

Mo, the Cave Dog, by Bonnie Hartig

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Mo, the ancient border collie, was having one of his talkative days. His many offspring knew this so they gathered around him tugging at his ears and his tail, begging for another of his stories.

"Tell us about when you went caving, Grandpa Mo," cried a chubby little roly poly pup who was very much like the old dog in colouring.

Mo looked at him across his big paws, stretched and drew himself up to sit proudly on his haunches.

Sambo, the black crow, also hopped into hearing and heckling distance.

"Yeap Mo, tell us again, and again how brave you were," he cawed, delighted with the opportunity to heckle his old friend again.

Mo ignored the bird and gazed fondly at his small audience.

"Well, as you should know, it's rare for a dog to go caving, let alone enjoy it," he started.

"Never met one yet," heckled Sambo. The little pups shushed Sambo and chorused, "Why is that Grandpa Mo?"

"Well...", continued Mo, "caves are deep, dark places full of dangerous tunnels and bats."

"Bats?" the little pups squirmed.

"Yes, they live in very dark areas and only come out at night to hunt for insects and things, and they hate being woken up. When they are, they get frightened and fly around in the darkness screeching and clawing at you. It can be very frightening."

"Ohhh...but..but you weren't frightened were you Grandpa Mo?" cried the chubby little roly poly pup.

Mo puffed his chest out. "Of course not, but the people I was with were," he frowned at Sambo.

"Oh yeap," Sambo cawed, "Granpa Mo was very brave."

The little pups ignored his antics and pushed Grandpa Mo to continue, "So what did you do?"

"Well," drawled Mo, "being trained as I was to take care of such situations, I set to work and herded them all together and kept circling around them until they calmed down. When they became quieter we began to explore the cave."

"Was it very dark?" they asked.

"Oh, it was very dark, but dogs aren't afraid of the dark and the people had lights. But of course I had to make sure there were no stragglers and I had to explore the tunnels and look for unseen holes," He fixed the pups with a very wise look, "Being a cave dog can be very busy and dangerous work. In this particular cave I found a small underground stream. So I swam ahead until the stream disappeared into many holes in a wall. They wanted to explore these, so I went ahead. The water was right up over my nose, and I had to stretch my nose right up against the ceiling of each hole to breathe."

The little pups were very silent as Mo stopped and shook himself at the horrible memory of that time he thought he was going to drown.

Even Sambo was quiet. He knew what Mo had experienced and it wasn't something to laugh about.

Mo continued, "It was a series of small tunnels that were mostly underwater and the only way we could find our way from one to the other was to dive underneath the water and feel for another hole. Eventually we all ended up in one big hole which had enough space for me and the people to stick our heads right out of the water."

He paused, "But, the air was very stale and there wasn't enough to go around. The people began to panic, crying, ' We must get out, we won't be able to breathe. Can we find our way out?' I knew then that if I didn't do something very fast we would never get out."

The little pups whimpered, "What did you do, Grandpa Mo?"

Mo shook himself at the memory, "Well as you know, we border collies have very good noses and can usually find our way out of many dangerous situations."

The roly poly pup interrupted, "But in water? Grandpa Mo you can't smell anything in water."

"Mmmm, yes and no," said Mo. "I knew many of the people had touched the ceilings of each hole and I began to search and sniff for those ceilings. So I dived and surfaced and sniffed and dived and sniffed for a very long time. Eventually I found a way out and went back to get my mistress. She was very grateful and I'll never forget what she said to me."

Old Mo paused, "She said: Mo, a person only gets one good thing of everything in this life, you are my one good dog."

The little pups were silent and so was old Sambo. He knew what Mo meant, because he knew the real truth of that dangerous caving adventure. He also knew that Mo was very special to his mistress because he had saved her life many times.

The little pups, tired now from the storytelling, settled down and went to sleep. Old Mo slowly got to his feet and walked across to Old Sambo. Pushing his black feathers gently with his nose, he asked, "What, finished heckling, old friend?"

Sambo looked up at Mo and said, "You're a brave dog, Mo, the mistress says it all the time."

"I was never so frightened," confessed Mo.

"So was the mistress. You stuck together, that's what counts." he looked at Mo and cawed, "Heck, if it had been me, my feathers would have turned white with fright and I would have ended up a 'Polly wants a cracker' cockatoo."

They both laughed at the image of old black Sambo turning white as they settled down to sleep side by side under the mulberry tree.