

A Member of the Family Short Guide

A Member of the Family by W. E. Butterworth

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Overview

The Lockwood family owns two matched Llewellyn setters, hunting dogs, whose instinct is to roam. In the opening paragraphs we read of their escapades as they escape a variety of devices to keep them confined to the Lockwood yard. When all efforts fail and the beloved Boss and Bandit escape one time too many and chase the Lockwoods as their boat travels down the canal to the Gulf, the dogs disappear, and the family is devastated.

The family agrees that these are their last pets. It is far too difficult, emotionally, to lose beloved pets, but with Tom's older sister out on her own as a reporter for a newspaper and Paul, Jr.

gone to MIT, leaving fourteen-year-old Tom alone with his parents, Mrs. Lockwood decides Tom needs something to fill the void. The "something" is an Old English sheepdog, a seven inch ball of fluff, which becomes Tom's responsibility to train and care for.

When Dr. Lockwood comes in from work and meets the dog, he laughs at it and immediately starts calling it "Precious," much to the consternation of Mrs. Lockwood, who has always wanted to name a dog "Prince." In spite of all her efforts, the little ball of fluff, which grows to an enormous one hundred twenty-five pound powerhouse, is known to one and all as Precious.

In the beginning, Precious lives up to his name and quickly wins his way into everyone's heart. Even so, his seemingly innocent action to protect Mrs. Lockwood at the shopping mall hints at the development of a much more aggressive behavior. Precious grows rapidly and Tom undertakes the job of training him. In the meantime, several more questionable events take place, including Precious' biting Dr.

Lockwood; during the Christmas break, threatening and very successfully frightening Tom, who for the first time in his life is frightened by a dog; and having an unexpected encounter with Precious and Bonaparte, a neighbor's dog, when Paul, Jr. takes Precious for a walk around the neighborhood.

By the time Paul, Jr. comes home from school for the summer, Precious weighs nearly one hundred pounds.

All one hundred pounds is overjoyed to see Paul, but turns ugly and threatens to attack when Tom and Paul argue. Paul tells his parents about the incident at dinner, and the next day, Mrs. Lockwood makes an appointment for Tom to take Precious in for a check up. Dr. Harte, the veterinarian, suspects Precious has canine schizophrenia because of inbreeding and warns Tom that he may have to put Precious down if he turns vicious.



On a business trip to New Orleans to interview Colonel Walker, Dr. Lockwood and Tom examine the evidence against Precious, and when he viciously attacks Colonel Walker, Tom and Dr. Lockwood decide Precious must be put down. Returning home, they take Precious to Dr. Harte with heavy hearts. Dr. Harte recommends giving Precious one last chance—surgery to castrate the dog—in a last ditch effort to gentle him. Precious makes it through the remainder of the summer without biting anyone, but is muzzled anytime he leaves the property or is around strangers.

In the end, Precious decides his own fate. After Dr. Lockwood returns home, ill, from an around-the-world business trip, he is hospitalized for phlebitis. On the day of his release from the hospital, Precious installs himself on the floor beside the couch where Dr. Lockwood is resting. Later that night Tom returns home to discover that Precious has bitten his father (as he got up to go to the bathroom, Dr. Lockwood had accidentally kicked a sleeping Precious and startled him). Tom and Dr. Lockwood carry through with the pact they had made earlier to put Precious down, an emotionally wrenching action.

About the Author

A storyteller since childhood, William Edmund Butterworth, III, was born November 10, 1929, in Newark, New Jersey, to William E. Butterworth and Gladys (Schnable) Butterworth (who later became Mrs. Irving L. Cottrell). He married Emma Josefa Macalik, a dancer in the Corps de Ballet of the Vienna State Opera, in 1950, with whom has three children. Butterworth lives in Fairhope, Alabama.

He served in the Korean War as a combat correspondent and was associated with the United States Army as a senior technical writer before turning to writing fiction full time. He had been writing since leaving high school, first for adults and then, persuaded by his agent Malcolm Reiss, for young people. He has published well over a hundred books under his own and a dozen pen names. Since he had not written for young people before, he wrote his first book, *The Wonders of Astronomy* (1964) with his eleven-year-old daughter in mind. Discouraged by his inability to write well for young adults, he turned to his friend Alice Doughtie, librarian of the Choctawhatchee Regional Library in Dale County, Alabama, who told him to write for young people precisely as he wrote for adults. The result was that *The Wonders of Astronomy* received the "Author's Award" of the New Jersey Association of Teachers of English. Mr. Butterworth states, "I found [that] very satisfying, for I had never been able to pass high school English when a student in New Jersey." He now devotes about forty percent of his output to books for young people, generally of high school age.

In Holtze's *Junior Authors and Illustrators* (Vol. 5, 1978) Butterworth says, "The only philosophical observations I have to make vis-a-vis writing for young people are that young people are considerably brighter than they are normally given credit for being, and that they loathe being written down to."

A fan letter from a youngster (one not written at the suggestion of a teacher) is probably the nicest thing connected with the publishing business.

Butterworth has written under various pen names, including: Walker E. Blake, Webb Beech, James McM. Douglas, Edmund O. Scholefield, Patrick J. Williams, and Eden Hughes. Under the pen name James McM. Douglas, he has written: *Hunger for Racing*, 1967; *Racing to Glory*, 1968; *The 12-Cylinder Screamer*, 1969; *Drag Race Driver*, 1970; and *A Long Ride on a Cycle*, 1971. Under the pen name, Patrick J. Williams he has written: *The Fastest Funny Car*, 1968; *Up to the Quarterdeck*, 1969; *The Green Ghost*, 1969; *Grand Prix Racing*, 1969; and *Racing Mechanic*, 1969. Under the pen name, Edmund O. Scholefield, he has written: *Tiger Rookie*, 1965; *Little Wildcat*, 1965; *Bryan's Dog*, 1967; *Maverick on the Mound*, 1969; and *Yankee Boy*, 1971.

In 1971, Butterworth was cited as "Most Prolific Alabama Author of All Time" by the Alabama Writers Conclave, Samford University, and in 1982 Butterworth was the first living member inducted into the Alabama Academy of distinguished Authors.

Orders to Vietnam: A Novel of Helicopter Warfare was a Junior Literary Guild selection, 1969. The Wonders of Astronomy was chosen children's book of the year by New Jersey Association of Teachers of English, 1964. Steve Bellamy was on the 1969 Child Study Association list. Leroy and the Old Man was named a Best Book for Young Adults by the American Library Association in 1980.

Setting

A Member of the Family is set in Ocean Springs, a small, bedroom community on the Gulf of Mexico, a day's drive from New Orleans, during a period of a year and a half beginning with summer break from school. Ocean Springs is a university town, where residents take pride in their property and community. Neighbors commute forty-five minutes to an hour from Ocean Springs to their jobs while Dr. Lockwood goes to his shop, a five minute walk down their street.

The Lockwoods live in a house built on a canal leading to the Gulf of Mexico, a convenience that allows them to dock their boat, The GIGO (Garbage In Garbage Out), at their home. The semitropical climate facilitates their favorite activities: boating, fishing, and hunting.

The friendly setting contributes to the climate of safety the Lockwoods feel in their community. There is no worry about Tom riding his bike to school, downtown, or to the university, so the apparent violence involved in the disappearance of their dogs comes as a shock to the family.

Social Sensitivity

One area of "political correctness" in our society today deals with hunting animals for sport. A Member of the Family subtly treats this subject, challenging readers to consider the hunting instinct of dogs. "The cooperation of man and beast,' Tom's father would say. 'One of the most beautiful sights in nature.'"

Drinking by Dr. Lockwood and Paul, Jr., as well as business associates of Dr.

Lockwood, and the use of "damn" and "hell" may be of concern to teachers using this book. Young people are constantly exposed to expletives and other poor choices in language via television, movies, and people in their own homes, so inclusion in this book will not be shocking to them; neither has Butterworth used expletives for shock value. Mrs. Lockwood reprimands her sons when they use expletives, firmly expressing her disapproval of such language and displeasure in such behavior.

Literary Qualities

A Member of the Family is written in the third person from the point of view of Tom, the protagonist. Butterworth's free style, interspersed with a great deal of conversation, reads easily and quickly. He carefully develops the personalities of the characters, sets the background, and helps the reader to understand the bonds that grow between people and between people and animals. His careful research of the subject of schizophrenia in dogs gives credibility to the way Precious behaves and the conflict of the story. A postscript dedicates the book to Butterworth's "son, John, who, when he was sixteen, met his responsibility to put down the family pet in circumstances very much like those described in A Member of the Family."

Butterworth weaves just the right amount of humor and levity into the story to relieve the stress of Precious' vicious behavior and the gravity of the situation. An example of this is Tom's visit to Dr. Harte, the veterinarian, to have Precious examined and ask Dr.

Harte's advice about a haircut for the dog for the summer to bring it some relief from the heat. Dr. Harte tells Tom he may have to put Precious down. This is a sad moment, but Butterworth breaks the spell by moving the reader on to a lighter topic, a very comical haircut for Precious.

Themes and Characters

The Lockwood family—Dr. Paul Lockwood, Sr., Mrs. Caroline Lockwood, Barbara, Paul, Jr. and Tom—is closely knit. They work together and care for each other. Family cohesiveness and deep filial love are strong themes in *A Member of the Family*. They share a deep love and respect for each other, handling anger, disagreement, jealousy, pride, and loyalty appropriately. This nuclear family can be a good role model for young people struggling for normalcy in their lives and in relationships with family members.

The major conflict is person-againstself. Tom struggles to make necessary decisions about Precious that are very difficult because of his love and devotion to his mother as well as Precious.

Frequently people must make choices in their lives that are for their own good and the good of those they love even though the choices go against what they want for themselves. Sacrificing our own desires for others may not be pleasant, but it is sometimes necessary.

Along this same line of thought, Tom becomes his father's confidante regarding Precious and his father's health.

Tom is given some very heavy responsibilities for a young person. Often young people are forced into roles they would not choose, but of necessity must play out. Readers may find encouragement in the way Tom handles himself and stays true to himself in each situation.

Fourteen-year-old Tom Lockwood, the young protagonist, is just finishing junior high school. Both his older sister, grown and gone from home, and older brother, Paul, Jr. who is headed for MIT in the fall, seem to be smarter than Tom. Tom struggles with mathematics, in fact fails algebra and must repeat it in summer school, while his Dad and Paul, Jr., seem to be wizards in the subject. Being the youngest, he is regarded as a kid as the story begins.

He believes that when his parents got around to having him, all the "smart genes" were used up and there were none left for him to inherit from his parents.

Tom is a likeable young man with a sense of humor, a love for parents and siblings, even though there is a bit of good natured teasing and testing between Tom and Paul, Jr., and a shared love of Boss and Bandit and hunting with his father.

Dr. Paul Lockwood, is a very organized person with a dominating personality. He works hard, plays hard, cares for his wife and children and respects those with whom he works and those who work for him. He is a man who is used to seeing things done when he gives instructions or orders to those in his employ. This carries over into his personal life.



The Dr. is twice earned, a Ph.D. in mathematics and one in electrical engineering; Dr. Lockwood is a highly intelligent and creative man, and a little eccentric. He makes a great deal of money as a result of starting a small computer business with a friend, Charley Walton, just before Tom was born.

The company, Wallwood Microtronics, Inc., in addition to the small shop near their home, consists of a plant a hundred miles away and offices in all the principal cities of the world.

He is the proud owner of matched Llewelin setters, which provide endless pride and joy. He has infused his love of hunting in his sons and one of the delights of his life is to spend the day in the woods with his sons and the dogs, Boss and Bandit.

Barbara Lockwood, Tom's older sister, is a reporter for a newspaper and only comes home occasionally. She is independent and self sufficient like her father. Paul, Jr., seventeen years-old and just finishing high school, is a mathematics genius like his father. He has been accepted by MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and will be leaving for college in the fall. Paul, Jr., likes girls, likes to have fun, enjoys family activities and especially enjoys quail hunting with his father and the Llewelin setters.

Caroline Lockwood, wife and mother, is a loving, supportive woman, a strong role model to her own family and for young readers. As an adult with adult children, she goes back to school to pursue a doctorate in music at the local university. She is the soft touch in the family, giving in to the whines and whimpers of Boss and Bandit, and then Precious when she brings him into the family circle. Her optimistic personality sees the best in everyone, including Precious, and will not allow her to believe that Precious is vicious and dangerous. She cannot make rational decisions about what is best for Precious or her family and strangers who innocently encounter the dog.



Topics for Discussion

1. Before beginning this book, look at the title. Make some predictions. What do you think it means? What is the story about? List your predictions and save them for later discussion.

2. Dr. Lockwood was not concerned with perfect school attendance for Tom and Paul and had no qualms about taking them out on Fridays to go hunting. What do you think of Dr. Lockwood's treatment of absence when he sends a letter saying, "They [Paul, Jr.

and Tom] had had the opportunity to go on a 'field trip'"? Is he lying and setting a poor example for his sons?

3. Would your parents lie about your missing school? How would you feel about it? Is it right or wrong?

4. What kind of attendance policy does your school have? What is your opinion of attendance policies?

5. In Chapter 3, Tom is the one who ends up working in the shop at the computer instead of Paul, Jr. because Tom knows how to type. Paul pushes a broom and attends to other lowly, menial chores. Why does this give Tom such satisfaction?

6. Why was the loss of Boss and Bandit so emotional for Paul, Jr., a seventeen-year-old? He cried. What does that tell you about his self-esteem and his family? Are the members of your family free to cry? What is your reaction to the loss of Bandit and Boss?

Would you cry if you were Paul, Jr.?

7. There is some disagreement over the new dog's name in Chapter 4. Why do Dr. Lockwood and Tom insist on Precious as a name when they know Mrs. Lockwood favors Prince? They seem to be making fun of Mrs. Lockwood. Why? Are they being mean?

What name would you choose?

8. Reread Dr. Harte's comments about disciplining Precious if he takes his protection responsibilities too seriously. With what you know from the story about Old English Sheepdogs and their personality, would Precious bite?

9. In Chapter 6, Tom meets his new neighbor, Mrs. Haynes, who has a Doberman pinscher and a dog problem.

Mrs. Haynes tells Tom that her dog, Bonaparte, has a Napoleon complex.



What does she mean?

10. As Tom begins the training process he knows Precious is disappointed that there is no dog biscuit reward for obeying. What would tell Tom that Precious was disappointed?

11. Tom makes excuses for Precious when Precious appears ready to attack him as he races up the stairs to awaken Paul, Jr. during Christmas break. Do you agree with Tom's analysis of the situation?

12. Tom learns for the first time that Precious may have canine schizophrenia and that he may have to put him down (Chapter 8). How does Tom handle this news? How would you handle it?

13. Tom is given instructions not to laugh at Precious after his haircut. If he does, Precious will feel ridiculous.

Is Ellen, the groomer, attributing human emotions to Precious?

14. In Chapter 10, Paul, Jr. and Tom rationalize the nasty bite Precious gave the weirdo with the umbrella. What do you think they should do? What would you do?

15. As we near the end of the book, Precious is biting more frequently and not just strangers, but people whom he loves and who love him. There is a serious problem here. Ethically, what should the Lockwoods do? What would the law say?

16. In Chapter 15, we see once again that Dr. Lockwood and Tom are in a conspiracy to keep the truth from Mrs. Lockwood. Why would they do that?

Would you? Shouldn't Mrs. Lockwood have to face the truth about Precious and Dr. Lockwood?

17. Pull out your earlier predictions about A Member of the Family. Now answer the same questions: What does the title mean? What is the story about? Compare your present answers with your earlier predictions.



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Research Llewelin setters. Visit your local kennel or pet store and obtain some literature and pictures if possible. Share your information with classmates through an oral report, a bulletin board, a video tape, or another avenue of your choice.

2. The Lockwoods have trouble containing their dogs. There is a device on the market called "invisible fence."

Check the yellow pages in your phone book under fence/fencing for a dealer who sells "invisible fencing." Visit the dealer and get literature to share with the class. Would it have been a good option for the Lockwoods? Why?

3. Have there ever been dognappers in your community? Prior to reading Chapter 3, research a periodical index and find some articles on dognapping.

How were the dognappers caught?

What happened to them? Share the information with your class during discussion of Chapter 3.

4. Go to your local dog kennel or pet store and find out about Old English Sheep Dogs. Bring back pictures to share as you tell your classmates about them. What kind of pets are they?

5. Keep a log of all the clues Butterworth drops that indicate all is not right with Precious. What is he leading up to?

6. After the disastrous attempt to introduce Bonaparte and Precious, Tom bought a book to help him train Precious. Make arrangements to attend and video tape a dog obedience training session. Prepare questions and interview the instructor. Tape portions of the training session along with either your explanation or that of the instructor. Share the tape with your class when you read the portion of the story describing Tom's training efforts with Precious. Compare them.

7. Research canine schizophrenia.

Audio or video tape an interview with a veterinarian who can explain the condition. Share the tape with your classmates during the discussion of Chapter 8.

8. Check with your local police department or research your local laws in the public library to see what the law in your area is concerning dogs that bite.

9. When Tom is bitten, the Ford service manager instructs him to see his doctor because puncture wounds become infected easily. Check with the school nurse about puncture wounds.



Find out how to cleanse and treat them. Create a chart for first aid do's and don'ts for puncture wounds to display on the bulletin board.

10. In Chapter 13, Precious' surgery is put to the test when Bonaparte challenges him. Find some literature in your library or from a dog kennel on communication between dogs. A great deal of research has been done with wolves which might be applicable. Explain Bonaparte's actions, rolling on his back with his feet in the air, crawling on his belly, and then running.

For Further Reference

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Ethridge, James M., and Barbara Kopala, eds. *Contemporary Authors*. First Revision, Vols. 1-4. Detroit: Gale Research, 1967. Includes paragraphs about W. E. Butterworth's personal life and career, as well as a list of publications.

Holtze, Sally Holmes, ed. *Junior Authors & Illustrators*. Vol. 5. New York: H.W. Wilson, 1978. A short biographical sketch and photograph of the author.

Munroe, Mary Hovas, and Judith Rogers Banja, eds. *The Birthday Book: Birthdates, Birthplaces and Biographical Sources for American Authors and Illustrators of Children's Books*. New York: Neal-Schuman, 1991. Provides pen names, birth date, birthplace, and sources for finding information about authors and illustrators alphabetically by last name, by month of the year, and by geographical location. Butterworth is included.

Tarbert, Gary C , and Barbara Beach, eds. *Children's Book Review Index*.

Detroit: Gale Research, 1985. An index to more than 200,000 reviews of approximately 55,000 titles. Includes five review sources for *A Member of the Family* plus review sources for twenty additional titles by W. E. Butterworth.

Ward, Martha E., and Dorothy A. Marquardt, eds. *Authors of Books for Young People*. Supplement to the Second Edition. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1979. A very short biographical entry includes pen names and a short list of titles.

Related Titles

Butterworth's other writings include topics from astronomy to cars and the Vietnam war, but no dog stories, so one needs to go to other authors to look at titles related to A Member of the Family.

There are two dog stories by Jack London that will grip the reader, *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*. The first, *White Fang*, tells the story of a house pet stolen from his home, cruelly mistreated, and forced to pull a dog sled in the frozen north. *White Fang*, part wolf and part dog, becomes a strong sled dog, a leader and a killer of weaker dogs. A second owner, cruel Beauty Smith, turns him into a pit dog.

He is forced to fight and always wins.

Dogsong, written by Gary Paulsen, introduces the reader to Russel, a fourteen-year-old Alaskan native. Russel learns about himself and his dogs as he makes a lone journey with his team and his dog sled. He survives a life-and-death struggle as he searches for food for a dying girl about to give birth and faces a polar bear.

Where the Red Fern Grows by Wilson Rawls is set in the Ozarks during the Great Depression. This moving story tells about Billy and his two beloved hunting dogs, Old Dan and Little Ann and the total devotion between boy and dogs.

For a touching and sometimes humorous look at dogs and their humans, read the nonfiction book, *James Herriot's Dog Stories*. Herriot is a famous Yorkshire veterinarian whose writings have been made into television series.

The stories in *James Herriot's Dog Stories* are true and are written with Herriot's distinct wit and sensitivity for animals and animal lovers. Two additional nonfiction titles worth reading are *You and Your Dog* by David Taylor and Peter Scott, and *Sound Friendships: The Story of Willa and Her Hearing Ear Dog* by Elizabeth Yates. *You and Your Dog* is a complete, fully illustrated guide to dog care. *Sound Friendships* tells the story of Willa, a profoundly deaf young woman, and Honey, her hearing ear dog.



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Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor

Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design

Amanda Mott

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)

ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)

ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature—Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3—dc20 96-20771 CIP

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Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996