

THE JOHN C.
WINSTON COMPANY

ELIZABETH MORTON
Editor, Trade Books

1010 ARCH STREET, PHILADELPHIA 7, PA.
EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

November 19, 1947

Mrs. Elizabeth Rider Montgomery
3209 Alki Avenue
Seattle 6, Washington

Dear Mrs. Montgomery:

I thought it advisable, after looking over the questionnaire, to send it directly to Mrs. Ruth Ferguson at 400 East 49th Street, New York, New York, and I have asked her to forward the material to you when she has filled in the information.

Where I was able to supply the information, I did so, but anything connected personally with Mr. O'Brien I felt she would be much more competent to handle.

It was my privilege to have met both Mr. and Mrs. Knight a number of times, and in fact while we were working on LASSIE COME-HOME, Eric Knight came into the office to discuss matters with us. He was a very colorful person with black hair and a sort of reddish moustache and a very ruddy complexion. He had rather much of an English accent, although not an unpleasant one, and was addicted to wearing coats and vests that did not match!

He was a very jolly man and had only one real hatred that I knew of and that was the way they did business in Hollywood. Of course you may not want to use this, because it might not be advantageous, but it took him a long time to decide whether he wanted LASSIE filmed by M-G-M. Then after everything was settled, he was very cooperative, but I believe was killed before the picture had its premiere. In fact I am quite sure of that, since Mrs. Knight had already gone into the WACS and we were unable to contact her for the preview in Philadelphia.


I am quite sure that Mrs. Knight, who is now Mrs. Frederick Lindtner, will be very helpful. She is a perfectly charming woman, and was before her marriage fencing champion in her class at the University

Mrs. Elizabeth Rider Montgomery -2-

November 19, 1947

of Pennsylvania. She has been in here to see me since her remarriage, and I understand she is still trying to straighten out the late Major Knight's notes on prospective books.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth Morton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "E".

Elizabeth Morton, Editor
Trade Department

Ercknight

3209 Alki Avenue
Seattle 6, Washington
February 26, 1948

Mrs. Jere Knight
Springhouse Farm
Pleasant Valley
Bucks Co., Pa.

Dear Mrs. Knight:

Thanks so much for filling out my question-
naire about the writing of Lassie Come-Home.
I thought you gave me all the information I
needed, but when I began to write the chapter
I find I have a couple more questions.

*She got lost from
us, Missiepa Rabbit
in the woods, a good
distance from home **

About your collie Lassie--known as Toots:
How did you find out she was a come-home dog?
Had you sold her, given her away, or left her
somewhere at some time? If there was some
incident which revealed her as a come-home dog,
and which later served as the inspiration for
Lassie, that is the incident I will highlight.
Another thing, how old was Betty at that time?
And did Eric Knight send the story cold to
the Post, or was it after his Flying Yorkshireman
story? That ran in the Post, didn't it? -No

*Through his
agent, Curtis Brown
Wtd. of N.Y.C.*

-About 17

Sorry to bother you again, but I do want to
do the best I can with this chapter.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth R. Montgomery
Elizabeth Rider Montgomery

* And later on, once when we had left her in our parked car at the
inter section of a busy city street & were unfortunately gone longer
than we intended, she managed miraculously to crawl out
the partly closed window & get out to relieve herself. But when
we returned she was sitting by the car, and a man was
standing by watching her who told us he had tried for a half
an hour to coax her away from the car... There were other
similar incidents in our joint lives (she was almost 12 when she died of
greenup for EK + me).
Forgive the scribble / over

Double Patriotism

"Lassie Come-Home"

Published by John C. Winston Co.

Year 1940

Author's real name Eric Knight Pen name Eric Knight

A. AUTHOR'S BACKGROUND

Date of birth April 10, 1897 Place of birth Menston, Yorkshire, England

Father's occupation Jeweler Number of brothers 3 and sisters

Father's nationality British Mother's nationality British

Kind of home during childhood (farm, small town, city apt., etc.) industrial area of Yorkshire, Leeds, Halifax, and surrounding countryside, knew hardships young in life, and began ~~where~~ to work during school days

Amount of schooling (high school, college, etc.) High School Wealthy at birth

Economic status during childhood (poor, middle class, wealthy) poor thereafter

Special interests as a child (sports, books, games, etc.) reading, drawing birds and flowers, dogs and horses, (came to U.S. when 15, at high school here interested in ice-skating, football, ice-hockey, etc.)

Childhood ambitions To paint or write

When did he begin to write? At 15, was copy boy on old Philad Press, as a precocious lad was encouraged by editorial writers of that paper, and Why? had published a series of great romances of history which were syndicated---those were the days of Christopher Morley on Phila. and Who encouraged him? others of note. C. H. Dickerman encouraged him most.

What and when was his first recognition of success? First published short story was a short-short in Liberty in 1930, then first novel "Invitation to Life" appeared 1934, "Song on Your Bugles" recommended by Book Society in England 1936; "Flying Yorkshireman" Book of Month, U.S. 1938

How did he happen to write for children? LASSIE COME HOME was first published as a short story (long) in the Saturday Evening Post, and editor friend suggested it would make a wonderful book for children, EK added all the passages he had cut to make it a short story and lo, it was a book!

Anything else about his background which has a bearing on his writing.

E.K. read everything and anything he could lay his hands on when young. He chanced into newspaper work, when 15 and continued in it thereafter, when after World War I he found that his eyes had been gassed and he was color-blind so could not be an artist (he had won medals for drawing in Boston and N.Y.), returned to newspaper work, edited Darien and Norwalk, Conn. papers then returned to Philadelphia and columns of dramatic criticism for which he got nation-wide acclaim. After first novel appeared was offered job in Hollywood, but did not like it there, and started writing as full time career in 1934. Before that he had only worked at his stories and novels at nights and odd moments. His writing all stemmed from his childhood years in Yorkshire...

B. THE WRITING OF THIS BOOK

Where did he get the idea for the book? From our own collies, we had a come-home collie, originally named Lassie but better known to us as Toots.

When? (Season as well as year) 1930s...

Were the characters real people, or based on real people? Yes and no

Where was he living at the time? Springhouse Farm, Pleasant Valley, Pa.

What was his major occupation? Writing

Names (also nicknames) and identities of members of his household at the time. (If children, give ages.) Wife: Jere; Daughter: Betty; Dogs: Toots, Herrie, etc.---all collies...

Did he talk the book idea over with any of them? Read over each night what he has written each day

Did he discuss it with an editor? Jack Fraser of J.C. Winston (now dead) had idea of making the S.E.P. story into a book.

Where and how did he get the material? (library research, travel, personal experience, etc.) personal experience and creative genius.

When did he begin to write the book? About 1938... Published Dec.17,1938 in the Sat.Eve.Post

Where? In the country, U.S.A.

How much had he had published when he began it? (Give names of books.)

3 novels (adult) miscellaneous short stories, including THE ELYING YORK* SHIREMAN, a novella, which with others was title story for BOM volume

What was his purpose in writing this book? Making LASSIE into a book from the short story was no trouble at all, as he had cut it greatly to make it short story in length, and had been begged by his family to make it longer

How did he write? (typewriter, long-hand, dictate) typewriter

Where? (study, office, etc.) anywhere indoors or outdoors, the most unlikely places...

Did he keep regular office hours, If so, what were they? more or less mostly he wrote full mornings

Did he revise much? Yes Write easily or laboriously? easily and then edited laboriously

Did he let his family or friends read his work, or try it out on children? yes, both

Who made his final copies?(himself, private secretary, public typist, etc.) Wife

Did he make an outline before writing the book? seldom, not for LASSIE

Did he decide on the title first or last? it decided itself

How long did it take him to write the book? Between the original story, revisions, the book version and further revisions about 1 year

Did he work on it steadily? no

Did it go fairly smoothly or did he hit rough spots? (Details of any particular difficulty and its solution would be appreciated.) smoothly

Was the book accepted immediately by a publisher? see above

Was it immediately popular on publication? yes

Anything else about his writing that might be of interest, especially anything that concerns this book Dedicated to Dr. Henry Jarrett, an Englishman who was a great dog expert in this country, and a sort of foster-father to E.K., Dr. Jarrett imported some of the finest collies ever seen in this country---the Wellesbourne strain, he was a verterinary doctor, and a great dog fancier---judged many of the outstanding shows in this country and Canada, including the Madison Square Garden National show several times. E.K. was very fond of Dr. J. who, at 80, is still alive.

C. ILLUSTRATIONS

How much did he have to do with the illustrations of his book? _____

He originally did a set of illustrations of his own in black and white, as well as a color jacket for book, but Winston decided on Kirmse. If he did them himself, which came first, the pictures or the text?

He was in touch with Kirmse when she was doing the illustrations, and answered all questions she had to put to him on type of dog, etc.

What medium did he work in? K never used

How much experience had he had in illustrating? _____

D. WHAT SORT OF PERSON HE WAS

What did he look like when he wrote this book? (Dark or fair?) Very British

Tall or short? Tall Thing or plump? Thin

Color of eyes? Hazel Wore glasses? No, exceptionally good sight

Color of hair? Auburn, bushy Kind of hair--long or short? longish and un-
controllable, but
not affectedly so

Curly or straight? slight wave How did he wear it? parted on right

Any special features of his appearance (square jaw, dimples, stoop, etc.)
Fine shaped head, good hair line with shock of hair undisciplined, clean nape;
prominent cheek bones, moustache, typical Yorkshire aquiline nose,
eyes and forehead all lined with smile lines,

Was he quiet or talkative? latter Friendly or reserved? both

Did he laugh a great deal or was he usually grave? Contagious laughter, hearty
could also be deadly serious and eloquently so.

Was he quick-tempered or calm and placid? red-head temperament

What sort of clothes did he wear most when writing?(sports, suits, slacks,
sports clothes, mostly farming clothes-- blue jeans and wool shirts
etc.

Favorite occupations and hobbies? Farming, wood-carving, dogs, horses, ice-
skating, making furniture, playing piano or piano accordion, singing, etc...

What was his normal speech like? (Meticulously correct, colloquial,
To Americans he sounded British, with the
slangy, abrupt, rambling, etc.) soft Yorkshire burr, to British he seemed
Americanized; voice deep and resonant

What were some of his pet expressions and exclamations? Too varied to note,
depended on mood, sometimes Yorkshire dialect, sometimes American slang

If strongly religious, give denomination _____

Any other details about him, no matter how trivial, which might help
Healthy, ruddy complexion, not large in
me to picture him in my own mind frame, a mixture of robustness and sens-
tivity, he was perfectly framed in the outdoors, but equally at home in a
drawing room; incredibly versatile, outgoing yet deeply humble, his physical
presence would dominate a room and he loved to entertain with story or music
or showing off his animals; mostly he loved his fellow man and wanted to ask
the questions which would bring remedies for the world's worst ills...

Can you direct me to any articles or books which have been written about
Whit Burnett in various end papers of STORY magazine... Biographical
him? notes in various magazines which published his stories (Esquire, Sat.
Eve.Post, etc.) H.C.Wilson Directory of Authors & Library Reference
Biographies, Who's Who, etc...

If you have a photograph or snapshot of him of about the vintage of this
book, I would appreciate it. Of course I would return it promptly.