

Five Dog Night

Richard Porter of East Charleston, Vermont, aged 79, does not own an electric blanket. He does not have central heat in his three-room cabin, has not heard of modern airtight wood stoves, does not own a kerosene or gas space heater, and regularly allows the fire in his box-type wood stove to burn itself out each night around eleven o'clock. He is not averse to cold drafts and for this reason has never insulated the pine board walls of his cabin even though the temperatures in East Charleston commonly dip below zero degrees Fahrenheit for weeks at a time. And yet, in spite of his apparent lack of conveniences, Porter says he is never cold at night. He has devised a system of living blankets that automatically pile themselves on his bed in response to the temperature.

Porter is the type of mildly eccentric individual who can be found living beyond the confines of the rural towns throughout most of North America. He lives by his wits, working for logging crews whenever he needs money, picking over the local dump for resources he feels need recycling, and getting through the New England winter with as little expenditure of money and energy as possible. Like many who have deserted human society, Porter keeps a number of dogs for companions. Townspeople regularly see him walking along back roads surrounded by his pack, a mixed crew of all sizes and shapes, some large, some small, some friendly, and the rest too lazy to be unfriendly. Because of his companions he has earned for himself the title "The Dog King" among the townspeople. Not surprisingly, it is his subjects who keep him warm at night.

Each winter night about the time the box stove begins to cool, the first of Porter's alternative heating systems—a black and tan hound named Spike—begins to stir from his spot beneath the stove. Spike will climb onto Porter's bed when the room temperature reaches 50 degrees. Louise will get up around 40 degrees. Any colder and the others begin to come in through a dog door that Porter has cut in one of his door panels.

Spike and Louise, his favorites, spend most of their time in the cabin. The



others come in only to sleep, and only when it's cold. They come in a progression, Porter says. Jeff, a collie-like dog with a thick coat, will move in on those nights when the outside temperature reaches 10 degrees and will join the others on the bed shortly thereafter. Alice, a medium-sized dog of indetermined parentage, arrives after the temperature dips below ten. But those nights when the mercury dips below the zero mark the arrival of the warmest dog of all, an immense golden-

eyed thing named Bull who has a strong shot of Irish wolfhound in his blood.

Porter says that Bull does not normally appreciate such bourgeois comforts as warm stoves and human companionship. But in his aloof, doglike way, he is as devoted to Porter as any dog of his type could be. Porter believes that it is generally below Bull to come in at night, let alone climb up on the bed with the lesser beings in the pack. But zero-degree nights get the better of the pride and invariably he deserts his usual hideout beneath the porch stairs and squeezes in through the narrow door panel. With Bull on the bed, there is not a night that Porter cannot endure.

Richard Porter has fallen behind the times in some areas of study. He believes, for example, that J. Edgar Hoover would have made a good president, is convinced that the Reagan administration is rife with communists, and was not aware of the fact that this country experienced what was once termed an "energy crisis." On the other hand, he has not been cold at night for 65 years in spite of the fact that he lives in one of the coldest regions in New England and spends no more than one or two hundred dollars a year on energy—mostly for dog food.

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