



Lassie

The Extraordinary Story
of Eric Knight and
'The World's Favourite Dog'

PETER HAINING

NON FICTION/BIOGRAPHY

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In 1938 Eric Knight wrote a magazine story about an impoverished Yorkshire family who are forced to sell their beloved collie dog to a Scottish breeder. Against all the odds, the dog manages to find her way home. Described by its author as a job of 'bread and butter workmanship', *Lassie Come Home* went on to inspire films, radio and television shows and a staggering array of merchandising that established her as 'the world's favourite dog'.

Although Lassie is an American icon, her creator was actually born in the Yorkshire Dales in 1897 where, as a child, Eric Knight became fascinated by the collie dogs used by local sheep farmers. After his family split, he moved to the USA with his mother in 1912 where he began practising as a writer and artist. After serving in the First World War he married, settled on a farm and purchased a collie of his own, 'Toots'. Inspired by a return trip to Yorkshire, he drew on his knowledge of working-class hardship and his own love for Toots to create *Lassie Come Home*.

Although MGM's decision to film the story in 1943 made a star of Elizabeth Taylor, it also marked Lassie's rise to superstardom. The collie with the trademark white feet, collar, chest and blaze between the eyes featured in six more movies before transferring to television (1954), with one dog after another being re-cast in the role of canine saviour with human-like intelligence. Unbeknown to viewers, all the dogs were males because, for moulting reasons, they look more photogenic on screen.

While the fame of Lassie grew with every passing year, Eric Knight did not share in its success. In January 1943, while travelling to Egypt, his plane crashed, killing all on board. As the aircraft was on an intelligence mission, there is speculation that it may have been sabotaged. Knight was posthumously awarded the US Legion of Merit.

- **Lassie is one of entertainment's most successful franchises with 10 feature films and more than 675 half-hour television episodes**
- **Lassie the TV series celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2004**
- **Contains rare film stills, cartoon strips, and book and magazine illustrations**
- **A perfect gift book for collectors, dog-lovers or any anyone interested in the Lassie phenomenon**

For further information please contact Simon Smith at Peter Owen