have to tell is of a little fellow who is not shaggy at all ... he is smooth ... smooth-haired I mean, and his remarks are colorful but never shady. He is the fabulous talking dog of Kelleys Island! Honestly, this little guy talked to me. He answered my questions and he did more. Let me tell you about it.

Mr. and Mrs. Ray Tacke bought a Boston bull puppy some eight years ago. He was six weeks old and he looked and acted like any pedigree specimen should. His habits were good from the start and he took a special shine to his mistress, Anna. They called him "Tarzan" and when he was a year old he began making funny noises – guttural noises they were – and they sounded like speech! Anna encouraged him and when he was three years old Tarzan quit barking and began to talk. His first words were ANN-AH! From then on this canine curiosity has picked up many more words. He speaks when he is spoken to. His words are well chosen and appropriate.

He began to tell customers at the inn what kind of beer they should drink – he told them who would be the next president of the United States (back in 1952). They tried to make him say "Stevenson." He had one and only one answer to the question. "Eis...en...howell." He still sticks to his story when you ask him whom he loves. He might, however, on occasions, say "ANN-AH" or "I love you." He might even say "Bud-weis-rrr."

A beer salesman visited Kelleys Island a couple of years ago and suggested that Tarzan should offer the customers more than one brand of brew. Tarzan now makes no recommendation but he'll tell you what you're drinking. A Budweiser bottle will be plainly identified by brand name. However, a bottle of Phieffer's will bring a different response. "FIFER-SHHH" he says, plain as day! When the label on the latter was changed a year or so ago, they thought Tarzan would be confused. He hesitated for a moment, read the label, (so Anna says) and burped out the right answer.

Tarzan has three loves aside from Mrs. Tacke. He likes beer, the President and hamburger. This past summer a visitor to the inn brought along her own Boston bull-terrier. Tarzan sniffed the intruder with a definite air of disdain. In a fit of jealousy, he became unusually articulate. To each table he stopped with the query – "Budweiser, Leisy's, Eiserhowell, hamburger?" Normally this little son-of-a-gun speaks to no one except his true love – Anna! She can make him expound without the inducement of hamburger – the usual bait.

She tells about the night some years ago when Tarzan didn't come home until three o'clock in the morning. When he scratched at the door and whined "ANN-AH" he was admitted – with a gentle whack on the hind quarters. Tarzan didn't speak a word for three days. He sat back of the bar and sulked. Not even hamburger would jar him loose from his morbid state. On the third night he laid on the floor beside his mistress' bed as always. When all was quiet a plaintive little word came from Tarzan. He said "ANN-AH." "I love you," she said. The little guy curled up and went to sleep and has been talking ever since. He has never been punished since – and he never will be.

One of the biggest kicks that Mr. and Mrs. Tacke have had came on a trip to the Mardi-Gras at New Orleans. They took Tarzan along with them and sat him on a stool at a plush bar and restaurant. "Bud-weiser," he said. A customer who was sitting next to Tarzan stiffened and looked. "Who said that," he asked Anna. "The dog said it," she replied.

A flashback to the many shaggy dog stories told about talking animals prompted the customer to make a bet that Tarzan couldn't repeat his words. "Ten thousand dollars that dog can't talk," he said. "I'll take you up," Anna replied. The customer petted Tarzan and said, "Alright, say something." The little guy looked him right in the eye and said, "I'm mad!"

The money wasn't taken for two reasons – the customer was in his cups and Tarzan was really mad. "I'll bet he took the pledge after that one," says Anna. And you can't blame him if he did! The man who made the bet had it to spend. We dare not mention his name but he lives right here in Ohio.

There are such things as working dogs and barking dogs, but Tarzan is an exception to both. He's insured, of course, but he doesn't even rate old age pension or fringe benefits. That's the life of a dog, I suppose.

When I was ready to leave the inn, it had become dark. Our boat was tied up some 1,000 feet away. "Take Mr. Beer out to his boat," said Mrs. Tacke to Tarzan. "Aruf," he said in true dog style, as she put a lighted flashlight in his mouth. He led me up the lane from the inn and stayed six paces ahead. At intervals he gave me a furtive glance to be sure I was still with him. When we reached the boat Tarzan stopped looked up at me and proffered a friendly growl.

As I stepped into the boat I saw him turn and trek down the dock toward the Casino Inn, flashlight still in mouth – to paw at the door of the inn and plead for "ANN-AH!"