

# The Old Hemlock Letter



*An Exclusive Publication Dedicated  
to the Continued Development of the  
Old Hemlock English Setter*

## Greetings,

*The hunting season is rapidly coming to an end for us. It has been a season of introducing Karma to real hunting. Michigan was better than expected and we found great numbers of woodcock. Just what a puppy needed. Then we went on to Minnesota and met friends for the first time that I had known for years. They graciously showed us the hunting that Minnesota has, and Karma was blooded on grouse at five months. Woodcock numbers were exceptional in Minnesota too. Karma learned even more. Then we went to South Dakota and her lessons continued on pheasants and I could now run her with Diva and Charm since she was hunting independently and finding birds on her own.*

*Returning to Ohio was a let down. Daily runs with no birds, so we are going to preserves to get enough birds for Karma to continue her development. We hunted with LeJay*

*and Willow and with Richard and Casey and Covey. So Karma got to see her mother and father and half brother. It takes birds to make a bird dog, so we will visit a preserve a few times in the next couple of months.*

*There are a few who have expressed interest in having a litter this year depending on when their females come in season and if the breeding connection can work into schedules, canine and human. So hopefully we will have two litters this spring/summer. I am looking forward to seeing all of you and your dogs at our Old Hemlock Reunion March 7, 8, and 9, at Hunting Hills.*



*Best to all,  
Roger*

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## **Old Hemlock Rangeley 10/22/2002 – 11/09/2012**

OH Rangeley broke our hearts when he left us suddenly and too early. But our hearts have been lifted up by the outpouring of support from so many in the OH Family. Your phone calls, remembrances, notes, emails, and Facebook posts have meant so much to us. Dear OH Sage still struggles with life without Dad but we are so thankful we have him to help ease the emptiness.

~ Kandice and Bob Tuttle



*"It is easy to be hypnotized into thinking it will last, and then the leaves of the North Porch Maple suddenly turn gypsy and are gone."*

~ George Bird Evans

*I lay my hand on ninth-generation Old Hemlock Quest on the sofa beside me and feel the pulse of the one thousand twenty-two names on that extended pedigree of English setter bone and muscle and sight and hearing and scent and love and soul, and know the yearn of beauty there. These lovely setters with their uncomplicated honesty have given me an ideal of purpose and principle and courage, their way of Living for each day to when the day goes down, ignoring the Inevitable with a nobility I can only seek to emulate.*

~ George Bird Evans  
Living with Gun Dogs 1992

## *Ice Storm Litter Memories* by Vicky Catlett

Maine, January 1998

The Ice Storm Litter memories and notes from my diary: Dedicated to Flight, the “runt of the litter” who will be 15 on January 4, 2013 - Happy Birthday, “Little Leota” (her nickname for the first 8 weeks).

As per Kay, the breeding was to be: mom, OH Bittersweet (Catlett) & dad, OH Sirius (Bob Rose). A brother sister mating that Kay and George felt would be a great match. Kay was right – it was a beauty pageant litter, as described by Bob Rose.

We met Bob half way to pick up Sirius to bring him to Cateslot. Bob handed me a red rose from Sirius to Sweetie. Sweetie and Sirius had four glorious days of mating on the Oriental rug in front of the stone fireplace. I would sit with a glass of wine and watch. Once the hook up was over they would curl up together and love was in their eyes.

1/3/98 – Sweetie was restless all day, getting progressively worse and panting. I held her on the couch and could feel the contractions go down her entire body and she yelped in pain. Whining a little, she put her head to the back of the couch and seemed confused. Water broke and she screamed. First puppy’s face appeared, sack was broken and it was breathing. She finally pushed it out...very tense moment. Refer to time sheet. Each pup thereafter was a much easier delivery. Some were surprises. She would curl into my body (we were both on the floor) so I could feel her contractions and tell Holly and Larry. She aggressively tried to chew the cord. Larry and Holly would clear the airway first. Clamp and cut the cord, dry off the puppy, and in three cases Larry had to suck the mucus out of the pup’s nose. It was nice that the studio was set up in advance with all necessary items, warm and a bed for us for resting. Not much rest though. We would offer her pups between births, but would remove when contraction or next pup came because it was so hectic and didn’t want pups injured. The pups know to go to Mom’s teats to nurse as soon as the trauma of birth is over. Instinct is amazing.

1/4/98

<u>Time</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Markings</u>
2:32 A.M.	female	all white
2:42	female	black spot under L ear/top & bottom
3:30	female	brown R eye & black spot under R ear
3:43	male	little black spot under L ear
4:10	female	L black ear & little black on R “runt”
4:58	male	light black spot around R eye
5:52	male	yellow “fella” all white sack broke
6:50	female	black spots under R&L ears
6:55	male	black R ear & L ear
7:45	female	black on L ear
8:51	male	no record noted
1:10 P.M.	female	(Vicky delivered) 2 black ears/ some on face
1/5/98		
1:30 A.M.	female	white born dead

Comments post deliveries: Overwhelming!

Lost pup in whelping box. Had to take it out in a basket, Sweetie followed me – she knew. Litter down to 11 from 13. Need to rotate feedings so she can keep up and we are certain everyone gets fed (6 pups on and 6 pups off) every ½ hour. Runt stays in for all feedings as she gets pushed around. Changing bedding constantly.

Sweetie wasted from delivery – lost a lot of weight during pregnancy. She is on Esbilac and Iam’s puppy soft food.

DAY 4 – ICE STORM – NO POWER! We moved whelping box upstairs next to woodstove. Put sheep skins on floor with down jackets, covered with newspapers then topped off with flannel sheet. Very warm.

Melting snow on the woodstove for our water source. Changed sheets 3-4 times a day until we lost power then would flip sheet over to make them go longer.

Kay protects us from buyers as she knows we are busy, especially without power. People want information on how pups look. I provide Kay with information during our daily talks and she passes it on. I always talk with her, but George

hollers out messages in the background. Very distressed about losing two pups, but they are very supportive. Sit on the couch in front of litter box with the candles burning and talk with her.

Taking Sweetie for walks to exercise her and get her away from the pups. Always anxious to get back to them.

11th day without power! Electric company trucks on road and there is power to our neighbor's house. Got a generator hooked up yesterday for minimal lights and water. Pups are two weeks old some are beginning to open their eyes. Feeding 6 females now – the 5 males are in the basket and one is looking over the edge – he might fall out! Only a couple of pups have opened their eyes.

Day 12 -Had to bathe pups because Sweetie had gotten behind and they pooped all over, too much for her to keep up with. Bathe, dry quickly- it didn't seem to bother them.

13th day – ears open.

Day 18 – Still no power, and as my brother tried to console Larry he stated “you're not doing too badly considering:

- 15 days without power
- 15 dogs in the house
- Cat exposed to rabid fox and quarantined
- Kid in hospital
- Broken generator
- Suburban towed to garage
- Vicky in a “bad mood”

Sweetie had rabies booster because of questionable contact where fox was in yard. Jaguar is in pheasant cage for observations for 45 days. It's a long walk through the snow for Larry to the quarantine cage. Pups growing and so cute!

POWER ON – Yahoo! - 1/24/98 at 4:00 P.M.

1/26/98 – notice little canine sharp back teeth today.

Preparing to assemble larger whelping box – not enough room for large Sweetie and 11 pups in the other whelping box.

Puppy Pick Up Days:

Walter Stocker	orange female – Jess
Jeff & Gabriella Leach	blue male – Stonehouse
Sue & Bruce Buckley	blue female – Autumn Flight (the runt!)
Tom & Pam Bowman	orange male- Bracken
Kenny Grandstaff	orange male – Orion
Bill & Robin James	orange male – High Timber
Steve Hitsman	blue female – Graceful (Grace)
Mike & Wendy McDonald	orange male – Link
Dennis & Barbara Bogan	blue female – Brooke
Larry & Vicky Catlett	blue female – Dolly Sods
Larry & Vicky Catlett	orange female - Belle

Kay, George, Kenny Grandstaff, and all but one of the ice storm litter pups are gone. I am not sure about Walter Stocker, but last I knew he was in a nursing home with Alzheimer's. These are sad thoughts, but through this litter we have made wonderful memories with wonderful friends. We now have our fourth generation “Whisper” and her daughter “She” the fifth generation bred here at Cateslot with hopes for a sixth generation breeding in 2013. I hope we have a successful breeding on the Oriental carpet in front of the stone fireplace with lots of pups. And if we have an ice storm and lose the power for 18 days – so be it. We are now prepared with a full blown generator that will handle the entire house and all the OH pups “She” can deliver!



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*It is impossible to remember the problems of bringing an eight-week- old puppy into your home until you do it again.*

~ George Bird Evans

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## *A Conversation With George* by Robert Tovarnak

Years ago I called George at his Bruceton Mills home to order one of his books. After George took the order he asked me about my grouse hunting. I told him because of the location of my home in western Pennsylvania I was able to hunt three states: eastern Ohio, northern West Virginia, and western PA. Occasionally I would drive as much as two hundred miles in search of grouse in one day. Back in the seventies grouse were more plentiful and I would hunt relatively small woodlots, abandoned strip mines, old farms, grape vine tangles, and timbered areas that were growing back.

I asked him about his own hunting. He said he and Kay might hunt a whole mountain at times, stopping at lunch to make a fire and toast their sandwiches. He covered a lot of ground in some remote places. What a grand way to hunt! I asked how he kept from getting lost and he said he carried a top map. Due to my occupation I was quite familiar with maps and charts but had never heard of a top map before. Was this something West Virginians called a topographic map? Topo or top map, it was another facet of George's life that made him a very unique individual.

Good Hunting



# *A Sense of Style* by Helen Ann Graffious

During tours at Old Hemlock, visitors see George's sense of style in the home's decor, clothing left behind, and in photos of the Evans in the early years. Guests often comment on the advanced sense of style they possessed. When I first met them on the road at the 4H Camp bordering the large hemlocks, my first impression of George and Kay in their safari jackets and Kay's white cat-eye glasses left an indelible image that lasted these nearly forty years. George's sense of style developed at a young age. We have preserved a raccoon coat from his college years. The photograph of him sporting this in vogue wear shows quite a dashing figure. The fact that style was so important to George is evidenced in so many ways. He guided Kay's dress and look. When he was an artist for *Cosmopolitan*, the women of his illustrations were in style. Kay told me that they subscribed to New York magazines to study the current fashions for inclusion in his work. When George was developing the Old Hemlock setter line, three attributes were of importance to him. The qualities were ability to hunt, companionship, and looks. George took great pride in the confirmation of the Old Hemlock Setters, so much so that some setter breeders felt that looks superseded hunting prowess in his selections.

After a tour of Old Hemlock, local actress, Amy Widmer, was enthralled by the vintage dresses of Kay Evans. "Would it be possible to borrow a dress for our next production?" The M.T. Pockets Theatre Company was producing the play "Women and War" by Jack Hilton Cunningham in March, 2012 in Morgantown, WV. The 100% volunteer company of devoted theatre enthusiasts is a nonprofit organization dedicated to presenting theatre of the highest quality, with style, passion, and artistic excellence. At the end of the play's run, Amy commented, "I was the only person who had an authen-

ticated 1940 outfit." I'm sure Kay would have been pleased to participate in this way by lending the dress.

After meeting Kay in 1974, I never remember her in a dress. Her common attire was khaki cotton pants and a blouse, accented with a tweed jacket. She wore her hair in a ponytail with a patterned silk scarf tie. She often commented that George preferred the simpler style. As you may remember, George's father owned a tailor shop in Uniontown, PA., and quality with a classic style dominated their wardrobe. Kay wore those white glasses until she could no longer find them, and then switched to brown tortoise-shell.

Kay and George often supported the arts and music, donating money to the Bruceton School music department for the purchase of a drum line and a tuba. They also provided funds for the fifth grade class to travel to Pittsburgh to attend a children's theatre production in the Benedum Theater. The Evans often attended music programs at West Virginia University. I remember driving them to a piano concert by their personal friend, Herman Goddes, where at the end George could not find his hat. After a lengthy search we finally discovered he had been sitting on it the whole time. Their interest in the arts was a life-long pursuit. Kay told stories of her father playing Italian operas in the evening and the Italian wood hicks (a period term for loggers, Ed.) would gather on their lawn to listen. When they lived in New York they would attend performances in Central Park of theater productions and concerts.

You need three things in the theatre, the play, the actors and the audience, and each must contribute something. The Old Hemlock Foundation was pleased that we could add the Evans' Sense of Style to the production.



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*I haven't known any other girls well enough to take them into wild back country like this hidden part of The Mountain, let alone on a forbidding day such as this, but to Kay it was adventure. From the first afternoon we spent together sixty-five Autumns ago, everything – every small detail we have shared – has been fun.*

~ George Bird Evans

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# *Treasures and Troubles in Maine* by Mark Hitsman

The day was beautiful, sunny with a chill but not bitterly cold like a usual Maine February day.

I had been waiting for this day for two months, actually for years, but my time had arrived. I would be picking up a hunting partner and friend for many years to come.

Prior to this day I spent a lot of time looking at up to date pictures of a small white bundle of joy with orange ears and an orange patch on her eye. She was the most beautiful thing I've seen, but the thing is I don't really know if this is the partner and companion I'll be joined with.

My daughter and I arrived a little early. Like a child on Christmas morning, I just couldn't wait to see all the presents God gives us through the Old Hemlock kennel.

I arrived at a beautiful saltbox house in the Maine countryside and was not only waiting to meet the newest Old Hemlock members; I also couldn't wait to meet Dr. Larry and Vicky Catlett.

When we arrived a few new owners, no that isn't really correct, I should say a few of the new companions of these beautiful puppies were already there. We walked around the house and were invited in, although I was early. So the dilemma was making the choice of which puppy Larry and Vicky wanted, and I know it had to be heart breaking to make that kind of choice, which one day I'll experience. But not too long after all the introductions, Vicky walked in to the family room with the now named OH Morning Delight puppy, the one I really had my eye on since the puppies pictures started coming to me. Of course, as with all Old Hemlock puppies, I fell in love and Vicky placed her in my daughter Spring's arms.

So I was ecstatic with my puppy I had been waiting for so long, and finally having a breed of dog I wanted for so long. I was in heaven. She was beautiful.

I needed pictures of her right away so I took her outside to let her run and to watch her explore her new world, so I put her down at the side of the house away from the mounds of snow that had been shoveled away from the back walk of the house. Delight was nose to the ground searching for what I don't know but it was so cute I had to take a picture of her. I had to get some distance from her, so wearing my heavy logging boots, as I started over the large mound of snow and ice I planted the heel of my boot in the snow, but with a good layer of ice it didn't work. My foot came out from under me and as everyone knows with instinct my hand went down to brace the fall. The pain was excruciating as I looked down and my left wrist was in a position that it should never be with the bone pressing against the skin. Then the yelling began with calls for Larry, knowing he was a doctor and I needed help. Everyone came running.

Larry and Vicky helped me up and rushed me in the house and sat me in a comfortable chair while Larry went and found splint material.

Now the real problem was I hadn't been there more than 29 minutes and never got to talk to all the people like me that were receiving these gifts that George and Kay Evans had so lovingly brought into to this world through many generations of the Old Hemlock breed.

As I was sitting there and Larry was getting ready for the trip to the hospital, Vicky handed me my Delight and for a fleeting moment the pain was gone. Just to hold her was a treasure beyond all treasures except my children being born.

After all the good byes Larry loaded me in the car for the 30 minute ride to the hospital. Country life: that is the down side.

The ride, in spite of the pain, was great. Larry and I talked about everything from hunting to cars and everything in between, and found out that even though our lives were so different it's weird how friends can be found everywhere at any time.

After three hours or more waiting for x-rays and a doctor to consult with me, time was slipping away to spend time with all the other puppies' companions, but I did get a visit from Bob and Kandice Tuttle.

So this trip was almost over. I was put in a splint because I told the doctor I would take care of it when I got home although he wanted to do surgery. I decided to wait 'till I got back home and with a two hour trip still staring me in the face and a two day trip back to Pennsylvania with a broken wrist and a new puppy this will be an experience. Lucky for me, Spring was there to take up the slack.

After the trip back, as generous as the Catletts are they offered me a room but I needed to get back on the road. After a late tour of their house and looking at all of Larry's treasures in his den we ate some good sandwiches, and with a present of some excellent cigars, I was on the road to my first destination.

As you all read this, my Delight will be one year old and hopefully some good game work has been done, but the one thing is from the pain to all the doctor visits I have my treasure, she is the most loving beautiful creature on this earth. She hardly ever leaves my side and can't wait to see me after work. She's learning every day and keeps me on my toes with her antics.

After my first OH Reunion this March I hope to prove I'm a good companion for her, and hope we will show the others we are an outstanding member of this group of dogs and people.



*OH Morning Delight, from the 12/09 Catlett Litter. Mark wrote this story a year after their puppy day, but it was somehow misplaced along the way and has only recently surfaced. These moments are timeless however, and an important part of our legacy.*

*~ Editor*

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*When you give yourself to a dog and he to you, you have a past, both of you, no matter how young you may be or how old.*

*~ George Bird Evans*

# Old Hemlock Foundation News by LeJay Graffious

*“Out of sleep with his nose tucked to tail, he cocked an eye at overhead sounds, early sounds that hadn’t stirred like that since the Season ended. Bounding upstairs, he found Him in those glorious clothes and, sniffing pants he knew without sniffing, he felt excitement run down his spine.”*

Thus the legacy of George’s brilliantly crafted words continues in the latest edition of *“Pointing Dog Journal”* (PDJ). Editor Steve Smith has reprinted “How Many Days” from *“Troubles with Bird Dogs”*, exposing new readers to the beauty of George’s work. To me, as a director, this is an important milestone for the Old Hemlock Foundation (OHF). I believe one of the most important steps of our mission to promote the writing and philosophy of George Bird Evans is to have his name kept before the public. The PDJ article is a great start to 2013. Another positive development is the inclusion of his quotes in a new book from “Sporting Classics” called, *Passages*. In their promotion, they state “the book is laced with poignant passages by legendary writers.” For their December 5, 2013 quote of the day to promote the books, they used this:

“The perfection of a life with a gun dog, like the perfection of an autumn, is disturbing because you know, even as it begins, that it must end. Time bestows the gift and steals it in the process.”

George Bird Evans, *An Affair with Grouse*, 1982

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In past newsletters, I have encouraged members of the Old Hemlock Family to submit quotes to me to post on our webpage. I appreciate the few who have supplied me with a quote and citation. I feel this is great way to promote George. Writers and editors search the Net for fillers for inclusion in their stories. Having these quotes at the world’s finger tips is a powerful way to promote his well-crafted words which have meant so much to each of us. A prime example, which Jeff Kauffman shared with me, was a full page photo of a black Cocker Spaniel on the hunt, with a GBE quote inset, in a prestigious English shooting journal. I applaud our editor, Bruce Buckley, for his goal to include more GBE quotes in the newsletters, but these only reach a small, elite segment. Your submissions are never too late.

In other news, I received this in an email from Ralph P. Stuart, Editor in Chief of “Shooting Sportsman” magazine. “(The magazine) will be celebrating its 25th Anniversary in 2013, and as part of that celebration we would like to run a “classic article from the archives” in each of our issues during the year. For our March/April issue, we were hoping to reprint George Bird Evans’ story “The Thorns,” which originally appeared in our October/November 1988 issue.” The details have been worked out and unpublished photos sent to the magazine. Look for this issue soon.

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I would like to share another email from a reader in Tennessee:

*“Since part of the Foundation’s Mission Statement is “also to promote his writings and philosophy of hunting” I have anticipated reprints of his books. I don’t see how Mr. Evans’ writings and philosophy of hunting – and conservation-can be promoted without reprinting his work. There are generations of young upland hunters who have not been exposed to Evans’ philosophy of hunting and lack the upbringing in the ways of traditional upland hunting and sportsmanship that only Evans’ writings can provide.*

*I suggest you consider the The Upland Shooting Life as the first reprint. Other books to consider should, in my opinion, include: The Ruffed Grouse Book, The Woodcock Book, Troubles with Bird Dogs, and An Affair with Grouse. I think a selection of Mr. Evans’ articles and photos from “Gun Dog” and “Pointing Dog Journal” magazines would make a good book, too. You may consider approaching Steve Smith, “Pointing Dog Journal”, to select and edit the collection. With the current low populations of grouse across the Appalachians, Evans’ articles and books tell about how good grouse hunting can be – and the need for changes in current thinking about length of seasons, bag limits, habit development, and game management.*

*As for me, I have several of Mr. Evans’ books and magazines with his articles. They continue to enrich my hunting life as much today as they when I first read them.*

*Thank you.”*

*Mr. Lynn Smith  
Elizabethton, TN*

Mr. Smith brings up points that we have considered. I believe creating the desire to purchase George's writing comes first. I monitor the Internet for resale of his work. Based on that and the number of requests I get to purchase books, I really do not think the interest is there currently to invest in reprinting. We are exploring publishing through the WVU Library, on-demand services over the Internet, or e-books. If you have ideas on how to promote George to non-readers, I would love to hear them.

Another pending publication will be a book about the history of the Ryman Setter and kennels. It is authored by Walt Lesser and Lisa M. Weisse. The work is currently with the Schiffer Publishing editor. Walt has included his early association with George Bird Evans and the Old Hemlock Setters, along with a section on Appalachian Mountain grouse hunting. I am looking forward to its publication and believe it will be an interesting read for the Old Hemlock Family.

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One mention of George in the winter 2012 issue of "The Upland Almanac" brought up some Internet chatter among his admirers. Tom Huggler wrote this in his article titled, "Old Birds": "Shortly before George Bird Evans died, I interviewed him by telephone. Evans, 95 and nearly deaf, was looking forward to autumn and hunting season number 73. His wife, Kate, who walked behind Evans and took pictures, learned to nudge his shoulder left or right, at the flush." This was first brought to my attention by Bruce Buckley and then by several other readers. Bruce has appropriately responded to the editor. I have also been giving this some thought. Of course there are the obvious errors in Huggler's statement of George's age, and referring to Kay as Kate. We know George's hearing was failing before his death at age 91, but one could certainly hold a conversation with him. On my walks with George, he could hear a flush but had trouble locating it. George would only shoot a bird which was flushed over a point by his OH Setter. He only used a bell to locate dogs in the field; he did not use a GPS unit or any electronic beeper equipment to locate Manton on points. I believe if the bell went silent, Kay would assist him to find the dog in the cover thus helping locate where the flush would be. I do not believe that Kay would touch either right or left shoulder to guide him to the actual flush. If anyone has any knowledge related to this, I would appreciate hearing it.

*(Editor's Comment: In my opinion, the article created an inaccurate and uncomplimentary impression of George.*

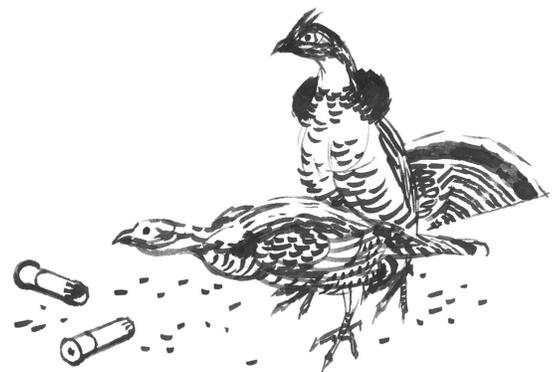
*I transmitted my objections to the blatant errors of fact and other matters to the editor of the "Upland Almanac". His short reply I would describe as petulant and unhelpful. His more detailed response to another correspondent, which was shared with me, lauded at some length Huggler's diligence, integrity, and accuracy. Strong support for a professional writer who made at least three egregious errors of fact in two sentences, from an editor who missed them all.)*

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Old Hemlock popularity continues to grow. Last year we had 331 visitors. This included two public tours. The July tour had 79 visitors and the October tour had 46 visitors. We also provided tours for six groups. Some were civic groups like Kingwood Garden Club and Daughters of the American Revolution. Gifted and talented students from Bruceton School visited on a field trip. I continue to work with West Virginia University students. Currently, a small group of graduate students in Public History is designing a project to record oral history stories about the Evanses. Our web page had an uptick of visits and use this year too. We had 65917 visits and 492372 hits. I also welcome any ideas from the Old Hemlock Family on ways to improve our website, [oldhemlock.org](http://oldhemlock.org)

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This winter a large part of my time has been devoted to clean up after Tropical Storm Sandy. Even though we were far removed from the effects of the wind and Atlantic storm surge, we received two days of very wet, heavy snow which totaled 20+ inches. The wreckage of limbs, snapped trees, and up-rooted trees was great. The trails and lane were blocked. In the Red Pine stand, over 200 trees were toppled like dominos. Luckily no damage was sustained by any structure. Other than nine days of power outage and the seemingly endless clean up, we continue to love our life at Old Hemlock.



# *The Education of Larry Lee* by Larry Catlett

I caught the fever after purchasing a department store bargain basement copy of The Upland Shooting Life. Once through that book and anybody would want to grouse hunt. I was in medical school in Atlanta so my first grouse hunting was in the north Georgia mountains. I saw and learned little in the woods as time was short, I was the dog, and the rhododendrons were thick. My first shotgun, a Browning Sweet 16, saw little action. I did, however, study "the book", picking up a lot of information about guns and dogs and coverts and grouse habits from George's writings. During that time, before I had even shot my first bird, I decided someday I was going to have an Old Hemlock Setter and a Purdey.

There was no Purdey to be had on a resident's salary and no place for a dog in my little apartment from which I was absent more than not. Having arrived in Maine for my Family Practice Residency, I spent as much time as I could in the local woods that first year and was rewarded after many misses with my first grouse. Time passed. I got better at finding what were lots of birds back then without the help of a dog and soon felt I was quite the accomplished grouse hunter. I dreamed of the OH Setter and the Purdey from time to time. With a bit less time on call so I could look after him, I brought home a Golden Retriever, Moose, to help with ducks and birds. He would go anywhere and do anything I asked him to - the perfect bird dog? Still, he wasn't a "real" bird dog.

Wanting an OH Setter, but thinking it much too presumptuous to contact the master for one of his dogs, I eventually purchased a Laverack type dog locally. Bracken was a great woodcock dog and I, in my infinite wisdom, worked hard teaching her how and where to look for birds. In spite of my excellent instruction, she never became much of a grouse dog. She was stolen, and after the heart break mended, replaced with Feathers from Ken Alexander's kennel. Feathers actually thought she knew more about grouse than I did. We had some knock down drag outs about which way to go and to what spots, as I was sure by then I knew where the birds were and just needed the dog to pinpoint them once I picked the location. One time she left me after a disagreement about woodcock and much later I found her back at the car not at all happy with me. I had been scared to death I had lost her, but once she was found, I was determined to remain in control. She was a great bird dog, and in retrospect taught me a lot, but we remained at odds to some degree right to the end.

On one occasion, after a questionable hit on a big cock grouse, Feathers took me on what I then considered a wild goose-chase through a very wet cedar swamp, far beyond where I thought the grouse might be. Finally her bell stopped somewhere ahead of me and I hoped to just catch up, get the leash on her, and get out of that God forsaken mess. When I arrived at her side, she was pointing a hollow stump that on closer inspection contained my grouse! Wing broken, it had run all that way and she knew it.

You might think that at that point some sort of light might have gone on regarding which of the two of us knew the most about these wonderful birds, but you would be wrong. I continued my errant ways on into my next bird dog who turned out to be none other than my first Old Hemlock, OH Heaven Scent.

I had finally summoned the courage to write George and Kay regarding getting a puppy. Apparently they had one for me, but my wife, Vicky, not yet the uplander she would become, sort of misplaced the note for a while. Feeling guilty, She finally fessed up. But it was too late. That our marriage survived that event is a testament to its strength! I did get on the list for the next litter and sometime later, Scent came to us.

For the first few years, I attempted to instruct Scent in the art of bird hunting without a great deal of success. She was all right on woodcock, but seemed to have a hard time with my instructing her all the way through the pursuit of a grouse - time after time. "Ok, go find the bird". "Whoa". "Too close". "Come on, I think it has run over here". "Whoa". "Find it now". And on and on. Never occurred to me that I might have been messing this process up somehow.

When Scent was six, we were on a mountaintop hunt in Andover, Maine in a good looking covert. I don't know if I was tired or bored or just focusing on fighting my way through the thick woods that day, but I remember that I was not bugging her all the time. Half way through the cover, her bell stopped on the other side of a large vine covered mound, a byproduct of an old logging operation. I somehow remained quiet even though I couldn't see her, and after a few moments, five grouse got up one at a time from the mound. I missed one and killed the fifth and only then did she break point and retrieve the bird for me. Needless to say, I was impressed - but still not educated.

We continued on. On the swing back to the car, she soon got birdy again and offered me a wonderful Scent point with tail parallel to the ground, slight crouch with front leg lifted, but high head extended as if she were trying to suck the bird itself into her nostrils. I broke open what was by now the Purdey, and found that I had but a couple of empties. After some consideration, I told Scent to "Whoa" and took off backwards and around to the car over a hundred yards away for some shells (I should have been a boy scout!). Returning exactly as I had left, I found Scent just as she was before, except that she had raised her head and was staring up into a little moosewood maple just in front of her. I followed her sight line and there indeed was the bird.

Birds flushing from trees are tough shots for me. This one came right back at me, roared over my head just missing me, veered right and disappeared as I shot. I, of course, called Scent and tried my darnedest to get her to go to the right where the bird had obviously gone. She repeatedly refused, wanting to go in the opposite direction toward what did not seem to me a likely escape route for the bird. We argued about this for some time. Finally, she looked at me for a long moment and took off where she wanted to go at a dead run. No amount of whistle blowing or verbal harassment would change her mind.

She was gone a long time. Calming down, I recognized that I had probably provoked another mutiny as I had with Feathers so long ago. I sat down on a nearby stump, worried now as this was a mess of a cover and I was afraid I might lose her.

Time passed. After what seemed like an eternity with no bell sound or any other indication of where she was, I decided I had to start searching. As I rose from the stump to begin the search, a muffled tinkling sounded from way off to the LEFT, where she had wanted to go all along. I broke into a dead run toward it and within a few seconds Scent appeared holding the grouse in her mouth in a way that allowed the dead bird to muffle her bell.

I have no idea how far she went. She was gone way too long for my nerves. The good news is that was the last time I told a dog anything about where to go or how to hunt. Now I go where I am told! It took forever, but I had finally learned my lesson. Scent remained a staunch pointer of grouse until she died and I owe her really big time for the wonderful relationships I am now able to enjoy with my dogs, all of whom know more than I.



## *Can't Hunt ... What to Do?* by Mike McDonald

For the second year in a row, a medical malady has prevented me from enjoying the grouse woods. Last year, it was tonsil surgery in early November – a minor inconvenience if you were smart enough to have it as a child, but at 58 recovery takes a bit longer. I managed a few hunting days in October but as so often happens, rain shut us out of nearly every weekend I was not “on-call”. This year I developed arthritis in my left knee, and suffered the hauntings foretold to me by a doctor forty years ago when I dislocated it in a silly college gym class. That knee has always been weaker and it began to pain me in late September after a day-long fishing charter on the St. Lawrence River with Keith. The water was not particularly rough that day, but we did spend the better part of eight hours standing on a swaying boat deck. It’s the only thing I can think of that might have aggravated the old injury. And yes, forty years of eating too well made its contribution to the problem. At any rate, the pain got worse forcing me to see an orthopedist who diagnosed arthritis. Recommendations: physical therapy and ice packs for a month and then he might suggest some injections, but he was certain we were not at the point of knee surgery. When I asked about bird hunting, he only laughed, saying “You can do anything you like but I warn you...your knee will tell you what, and how much, you will want to do.” He was right. By the end of that week I could hardly walk to the mail box and back. I continued to work, but spent most of the day at my desk and what little movement I managed exhausted my pain tolerance by the end of the day. Weekends became a welcome rest and I had no choice in any decision about hunting.

So, what is a bird hunter to do with lovely fall days burning outside...a willing and eager setter teasing to hunt...and a bum leg keeping us both indoors? This was another kind of pain, entirely. Two years with a dog this age and not so much as a point on a wild bird, unimaginable! Off season forays and released birds break some of the tension with a limited kind of sport but it is not the same as glorious fall colors drifting down with brown gypsies and cock birds rocketing up through them. Poor Flint suffered just as much; bird dog years are limited as it is. At home, he loved our sessions in the chair together, but puzzled at my keeping his warm head off my knee in favor of a bag of ice – silly man. We managed bumper retrieves in the yard and chasing an empty milk jug across the driveway, especially when it’s icy...a favorite past time of my setters for years. The plastic jug is too big for them to get a firm hold and I make it more enticing, at least for a few minutes, by placing noisy pebbles inside. A smart dog soon finds the handle and is off running with his rattling toy

for a game of keep away. This year, the game was an easy win for Flint as I was incapable of maintaining my end of the chase. After a couple passes I command a retrieve to hand when chewing off the cap becomes more interesting to him than the chase. So much for that jug, “Save us the next one, mother.”

We also burned more wood in the gun room stove since the time we spent there increased tenfold. Hauling it in from the shed probably violates common sense, but I had to make some concessions to the pain and the warm fire is worth it. Therein Flint also has a “new” couch after we replaced the one in the living room and moved the old couch to the gun room. He fussed a bit watching the delivery men take away his former gun room perch but reveled in the fact that he was now allowed upon a piece of furniture that had previously been taboo, and all because it was moved to a new place. Must be puzzling for a dog, but he got over it soon enough.

The gun room is where we spend many a winter Saturday so it only seemed natural to go there now on fall weekends, if only to get closer to the grouse hunting we were denied. The book shelves are full of many favorites and even a few titles yet to be read. Sometimes though, in certain moods, there are books you avoid (sorry George, but reading about it when you can’t do it only makes things worse. I’ll stick to your chapters from “outside” the coverts). In such cases, best you turn to books covering subjects you have never experienced that are less troubling since you read to imagine being there, not wishing you still were. Hiking Everest, stalking plains game, and casting full-dress flies to Atlantic Salmon are all safe subjects out of reach before now and likely to continue to be. I can absorb them without stirring up old memories; discovering something new is an entirely different emotion.

Other diversions: My guns have never been as clean after two years with rarely a shot fired. The Rizzini got its use during the summer Trap League and the Sauer was unlimbered at the 2012 OH reunion. A few afternoons on the pistol range rounded out my shooting for the past 18 months. Inspecting and cleaning were the only remaining gun handling activities afforded to pass the time. Previously, finding the time to break a gun down to its components, at least to the extent I dared with limited tools and experience, had been a rare commodity. Now that I had the time, it revealed dirt and grime I am ashamed to say I found. It’s amazing the variety of places into which weed seeds and powder fouling can work themselves. Probing with a swab here or a tooth pick there,

I was able to root it all out. Hoppe's No. 9, Rem-Oil, Shooter's Choice, and lots of cotton patches did the rest resulting in mirror clean bores, well lubed hinge pins, and polished wood, just as they should be always.

A down season is also a good time to catch up on fly tying. My fishing is like my hunting, I am better at preparing for success than actually finding any. That being the case, I spend a lot of winter evenings and weekends tying trout, salmon, and steelhead flies, giving most of them to my friends who are much more successful with them than I. I always seem to be in short supply of wood duck and pheasant feathers, should anyone run across any. Fly tiers are shameless beggars.

Flint too suffered his share of extra attention in the form of more frequent shampoos and clippings, making me much better at the latter. A few years back I installed a raised bath tub in our laundry room and I highly recommend it to all who have hunting dogs that wear their days work into the house without a second thought. For even the most understanding of spouses, there is a limit to the domestic upheaval they will tolerate. A raised tub can save your back, your knees and likely your marriage. It also contains a dog who understands the "stay" command, as well as most of the soap and water.... more on this in a minute. A short piece of garden hose with a spray nozzle attached to a utility faucet provides hot and cold water. I begin by clipping, if it is due, trimming ears to lay closer, rooting out chest and belly mats, and finally tending those out of control leg and tail feathers – all from a standing position. It's a good time to check for ticks and inspect foot pads and nails for any attention they might need. I clean up the clipped hair to save the drain plumbing, ending up with a wad of hair the size of a soccer ball is not unusual. The bath itself begins with an initial hosing down, which raises more fuss than the clipping, but soon Flint succumbs to his situation and lets me suds him up with nice smelling dog shampoo, nicer smelling than Tug Hill black muck, at least to me. With the raised tub you can get all the good spots with little strain on you or the dog. A good triple rinsing with mildly warm water flushes all the soap and dirt down the drain. Now then, to the challenge of containing the water mentioned above. Plan as I might, a towel is usually a few steps away – time enough for Flint to decide for himself the best way to get rid of all his water. Fortunately, being a laundry room, the walls are fairly waterproof, resulting in little damage when the deluge begins. I duck behind the towel, saving my face and most of my upper torso from a drenching. Flint's first shake showers the place with what seems like a gallon of water, although I'm sure it's some lesser amount, and his

second produces a finer mist in far less quantities, thank God. By now I have him covered in a big towel and rub him as dry as possible, squeezing down his legs, tail, and ears. He needs little encouragement to hop out of the tub and I brace his descent as much as possible, while protecting my knee and back, and he lands on all fours far more gently than some leaps I've seen him take while hunting. A quick leash and we head for the back door. Even in winter a wet dash across the yard seems a delight to him. There is more shaking and lots of rolling in order to camouflage that offensive soapy smell. Then it's back to the gun room to finish drying on a fresh towel in front of the fire. Brushing and combing come later when his coat is dry enough to allow it. What a handsome boy emerges from under all that mud!

Not bad ways to spend a huntless fall, would you say? We miss being out in the coverts but our few attempts quickly told me I didn't belong on uneven ground. So, we made the best of a bad situation. By the time Christmas arrived my knee was much better and could have taken on some of our easier coverts, but as is common by then at this latitude the woods were buried in two and a half feet of snow. A healthy man and dog can still hunt the edges, but we are only half of that team. Unless we get a January thaw, our next opportunity will be at the OH Reunion in March. Please let it happen; we need the change of scenery lest I rub the bluing off all my guns, burn up our store of fire wood and convert a fine setter to a couch potato.





WILDA

*"I reached the road in that ineffable fragrance of an Autumn twilight, essences released by cooling shadows and dew. Ruff and Wilda climbed stiffly into the station wagon and I disassembled and cased my gun, feeling as much as seeing the smooth walnut and steel, and the oil-tanned leather. Fumbling into my game pocket for my two grouse lying heads to tails, I withdrew them smoothing their feathers, sniffing the dry smell of their plumage, spreading their fans and placing them on the rear seat, one of them still warm. As I stood with the car door open, listening to a belated katydid and licking sounds coming from Ruff and Wilda where they lay sprawled in their compartment, I looked up at the southeastern sky and saw the Pleiades and Orion's belt sparkling through the bare trees. These things feed the soul – two dogs, a gun, a brace of grouse, the mountain constellations, and an enchanted valley far back in those black-dark hills, swallowing the night entirely for its own."*

~ George Bird Evans, October Fever 1989



## Editor's Note

In this space last time, I said the Letter won't get written if you don't do it. Well, you sure stepped up! I continue to be impressed by both the quality and quantity of the contributions to the Old Hemlock Letter, and thank all those who take the time and do the work to be part of it. Special thanks to John McGranaghan for his excellent graphic and production work. I have said it before, but it bears repeating: there would be no letter without all of you, and many of your stories have archival importance. Now is the time to start planning articles for the September issue.

Nor would there be an Old Hemlock Foundation without the foresight of George and Kay, and the hard work and wise vision of the Directors. LeJay and Helen Ann bear the brunt of the day to day, and do it with grace and a welcoming smile. Anyone who has the opportunity to see this up close stands amazed at the steadfast strength and quality of their commitment to Old Hemlock, whatever the challenge.

As you read this, the 2013 Reunion will be upon us. It has become an important part of our shared legacy, and is a happening not to be missed. I hope to see many of you there, including some new faces and puppies!



~ Bruce Buckley

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