



Old Hemlock *Letter*

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The Old Hemlock Foundation, Preserving and Promoting the Legacy of George Bird Evans and Kay Evans



7/7/80

Troubles with
Bird Dogs #1

For Kay —

Each of us seeks his paradise;
I found mine with a girl and a dog and a gun.

George

Old Hemlock

30 November 1975

No End in Sight

Karen Killay

The hunter, a man with many seasons behind him, begins his morning with a late start as his alarm clock doesn't go off. Exasperated, he is annoyed with himself for forgetting to set it. Slowly swinging his legs over the side of the bed he pauses and steadies himself. Damn, it seems like yesterday when one leap was all it took. Still dark, he tries to dress quietly so as not to disturb his wife. But then his boot drops clumsily from his arthritic hand, thumping noisily on the wood floor.

"It's ok" she says softly. "I'm awake, put the light on." "Sorry," he says, "my fingers aren't working yet." He finishes dressing and gives her a quick kiss on the cheek. "I'm running late" he says. "Mack will be waiting for me. See you tonight." She answers him the way she always does, "Stay safe and good hunting."

Carefully, on unsteady legs, he eases himself down the stairs and hears the frenzied barking of the dog. The dog knows he is late too. "Ok, I'll be right there," the hunter yells. After letting the dog out, and shivering at the blast of cold air from the open door, the hunter checks the temperature, a mere nineteen degrees. "I'd better grab my down vest for this lousy weather" he says to himself. Why does it have to be so bone chilling cold?!

The hunter goes to the coffee pot. Empty, no coffee! While muttering a few colorful phrases he fills the pitcher with water and measures the coffee that he had meant to do last night. No alarm, no coffee. What the hell is the matter with me?!

Barking again. The dog is back. The hunter opens the door and remnants of frost fly through the air as a big ball of fur bounds through. The dog is impatient, anticipating the truck ride that is to come. He stares at the hunter with a 'hurry up' look on his face. "Ok dog,

settle down, be a good boy, I'm going as fast as I can," the hunter scolds.

The coffee has cooled, so the hunter fills his favorite mug. The first swallow burns his tongue but no matter, he can't wait for it to cool down. Doing a mental checklist of what he needs to finish loading into the truck and hurrying now, the mug slips from his grasp and the contents spill down his front. The hot coffee quickly soaks his shirt. Now angry, the hunter sputters, questioning why he still continues to do this. He pauses and considers that maybe it's time to face that he is just too old.

Finally, with soaked shirt changed, coffee thermos filled, gun and shells loaded, the hunter and the dog are on their way.

The heavy panting of the dog mixed with excited squeals, the truck's tires grinding loudly on the cold dirt road, and the crackling of old leather seats are the sounds that simultaneously greet the hunter's ears as he drives. His heart warms to these familiar sounds he loves to hear. This is his kind of morning music.

Reaching his destination at one of their favorite areas, the hunter pulls up behind Mack's old Dodge Ram. As he opens the truck door he inhales deeply. This brisk morning air is clean and fresh he is thinking, and much to his liking. Reaching into the back seat he slides the collar and bell over the dog's head. In a flash the dog catapults out of the truck, not willing to wait any longer. C'mon, c'mon is the beseeching look in the dog's eyes as he dances on the frozen ground.

Mack is there waiting.

"Sorry, I overslept," says the hunter.

"Hey, don't worry, I just got here a few minutes ago myself. Just getting older and slower!" acknowledges

Mack. Ignoring this remark, the hunter puts a few more shells in his vest, shoulders his gun, and whistles the dog ahead. He moves quickly, his boots creating crunching sounds as they break the fresh crust of the frozen snow. His steps are no longer labored, as he keeps his eyes on the dog. The hunter is pleased with this dog. Watching, he admires the way he is moving effortlessly, pacing himself well, and covering the ground efficiently. Checking back, the dog looks to the hunter for direction and follows the hand signal he is given. The hunter, keeping him in sight, follows.

Several hours into the hunt, the dog starts working scent, his body reacting as the scent gets stronger. Now creeping, the dog slows. Two more steps and he is on point, crouching with his nose thrust forward. The dog's breath in the chilly air forms circles around his head. The skin is quivering over his ribs. The hunter hurries on legs that have suddenly become stronger, and reaches the dog. "C'mon Mack, we've got a point. Hurry, get up beside me," the hunter whispers over his shoulder. "You take it. I'll back you," Mack quietly answers. The hunter quickly moves ahead, anticipation consuming him, and instantly from the brittle growth surrounding a fallen log a nervous grouse erupts into

the crisp air.

A single shot from the hunter's twenty-eight brings down the bird. The dog quickly retrieves the grouse and delivering it to the hunter, drops the bird at the hunter's feet. He looks up at him with glowing eyes. Giving a hearty pat on his head the hunter tells him "You're a good dog." Then picking up his prey the hunter examines the still warm body, a red phase, uncommon in these parts. Surrendering himself to this time and place, the hunter reflects on the point, the shot, and the retrieve, willing his memory to savor this moment to relive again another day.

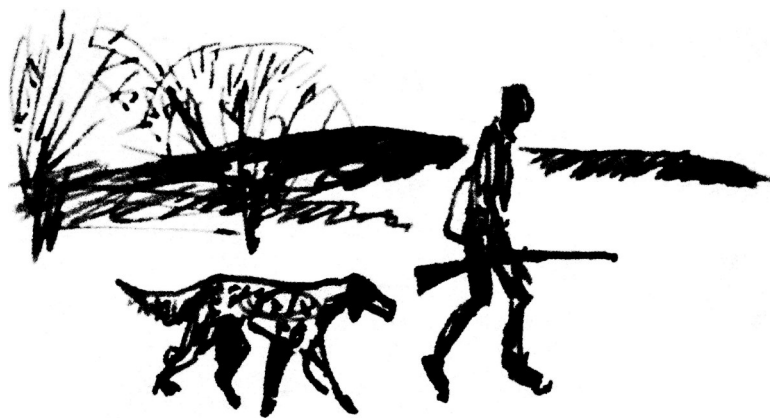
After gently smoothing the feathers of his prize, the hunter carefully places the grouse in his game pocket.

Slowly now a smile creeps across his face as he recalls the morning's chaos and his 'why do I do this?' musings.

Stroking the dog's head, the hunter laughs and says out loud, "Don't you worry, dog. I will never be too old. I just needed to be reminded."

"What was that?" asked Mack.

"Nothing" said the hunter, "Nothing at all."



"Some men dream of wealth and power. I tell of days. Of woods taking me where they wanted me to go, hawthorns scarlet with October, the lacy loveliness of hemlocks, old lanes gold with Autumn, fall color like stained glass showing through the leaded lines of black branches, each tree a love, each leaf a now, the dry bone look of maple twigs in winter, the silent snow. For more than seventy Indian summers I have begged each one not to go, and even as I spoke, the leaves showered down around me."

George Bird Evans Grouse along the Tramroad 1986

ATTENDEES, FIRST OLD HEMLOCK REUNION, 1999

Susan Buckley, assisted by Karen Killay

BOGAN Denis, Barb & Sarah	OH BROOK
BOWMAN Tom & Pam	OH BRACE & OH BRACKEN
BROWN Roger	OH BELL
BUCKLEY Bruce & Sue	OH TIME & OH FLIGHT
CARTER Willie & Hall	OH BRIAR
CATLETT Larry & Vicky	OH SWEETIE, OH BELLE & OH DOLLY
EVANS Kay	OH MANTON
GRAFFIOUS LeJay & Helen Ann	“
GRANDSTAFF Kenny	OH ORION
HALL David	OH FLARE & OH SONNET
HANKS Brad	OH SPRY
KAUFFMAN Jeff & Kendra	OH BRIARY & OH SPIRIT
KILLAY Jim & Karen	OH BÉCASSE
KROL Mike	OH SHAY & PURDEY BOY
LEACH Jeff & Gabriella	OH STONEHOUSE & OH CHURCHILL
McDONALD Mike & Keith	OH MARSH & OH LINK
PIERSOL Ben & Ben Jr.	OH BRILEY
RECKTENWALD Jim	OH ARGYLL
ROSE Bob	OH SIRIUS
SEAWRIGHT Quinn	OH SAVANNAH
STOCKER Walter	OH JESS



Around Old Hemlock Foundation

LeJay Graffious, Administrator

Every season at Old Hemlock is a magical time. I always enjoy a fresh snow. The white cover makes for picturesque views from a warm home. I look forward to walking our trails to see what critters are moving about. Plans are being laid for 2018 as we look back at the accomplishments of 2017.

Finally, after years of planning, organizing, and collaboration between West Virginia University and the Old Hemlock Foundation, George's shooting journals have been published on-line for the world to read. I have received accolades from many of George's readers who realize the importance of this momentous accomplishment. Hopefully, these nearly 8000 pages will inspire more readers and writers. Thanks to Steve Smith for announcing the internet site on *Pointing Dog Journal* magazine's list-serve. Also, gratitude goes to Bruce Buckley for his assistance and sage advice during this process. Mainly, the credit for spearheading this project goes to John Cuthbert, Director and Curator of the West Virginia and Regional History Center of the West Virginia University Library. Many of you met John at the celebration we had at the library in 2008. Very early on he recognized the importance of George Bird Evans' contributions to literature, and his stature as a West Virginia author.

Sometimes I think we have saturated the local market for visitations to Old Hemlock. Then I am surprised by the number of visitors we have welcomed. In 2017 we shared Old Hemlock with 720 guests and 35

dogs. I just had an inquiry from one of George's readers in Texas who is planning travel to West Virginia solely to visit the home of George and Kay. We continue to generate interest through a variety of media and events. Magazine articles have appeared in *Pointing Dog Journal* celebrating George's work. We have produced displays at local events such as the "Heritage Days" sponsored by the Bruceton-Brandonville Historical Society. Old Hemlock also makes presentations to civic organizations such as the Monongalia County Historical Association. And through West Virginia University's Center of Service and Learning, we have had the opportunity to interact with students who volunteer or do academic work centered on the Foundation's mission.

Following George and Kay's vision, we are able to give to the community through scholarship programs and grants. Through our gifts to the West Virginia University Foundation, we have presented our seventh medical scholarship to a local man, Tyler Groves, and our first George Bird Evans Literary Scholarship to Elana Zambori. Another gift to the Bruceton High Alumni Association provides them with funds to grant Old Hemlock Foundation scholarships to local college students. Two students, Marla Quinn and Nicole Yocum, who will be graduating from nursing school this semester, have received our scholarships for four years. Both women have parents who were teachers in Preston County, and both have excellent grade point averages. We know they will provide excellent nursing

care during their careers, which will honor George and Kay's wishes to support and improve medical care in West Virginia.

In addition to these scholarships, George and Kay provided funds to the local school for arts and literary education. The school uses the gift to provide teachers an opportunity to receive monies backing projects in their classrooms. An annual gift is also given to the Preston County Humane Society. This year a grant was given to the West Virginia Young Birders group to help with the construction of an outdoor classroom. We who knew George and Kay knew of their interest in the natural world beyond grouse and woodcock. They were always curious about the birds on Old Hemlock and in their hunting coverts. I found a list of birds from the 1940's written by Kay. The species that she recorded tell of the successional stage of the woods as they changed from fields to forest. Hopefully, this gift will lead young persons to enjoy the natural world as much

as the Evanses did.

Due to paper work problems, we will not have an AmeriCorps volunteer this year. We have been blessed in the past to have had wonderful, intelligent young adults helping to preserve and to promote the legacy of George and Kay.

The Monitoring Avian Populations and Survivorship program will continue for the third year this summer. About a third of the birds captured in 2017 were banded by me in 2016. I am still amazed at the toughness of these birds, whose body mass is that of three nickels, or 15 grams. These neo-tropical migrants have made homes on Old Hemlock in the forests provided by George and Kay. The three main species on the property are Hooded Warblers, Ovenbirds, and Wood Thrushes. A bird banded here in 2016 flew the gauntlet to Central or South America, then made the treacherous return trip to the same wooded home to raise its young and be recaptured by me a year later. This valuable citizen science data is



combined with others in this project by the Institute for Bird Population at Point Reyes Station, CA. The forests at Old Hemlock are providing sanctuary from shrinking habitats.

We are always looking for ways to promote the work of the Old Hemlock Foundation. We welcome your ideas and input. Our promotional products help with branding and keeping Old Hemlock in front of the public. Calendars are provided at cost, as are all of our sale items. The latest calendar was sent to 85 persons

both in and out of the family. You can contribute photos to me any time for possible inclusion in the 2019 calendar.

Helen Ann and I are very aware of the gift of friendship George and Kay bestowed on us. This friendship has multiplied over the years through the Old Hemlock family, and has given us a chance to share Old Hemlock with so many others. As always, our doors here are open to you.



“Those of us who have shot for years have come to know that a dog who is reliable on birds is more efficient and far more beautiful if he moves out enough to appreciably cover the terrain.”

George Bird Evans Troubles with Bird Dogs 1975

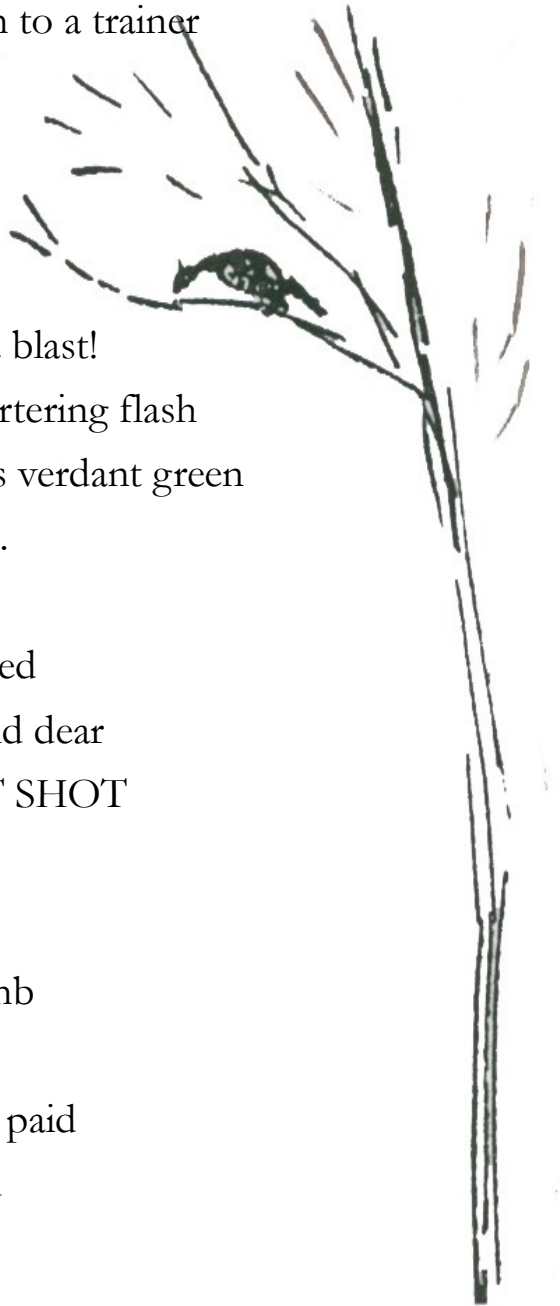
“Loaner”

Moe Lee

Knew of a man who bought a pair
Of unsuspecting setters with silky black hair
Named them quick, and then sent them to a trainer
To be a “Loaner”

First didn't start
Second surely passed
Oh those initial days are indeed a blast!
The whistle, the wing, cap gun and quartering flash
Would never be seen by the chap who was verdant green
For his dog was a “Loaner”.
He paid through the nose
For another man to be exposed
To those golden moments we hold dear
THE FIRST POINT, THE FIRST SHOT

When the time had come
None but the owner was dumb
For the bond was made
With the trainer who was much paid
...and eventually dismayed
For having to return
The “Loaner”



Where Have All the Game Birds Gone?

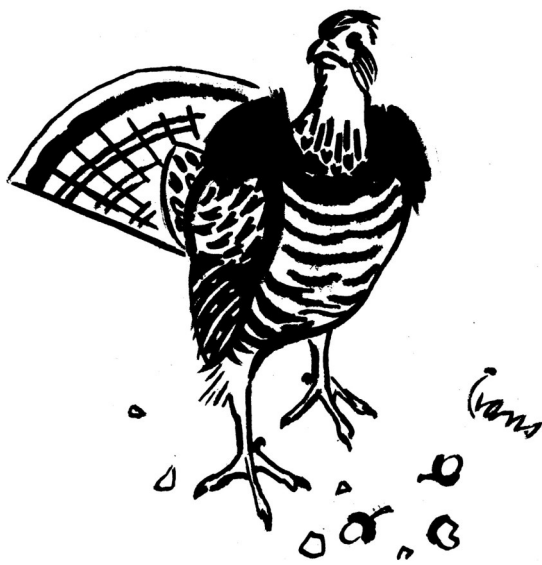
Mike McDonald

That question may seem rhetorical to the loyal readers of *The Old Hemlock Letter*, but beyond its readership it is not likely to stimulate much interest or concern. Why should it? Those who notice fluctuations in their local game bird populations, without having it pointed out to them, likely know the answer or at least have an opinion about it. Others, less aware, are oblivious to problems for which they have little interest or knowledge. Who can blame them? But when the drumming of a grouse, dance of a woodcock, or cackle of a pheasant all but define you, any reduction in sustainable numbers is troubling and even heart breaking. Nonetheless, we are finding more and more empty coverts where birds once flourished, living, breeding, and multiplying with seemingly endless dependability.

We have all read the biologists' theories on the cycle of game bird populations based on densities of birds vs. available habitat, predators, weather patterns, droughts, floods, fires and diseases. I accept a certain amount of their academic explanation for localized population declines since each of these impacts can and does affect bird numbers, particularly if they occur in multiples, i.e., drought coupled with disease and/or a spike in predation. And we cannot discount whatever impact hunting

has on these same populations alone or in concert with the natural impacts already mentioned. Through most of my bird hunting career I have watched the highs and lows in bird numbers with focused interest and accepted the changes as an element of my passion for gunning over bird dogs in the fall of the year, while changing tactics of pursuit in relation to pressures on populations in a given year. I hunt less aggressively when and where I find birds in fewer numbers. When numbers are good, I hunt with the confidence that a bird I take here or there is "affordable" from that population. I have convinced myself that I am fulfilling my obligation to gunning stewardship with self-imposed bag limits well below what the State allows, and tracking bird numbers through personal observations and reliable scientific studies when I can find them.

Currently our local game bird numbers are at an abysmal low, such as I have never experienced. I began the 2017 – 2018 grouse and woodcock seasons in northern New York State with an eager brace of dogs: my proven veteran setter and an ambitious ten month old in his first season. Together with my enthusiasm as a retiree, free of burdens that had previously limited our days afield, I felt we had a winning combination for sure. I fought my fears of the gradual drop in productive points and flushes I'd seen over the past several seasons by believing that with the time I could now spend behind my dogs we would surely find birds that had eluded us. Alas, it was not to be. In eight days hunting in October and six in November we did not move a single grouse or woodcock. Surely we would have put in more than these fourteen days had the birds been there, but you can't keep subjecting yourself to continued failure without neutral days in between to strengthen your resolve to continue. We did hear a few wild, distant flushes but nothing that could be claimed as bird contacts. After five or six birdless days, it became less gunning over dogs than a fruitless search for that which was not there, and I lost all interest in shooting *any* bird, should we even find one. On our last few days before an early winter shut us down, I didn't even carry my gun; we were simply trying to determine if there were any birds left at all. Flint, my veteran setter,



would start each day with determination but was soon at my side in self-imposed heel – his nose convincing him that we were only out for a walk. Young Seth, my pup of the year, had been well schooled during the summer on released pigeons, planted birds, birds in release traps, and all that goes with them. He knew what he was supposed to be doing, but something was wrong. He would dash right and left out in front then stop to look back for my instructions, yet I could not cast him to birds as we had done in training. How depressing to see such enthusiasms go unrewarded. Humans can temper their disappointment, but how do you explain it to dogs depending on you to take them to birds? Deep snow and bitter cold came early and we were house-bound well before Christmas, a blessed reprieve from the frustration of empty coverts.

Throughout the season, we met a number of other bird hunters along the jeep trails and log roads, some local, some from away. To a man they told similar tales of empty coverts and frustrating hunts. At least their similar experience confirmed that it was nothing we were doing wrong. About all we could do was to recount the glory of seasons we had known with never a thought of not finding birds. A few who had managed to shoot a grouse or woodcock appeared to regret it and many went home early or switched to deer hunting to curb their depression over the bird season.

So what happened? Without a doubt we have more predators than twenty years ago when you rarely if ever saw a fox, coyote, or hawk. There were always skunks, opossums, weasels, crows, and feral house cats to prey on ground nesters, but they were in manageable numbers. Now predators are everywhere and multiplying by the hundreds it seems. Trappers used to keep the number of fox, coyotes and raccoons in check, but fur prices have dropped so low that they tell me it's not worth their time or

effort to run traditional trap lines. A few hound hunters still chase fox, coyotes, and raccoons but it's not enough for dependable predator control. Avian diseases are also on the rise according to State biologists. NYS DEC reports finding many birds that test positive for the West Nile virus. Chemical spraying in higher human population areas shows good promise as a deterrent to insects that carry the virus, but wider implementation is too impractical and costly to have the necessary effects state wide. Lastly, we cannot discount human population growth, changes in farming practices, and transformation of traditional roosting, nesting and feeding areas to less attractive or functional purposes. A grouse habitat project implemented a few years ago on government land near here is interesting but far too limited in size to offer much benefit to declining game bird numbers over the wider area. Even this effort will not create productive grouse or woodcock habitat for ten to fifteen years.

I fear we are at the dismal point George Evans and others warned us about as early as the 1950's. There are simply *too many* negative impacts on game bird populations that are of interest to *too few* sportsmen, sportswomen, and naturalists. It was not my intention to offer such a depressing commentary on the future of bird hunting, but it is a fact that we need to face. Preserve hunting may be our only hope for dependable dog/bird contacts in the very near future. I also suspect as preserve hunting becomes more popular the opposition to it will increase from those who have little understanding of our passion or the impacts that brought us to this point. I know I for one will be monitoring closely for grouse drumming and woodcock dancing in the spring, keeping that tradition alive, and hoping for some natural resurgence of a bird cycle that I wish I were more confident of.

“Lady Luck, that bitch goddess who can destroy you while she smiles, at times seems to see to it that you get fewer breaks as you and your dog grow older.”

George Bird Evans Upland Gunner's Book (Amwell 1986)

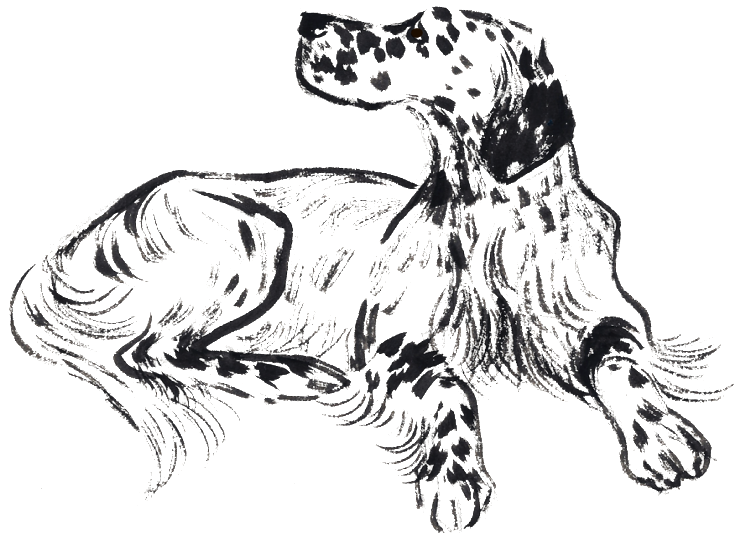


“Beauty does more than reflect light, it is the action of energy on form, glowing as a total function. This is singularly true of a grouse dog in his consecration to his bird.”

George Bird Evans An Affair with Grouse 1982

“I lay my hand on the 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



OLD HEMLOCK FAMILY

Blue 1938-1952

Dawn 1942-?

Old Hemlock Ruff:

In 1947 Dawn back to G. Evans, Sr.



OH Ruff 1947-1962



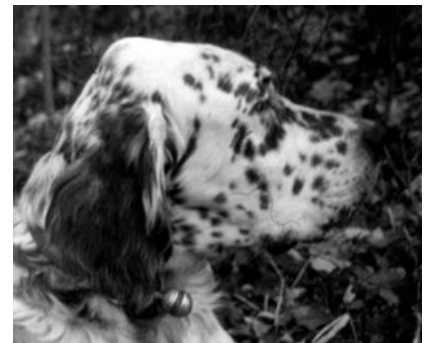
OH Feathers: 1952-1961



OH Bliss: 1964-1969



OH Briar: 1969-1979



OH Belton: 1976-1989

LY TREE

BLUE BLUE

RUFF RUFF

SHELL DIXIE

MARK

BRIAR

SNOW

TON



Wilda of Blue Bar: 1950 -1957



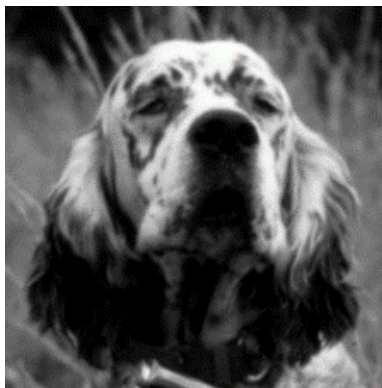
OH Dixie: 1958-1971



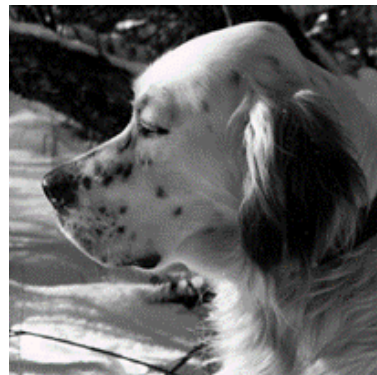
OH Shadows: 1953-1967



OH Quest: 1984-1994



OH Manton: 1991-2002



OH Bécasse : 1996-2007

With Killays 1997-2007

Fate Intervenes

Helen Ann Graffious

When we heard the good news that Karma, Willow's daughter, was pregnant we immediately wondered whether this would be a good time to add a second dog to our family. Willow had just turned seven years old. Our friend, Sue Buckley, advised that this was the best age to add a pup. Since we did not keep either of Willow's pups, (Karma went to Roger and Anna Brown, and Katie to Jim and Karen Killay) this would ensure that Willow's genes would continue in our home. The debate on whether to proceed continued for weeks. One day we wanted a pup, the next we knew we had an ideal life with Willow. If we would lose her, then we had the freedom to travel at will. Finally, we would leave it up to fate and put our name on the waiting list with Roger. We definitely wanted a female, but color was not a consideration. What if Karma had a small litter with no females? Fate would decide for us.

As luck would have it, Karma delivered two healthy females, along with seven healthy males. Roger called with the good news. A female would come to Old Hemlock after Jeff and Kendra Kauffman chose first. Number one was an orange belton, and number two was a blue with an eye patch. We

didn't care which we would get, and second pick of two means you don't have the agony of deciding. Ironically, Willow was the second female of the Kauffmans' litter after they decided on Mayfair, so we would be sharing litter mates again.

The Kauffmans could not attend Puppy Day, so we brought both girls back to Old Hemlock along with four males for a second Puppy Day. They arrived the next day to choose. After a long deliberation, the orange belton was to be their choice. With their connection to the heaths of the English moors, they named her Pink Heather. Names are always difficult. To keep with the plant theme of our coverts, our pup would become Mountain Laurel. We certainly would have been happy with either the blue or orange setter, but second choice served us well with Willow. It was certainly easier not to have to make that decision between the two gorgeous pups.

And so our world becomes different with a brace of setters. Now Laurel is two years old. We know we should not compare her to Willow, whose existence is hunting eating and sleeping in that order. Laurel, a more loving and social dog, always wants to be with



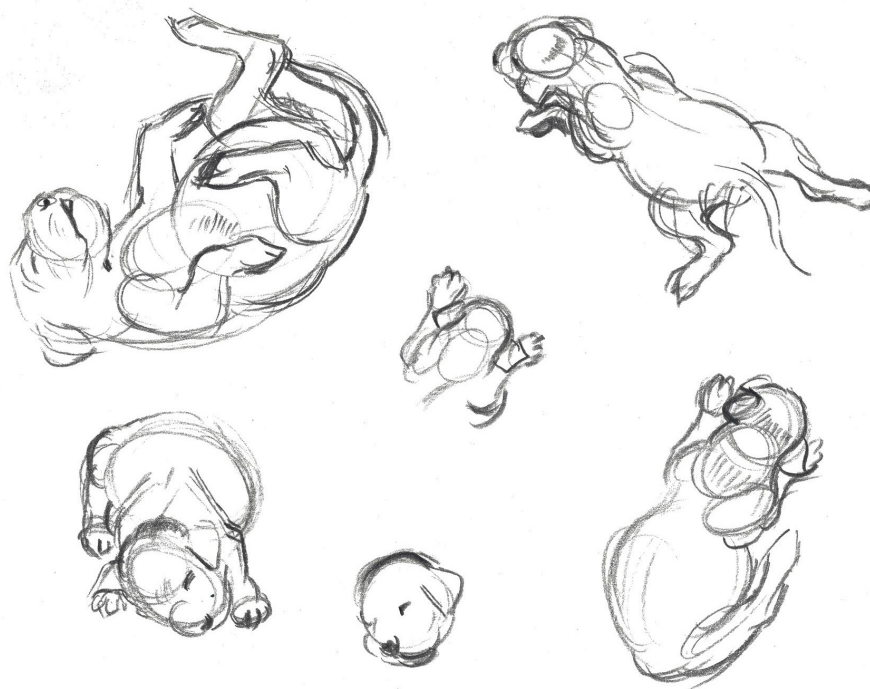
YOUNG QUEST BACKPOINTS BELTON

you. Her hunting instinct was slower to develop than her grandmother's. She takes her cues from her more experienced partner, always aware of what Willow is doing. Laurel plays with toys more often than Willow. She has the routine of bringing one to LeJay after breakfast in the morning for a game of fetch. Whereas Willow was a chewer and destroyed her toys in short order, Laurel has not destroyed a toy yet.

As our first canine companion, Willow had so much natural hunting ability, that she actually trained us! Those with much more setter experience often commented, "Do you know what you have in her?" She was special to us but we had nothing prior with

which to compare. We are learning now. What a joy to watch Laurel develop. LeJay reported that she found a grouse on her own today.

Now that Laurel has grown out of the puppy stage, we treasure each of her passing milestones. At 27 months she completed her first heat cycle. We hope to breed on the second cycle with Roger's permission; we would like puppies at Old Hemlock again. Laurel is Manton's great-great granddaughter. Manton was Kay and George's last setter to live at Old Hemlock. We want the legacy to continue. If the opportunity arises, will we be ready for a third Old Hemlock setter in the family? Fate will tell us, as it has before.



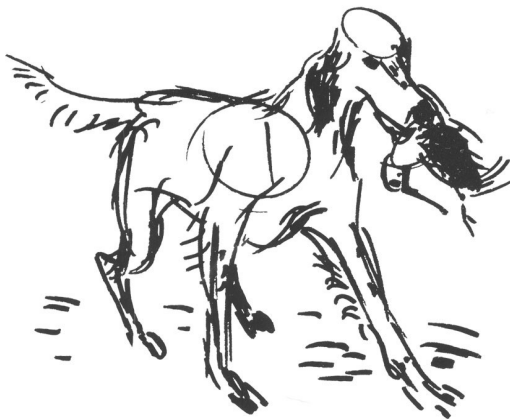
“Ruff plunged into Roaring Creek in front of me and stopped, rigid on point in the middle of the stream, facing a wall of rhododendron eight feet high on the far bank. He was standing in turbulent water below a small waterfall, his head reaching high, his left paw raised tight against his chest, exactly as Briar pointed years after him and as Quest does now, and his soul was in his face. I will never forget his eyes.”

George Bird Evans Grouse along the Tramroad 1986

On Greatness

Mike Krol

Those of us who have owned a number of dogs over the years have fond memories of each of them, unique in their own way, each holding a special place in our hearts. But all dogs are not equal, and only a select few achieve the status of “great”, that dog who is truly a cut above the rest. If you’ll humor me for a few moments, I’d like to give you an assessment of the setters who have graced my life.



I’ll start with Blue, my first English setter, not an Old Hemlock, sired by Stormy Trade Winds, a famous setter from Michigan in the 70’s. Blue came to us as a puppy in 1980. I’ve not written about him before. After all these years it still breaks my heart to think about him. Blue was in nearly every definition of the word “great”. He was pointing and retrieving grouse and woodcock at five months of age, and only grew better with time. Back then my coverts were many and bountiful, so he had ample opportunity to learn exclusively on wild birds. I was different back then, too; much more of a killer than I am today, so he saw a lot of birds taken over him. He will always be remembered as one of my very finest. Sadly, something happened to him that made him hate anyone outside my family. I cannot pinpoint any singular event that brought about this behavior, he began to display these aggressive traits at just over a year in age, and they only grew worse over time. I used to think of the “one man dog” as something pretty

cool; let me assure you, it is not. When we had children and other kids would come over to play in our yard, Blue would go crazy in his kennel, barking and snarling. Watching him, I knew if he were to escape that someone would get hurt. Taking him to the vet’s was always an adventure, he had a big WILL BITE sticker on his file, and getting him to take his shots required two of us holding him down, of course muzzled all the while. My neighbors live about a hundred yards away from us, and one summer he slipped his lead, made a beeline for their house and went after the son, a boy of about five. He didn’t break the skin, but there was no doubt he wasn’t playing. My neighbor was pretty cool about it, and I vowed to be more diligent. But there continued to be the same behavior, only getting more intense as he matured. When George and Kay hunted with me the second time in 1986, I recall Kay going to the truck to see him, Blue being true to form, snarling and growling in his dog crate. Later that fall I made the decision to put him down (he was 6 1/2 years old). I just wanted him to enjoy his final season and those hunts that late autumn were gut-wrenching and heartbreaking, me spending much of the day in tears. I had finally decided I couldn’t do it, I would just have to be extra cautious, watching him constantly. And then in late December, when I went to take him out for his evening walk, he again slipped his lead and dashed down to my neighbor’s, this time going after the wife who had just returned from running errands. She managed to evade him and jump in her car to avoid the attack, and that would be the final event. I put him down the following week. His memory haunts me to this very day. But as a gun dog and companion for me, Blue was truly great.

Old Hemlock Blossom came to me in January 1986, a lovely blue Belton from Mark Kucera’s Old Hemlock Dream, one of the most beautiful setters I’ve ever seen, sired by OH Quest. Blossom too was blessed with vast coverts, plentiful birds and a master who wasn’t shy about pulling the trigger so she, like Blue, developed quickly. She would account for more than 500 grouse points and 1,000 woodcock points in

her lifetime. Blossom was a wonderful bird dog, but an independent hunter who didn't check back to the gun as often as I would like, ranged a tad wide, retrieved only when it suited her fancy, and in her later years hunting with her son Shay, refused to back point, preferring to steal Shay's points versus honoring them. I loved her dearly, but her idiosyncrasies keep me from calling her great. In fairness, it is likely the sloppy training she received from her master that prevented her from being so. She was a splendid gun dog.

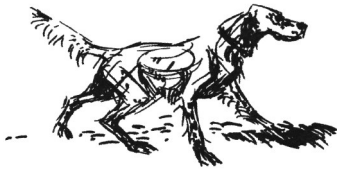
In 1988 we bred Blossom to Mike McDonald's Wildecovert Brook; this litter produced ten pups, and gave me Shay, the dog whom all others would be measured against. Shay would start his first season at a mere four months of age, really too young, but he learned quickly. Like his predecessors he was blessed with frequent bird contacts, and by the following season he was performing like an experienced pro. Shay always, always, stayed in touch with me, pinned his birds and held his points solidly, and from the age of just over a year, never ever failed to deliver his birds to hand, and I mean every single bird shot over him. This was before I used beeper collars, using only bells to keep track of the dogs. Of course I could hear a heck of a lot better then, and hunting was simply keeping track of the bells and going to where you last heard them when a bell went silent. Many a time when Blossom would be ranging wide, as was her wont, I would lose track of her bell and Shay would check back and I'd say "go find your mama", and he seemed to understand this, guiding me to her and back pointing loyally. There are not enough accolades to describe my boy Shay, he was truly great in every sense of the word.

Back in the 90's, Old Hemlock litters were scarce, nothing like what Roger is producing now. I wanted a young pup coming along at about five year intervals, and although we tried to breed Shay to one of the Catlett girls when he was six, he had never been used at stud and the breeding attempt failed. By 1997 when

Shay was nine and Blossom eleven, I became desperate and ended up getting an October setter, something that in retrospect I think disappointed George and Kay. I well recall Lisa Weisse, the breeder of October Setters, telling me "ours are not Old Hemlock setters", something I might have taken as a warning, but I was determined to get another pup.

October Purdey Boy came to us in the fall of 1997, too young to be hunted that year, but by the time of the first Old Hemlock reunion in 1999 was raring to go. I can still vividly recall working him at Hunting Hills braced with Shay, pointing chukars, going to retrieve fallen birds only to have Shay overtake him, take his birds from him so that Shay could be the top dog delivering the bird to his master. I think this happened twice before Purdey picked up a chukar, saw Shay headed his way, then as clear as day said "the hell with this" and dashed to me proudly with his chukar held firmly in his mouth. Jeff and Kendra Kauffman were with me at the time and we all had a good laugh over it. Throughout his life Purdey would be a retriever first and foremost. I have pictures of him breaking through skim ice to retrieve a grouse that had fallen on a frozen pond during a late season hunt. He had issues with porcupines, always determined the next encounter would emerge with him as the victor. Mike McDonald will well recall the time at Fort Drum when Purdey had a mouthful of quills, and the only way he would let me extract them was with my teeth, Purdey and I muzzle-to-muzzle, me praying he knew I was only trying to help him, Purdey understanding, even to the point that I was putting my tongue into his mouth so that I could secure the quills imbedded in his gums with my teeth. It takes great faith in your dog to do that, believe me! Purdey had great speed and was a true athlete, but his speed and desire would often cause him to overrun his birds, a source of great frustration. This was where Lisa's warning became evident, Purdey was much quicker than what I was accustomed to. Still, Purdey was a very loyal and hard-hunting setter, and became the first dog my son Grayson spent a lot of time





hunting over.
Purdey got to see
Gray grow from a
troubled youth to
the fine man he
would become.

Gray was by my side when we put Purdey to rest, and we cried in each other's arms. While I can't call him great, he was a character and loved me as much as I loved him.

In 2001 Jeff and Kendra Kauffman raised a splendid litter of pups from their lovely Old Hemlock Briery and sired by Ken Alexander's DeCoverly's Blue Major. I was blessed to get Old Hemlock Beretta from this litter, and oh my, what a bird dog she became. I have written about Beretta before, and I am hard pressed to come up with enough accolades to describe her. Hard driving, with speed, grace, beauty and a wonderful nose, and one of the finest retrieving dogs I have been privileged to see. She had an uncanny knack for marking down birds and recovering cripples, and some of these retrieves were truly epic. So many come to mind, but I'll just give this one example: at one of our Reunions Grayson and I were hunting the distant field with guide Bob Joseph (for those familiar with Hunting Hills, this is the field you have to drive to). I normally release only chukars, but to give Gray a special treat we planted a rooster pheasant for him. Beretta pinned the rooster and Gray took the shot, hitting the bird but failing to kill it cleanly. We saw a leg drop but the bird continued on, over the treetops and out of view, sailing on into the deep valley below, hundreds of yards away. I was skeptical but told Gray "if there's any dog that could recover this bird it would be Beretta", and we worked her down into the valley; it was only moments before she locked into a solid point, then dashed into a small thicket, emerging with Gray's rooster in her mouth. This kind of stuff was just business as usual for Beretta. In her later years I did a lot of guiding and some of my clients weren't the best shots, but Beretta could always be counted on to save the day.

If I was pressed to come up with a criticism of Beretta, it might be her natural range, which tended to be beyond 100 yards or more. In the grouse woods this could be problematic, for the grouse wouldn't hold long enough for me to get to her. She had such natural speed and drive I never wanted to try to hack her into closer range. Beretta was a wonderful bird dog with a sweet and gentle spirit, one of the finest ladies to grace my life. In a word, great.

In 2003 we bred Beretta to Purdey, resulting in a small litter of four pups, all males, three blues and one orange. I was intent on replacing Shay so naturally gravitated to the orange boy, the dog who would become Old Hemlock Gunrunner. With the goal of a "Shay replacement", I made a fundamental mistake: one should never get a pup with expectation it will replace one that is gone. Each dog should be measured as an individual, each dog gets to own a portion of your heart. Gunner would present his own unique set of challenges. Although I thought I had done an adequate job of introducing him to gunfire prior to his first season, he became gun shy, as evidenced by his breaking point and backing away as I would approach to flush; if I set the gun down and walked to him he would hold his point just fine. Gun shyness is sometimes incurable, but with Roger Brown's advice I got some pigeons and worked Gunner on them, allowing him to chase catch and retrieve while gradually introducing mild gunfire. Happy to report that the program worked, and within a month Gunner was fully cured. He had the idiosyncratic trait of occasionally burying his birds instead of retrieving them, something that he would do for his entire life (creating some interesting interactions with clients when I worked him while guiding). Gunner was my tragic hero, for he was hit by a car when he was three, badly mangling his left hind leg, and suffering from some brain trauma. We were able to save his leg, and although he would have a funny hitch to his gait for the rest of his life, he hunted like a champ, always giving 100% of what he had. He worked slower and more methodically



than my girls, which made him perfect for guiding out of shape clients. He was a fine and loyal companion who lived a long life in spite of his injury and being diagnosed with bad hips. Given the obstacles he had to overcome, Gunner was great in his own quirky way.

In 2008 we again bred Beretta, this time to Roger Brown's Old Hemlock True. This breeding produced six fine gun dogs, and gave me my wonderful girl Old Hemlock Autumn Dream, aka The Dreamer. Dream does it all, hunts with heart, grace, style and speed, holds her points, and lives to retrieve. She marks down birds like a lab, tracks cripples much like Beretta did, and adores me as much as I do her. She is, in every sense of the word great, one of the very best bird dogs I have been blessed with.

In 2012 we bred The Dreamer to Rick Baylor's Old Hemlock Buckeye Casey, and this breeding produced ten pups, the largest litter we have had since Blossom's in 1998. I kept Promise from this litter and since I've written about her before I won't bore the reader with too much history. Promise hunts with the speed and drive of her mother, perhaps the most stylish of any of my setters past and present on point, with a high head and tail likely inherited from her papa Casey. However, she shows little or no inclination to retrieve. This I attribute to her being spurred by a crippled rooster when she was about six months of age (at least that's my theory; she was on the running bird and when she caught it I heard her yelp). She usually hunts as part of a brace with her mother Dream, and the two of them comprise the finest brace I have had the privilege to run, both being rock solid on point and back pointing each other to perfection. Because Dream is such a dependable retriever I haven't done the force-fetch thing with Promise, something I am reluctant to embark on because it necessitates inflicting pain. However, it is only the lack of retrieving that keeps me from calling Promise great; she is quite the sight to see afield.

Which finally brings me to our newest treasure, Old Hemlock Gibson. One of ten pups raised by my cousins Karen and Jim Killay, sired by Bruce and Sue

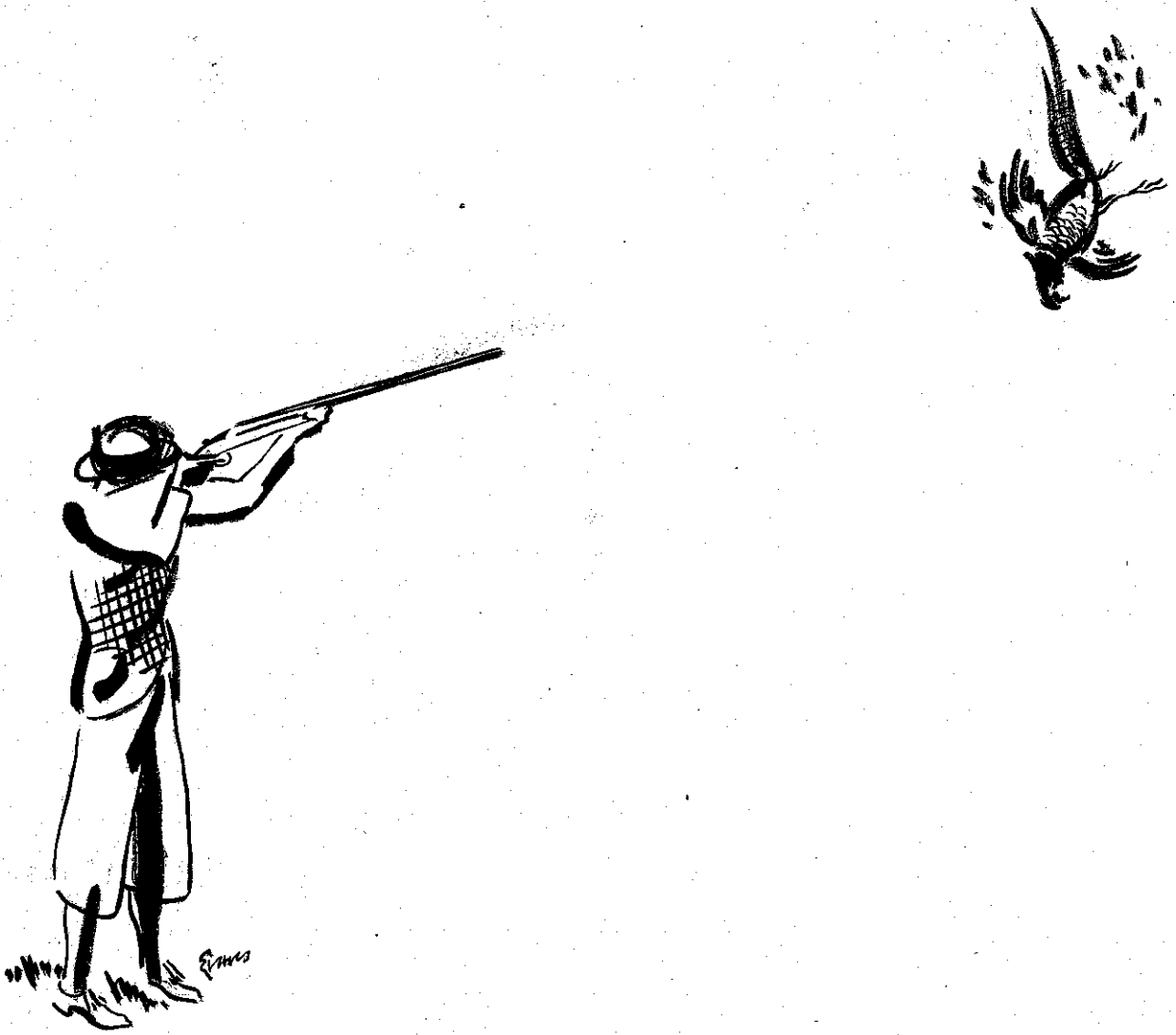
Buckley's magnificent setter Early Frost (October John), and whelped by the Killay's lovely Miss Kathryn. Gibby was the first pup to jump into my arms when we first saw them a year ago January and I knew from that moment we were meant for one another. With only a season under his belt it is too soon to categorize him, but oh my, does he have potential! Gibson works at moderate range, constantly checking back to the gun, holds his points solidly, naturally back points, and I am certain will be retrieving to hand soon. He has gone from nosing his dead birds to picking them up and parading around with them, it is only a matter of time and training before he is delivering. A truly stunning fellow, he has all the potential of greatness.

So there you have the rundown of my pack, nearly all of the dogs who have graced my life. I often wonder how George would have rated his dogs, which ones would stand out as spectacular, or if he would even have dallied in such thinking. In reading his many books, Ruff, Bliss and Briar seem to emerge as favorites, but I think he and Kay would seek the fine qualities in each and overlook or suppress any faults, which is likely what each of us should do. Every single dog should own an equal part of your heart and be appreciated for the remarkable creatures that they are. The fact that I have been blessed with truly fine gun dogs for nearly forty years speaks volumes for quality breeding, amazing canine instincts, and gifts from God. I find no small coincidence in what God spelled backwards says. I will go to my grave believing dogs are HIS gift to us, showing us what unconditional love is all about.



"In dying, a fine gun dog removes all comparison between himself and any other dog. Don't deny him that"

George Bird Evans Grouse on the Mountain 1994



"In a shooting life, it is permanence we yearn for."
George Bird Evans Grouse on the Mountain 1994

Year of Change

Jim Recktenwald

This has been a challenging year for hunting. Learning how to hunt grouse in the rugged mountains of western North Carolina, working the dogs in warm, dry conditions in Minnesota for grouse, woodcock, and pheasants, and learning how to leave Becasse at home when the other girls go hunting. However, we achieved one of our goals when we moved to North Carolina, and that is spend time with our nieces and nephews. The day after Christmas, Barb and I hosted my brother's family at our home and introduced them to quail hunting. We have a preserve near Hot Springs, NC.

I brought OH Patches McNab and OH Thatcher with me, and this was to be Thatcher's introduction to quail. Patches had hunted wild quail in Kansas. I brought two shotguns, a 28 and a 20 gauge. Each niece or nephew would carry a gun and I would work the dogs and shoot a bird if it was in exceptionally thick cover. I didn't realize that this would be their first time to shoot a side by side shotgun and to shoot at a bird.

Patches started out strong, pointing and retrieving the birds with Thatcher backing. We started with my nephews, who are at college studying engineering. They had to learn to carry the gun safely, walk up the quail, determine if they had a safe shot, point the gun, remove the safety and pull the trigger. Fortunately, we put out twenty-five birds. It took a little while but both nephews had broad smiles on their faces and quail in their vests. Thatcher was learning quickly and using her range and nose to nail the quail.

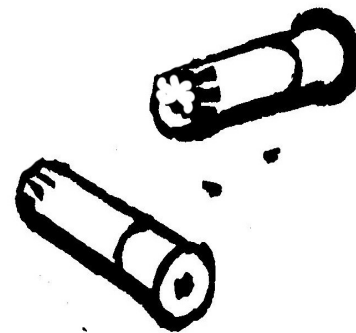
Then we took out my niece who is a freshman in high school. She is a special young lady, who has already gained a place on the swimming, cross country, and track teams along with playing the French horn in the band. As Patches' energy was waning, Thatcher kicked into another gear and found almost all the quail, and my niece was gaining confidence but had not hit a

bird. Finally, Thatcher was pointing on the bank of a large mountain stream. Her nose was held high towards the top of the bank. As my niece and I pushed through the briars I spotted the bird on the edge to the bank facing away from us. I whispered if she saw it and she acknowledged she did. I asked her where she thought it would fly and I pointed out the only path it had through the briars, which would take it across the water to a field on the other side.

"Just remember to cover the bird with the barrel and pull the trigger" was my only instruction. As she walked towards the bird it flushed across the water and the next thing I saw was a puff of feathers about twenty yards out. She had nailed it. I don't know who was smiling more, my niece, her brothers, parents, or her uncle, but it was memorable. It was the best shot of the day.

We finished hunting and we had one last thing to teach them. They had to clean the fifteen birds they shot; but after a few protests everyone cleaned a couple of birds and packaged them. We had a great dinner that night as they talked about their day in the field, the dogs, birds, and comradery.

Our grouse season is still open and there are quail to be hunted before the Reunion, but nothing will match the memory of the hunt with my nieces and nephews.



Bird Dogs, Grouse, and Thorns

LeJay Graffious

Today is the last day of fall, with mild temperatures and a sunny sky. In twenty-four hours the winter solstice will occur, signaling an increase in daylight each day until mid-June. My girls and I have not had a good hunt since deer season started on the Monday after Thanksgiving. Even though grouse season extends until the end of February, I think of it ending with fall.

George had strong feelings about the long grouse season. He felt the pressure in winter affected the breeding stock. Our fall hunting produced birds on every outing, but never many. We had fewer grouse flushes this season than any year in which I have hunted over Willow. I am glad we found good woodcock flights and had the stocked pheasants in nearby Pennsylvania.

Helen Ann and I both contracted cold viruses at a holiday party, decreasing the exercise Willow and Laurel have been able to get recently. Last Saturday was the Mountaineer Chapter of the National Audubon Society's annual Christmas Bird Count, which I have been coordinating since the late 1980's. Due to my cold, which I did not want to share with any other humans, I decided to take the girls to a West Virginia Wildlife Management Area in the count circle to find a grouse on count day. I usually do a count along the Monongalia River with friends and then take the setters out the next day to find a grouse to add as a count week bird. So, with only canine companions, I set out to find a

grouse. I was probably the only bird watcher carrying a double twenty gauge doing a Christmas Bird Count in America. Forty minutes into the hunt, Willow tore open an artery in her ear on a multi-flora rose thorn. When she came to my whistle, all I saw was blood. The blood running from the tip of ear had splattered around her head, drained down her shoulder and covered her chest. On first sight, I thought someone had put an arrow in her. Relief was felt when I saw the blood running from her ear. She rolled in the snow and made a three foot diameter circle of scarlet; I figured the next person walking by would presume a deer kill. I called her in and packed two snow patties on either side of her ear to apply pressure. The artery would clot off, but, with a shake of her head and flop of her ears, it would start running bright red again. Luckily, I was fifteen minutes from veterinarian friend Jesse Fallon's home. I called Jesse for help. His wife, Katie, was just returning from counting birds and would watch the children. I was to meet him at his clinic. We arrived simultaneously. Jesse, thinking it would be simple, tried a couple of standard blood clotting medical tricks without success. At that point, he decided to sedate Willow and cauterize the wound. Jesse worked his skills and we headed home with a mummy-headed dog. No grouse were found for count week that day.

With the nice weather on this last day of fall, I decided the girls deserved a hunt even though I am still not back fully from the virus. I decided to take them to an old strip mine near Old Hemlock. A deer hunter sent me a Facebook message saying he had flushed six grouse during the first week of deer season here. We arrived and I had planned a short hunt. Of course, Willow knows the area and I believe she remembers every copse where a grouse was found. They say daughters wrap their fathers around their fingers. Well Willow can do that to me. A couple of times I started out of the strip; Willow would just stand in the brush, stare at me, and will me to follow her. She never wants to quit. So I give in and we push further on. Finally, her bell went silent and I heard Laurel's bell move closer to Willow. Then both fell silent. I checked the

GPS in my hand; Willow was 182 feet away and Laurel was at 164 feet. The arrow said north and all I saw was a wall of brush. I always honor the point, so I pushed north through dense cover of blackberries, autumn olive, multi-flora rose, black locust, and Hercules Club. It was a dense mass of all shapes of thorns with the multi-flora being the worst. I kept checking my GPS and progress was slow. Finally within 50 feet, and it was too dense to see a setter on point, let alone a grouse. On my next step, I heard the flush and the bells began to ring. No shooting would occur today. I negotiated my way out of the tangle of thorns, found the trail, and headed home. I am pleased at least that the last day of fall will end with a snoutful of grouse scent, if not a bird in the hand.



“Wood ferns, once more frost-russet, have closed in over Briar’s grave under the hemlocks, embracing him with Ruff and Bliss. Briar is gone as far as he will ever go, if far is in my heart and my brain and everywhere on Old Hemlock and in those coverts he graced so gallantly.”

George Bird Evans Men Who Shot 1983



George Bird
Evans and Old
Hemlock Briar

“Briar, caro nome, I ask myself if I was aware how very much alive you were while you were living; did I lay my hands on you often enough; did you know how wonderful I thought you were.”

George Bird Evans An Affair with Grouse 1982

Editor's Note

The twentieth annual Old Hemlock Reunion is days away, and it is fitting to step back and consider how remarkable that is. No need to revisit the history here: there is a link on the Old Hemlock website to an article that tells that good story in some detail.

Also it is a shared milestone. This year marks the fiftieth for Hunting Hills. We have been privileged to share twenty of those with the Sisler family, whose dedication, vision, and plain hard work have built the impressive facility we have enjoyed so much. They, their exceptional staff, and Hunting Hills have become an important part of our Old Hemlock legacy.

With advancing age, many of us have figured out that most valuable in the end are the friends we have and relationships that have touched our lives in meaningful ways, not least our remarkable setters. Measured by that stick, the Reunion has been a howling success.

Sue had a grand time trying to come up with a list of the original attendees. Nobody had thought to keep records back then, so her best identification resources have been Larry Catlett's group photo, which appeared in an article he wrote for the July 1999 issue of *Pointing Dog Journal*, and Karen Killay's sharp memory. Easier said than done: much has changed, including such things as weight distribution and hair styles, at least for those who have enough hair left to style. There were 32 people and 28 setters at that first Reunion. Remarkably, 21 of the original folks will be back this year. If you notice any error or omission please let us know, as this list becomes part of our historical record.

We all anticipate the many facets of our Reunion, particularly the camaraderie. As we end our second decade and look forward, we do well to consider that the Reunion doesn't make much business sense for Hunting Hills. Quite simply, they could use the weekend to much better advantage. Their willingness to accommodate us speaks volumes about the quality of the personal relationships built over the years, starting when George and Kay brought their setters for winter training. We need to appreciate and participate.

My thanks to all those willing write so well for the Letter, and to Jim Jones for his generous support. I've said it before, but without your efforts there would be no Old Hemlock Letter.

And special mention to LeJay. The layout and production phase of the Letter has never been easy. He took over that responsibility several issues ago, and you probably haven't noticed unless you read the credits because the transition was seamless. That involved quickly teaching himself the not uncomplicated computer techniques of preparing and composing text, pictures, and illustrations, at a level usually left to professionals. Our collaboration has also been seamless, which has made my job much easier, and allowed us to keep improving the Old Hemlock Letter.

Bruce Buckley

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