

# The Old Hemlock *Letter*

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



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

Volume XV Issue 2 | September 2014 | [www.oldhemlock.org](http://www.oldhemlock.org)

# Greetings to all,

It has been a busy summer for us. We did a quail release and had a “natural” covey to work. The birds got better each day and so did the dogs, gaining valuable lessons each run. Savvy is coming along nicely for a six month old and Karma amazes me and brings a big smile every time she runs. She is so good and so willing to please me. We have a planned litter with Mark Kucera’s Old Hemlock Aislyn, a beautiful blue belton, and Old Hemlock Buckeye Casey that should give us puppies that will be available in late December. I really like the puppies we have from Sass, Steve Hitsman’s female and Aislyn’s litter sister.

The filming is completed on “Old Hemlock Setters: The Legacy of George Bird Evans” thanks to the efforts and hard work of Craig Kulchak, Hall Carter, and LeJay Graffious, who worked on the script and made sure it was accurate. Without their help this would not have been possible. Thanks also to all of you that permitted the filming of your dogs at the reunion. I look forward to seeing the finished product this fall.

We look forward to our trip to Michigan in October and Pennsylvania. We are not sure where else our travels will take us. Hopefully the winter weather will not shut things down early. I hope you are all planning and anticipating a good season with your dogs. We love hearing about them and seeing pictures too. It is not too soon to be thinking about the Old Hemlock Reunion in March at Hunting Hills. It is a lot of fun and something I hope you will be able to attend.



Best to all,

Roger



*“Gun dogs are precious, these alter egos of the gunning man – tough, vital, fragile benedictions bestowed upon us for the short years we have them.”*

# *My First Visit to Old Hemlock Was on Christmas Eve*

Tom Bowman

It is hard to believe that thirty six years have passed since I first met George and Kay Evans. My first visit is still fresh in my mind as if it occurred more recently. Little did I know the influence and impact this man, his philosophy and approach toward dogs and hunting, and those gorgeous setters would have on my life. My early introduction to George is similar to that of Mike Krol. I also was a member of a book club during my high school years and once monthly received a new book selection to review and keep or return. One selection was *The Upland Shooting Life*, by George Bird Evans. That was the first time I saw his line of setters and read about his grouse hunting. It is still my favorite book, and is what kindled the flame and started my journey into the world of Old Hemlock setters. In the back of that book George had listed his home town as Bruceton Mills, West Virginia, and I easily located a telephone number from directory assistance. I called and spoke with George the summer after graduating from college in 1977. Looking back I am amazed that I actually got to speak with him, learning that Kay often screened his calls.

The following year just before Christmas 1978, my friend Danny Moore asked if I would travel with him through the northeast as he searched for a veterinary clinic where he could do his internship prior to his graduation from veterinary college. The trip sounded great to a single twenty three year old school teacher. My hope was we could stop and meet George Bird Evans. I had recently read that he had completed two new books about grouse and woodcock and wanted to purchase them (Danny Moore, DVM was later to become the owner of OH Fortune, the mother of Quest).

The trip was not without its challenges. Loaded with guns, my bird dog Duke, and plenty of food, we squeezed into my new four wheel drive Subaru station wagon and headed north. We left under sunny skies on the late afternoon of December twenty-third and spent the night somewhere in Virginia. We woke to gray clouds and cold temps the next morning, but were two young guys who gave weather no thought. I attempted to call George and Kay but was not able to reach them. Danny had wanted to tour Luray Caverns, and by mid-morning when we left the caverns it had started to rain. I gave George and Kay a call to see if we could come by later that evening. It never occurred to us to plan a visit ahead of time. Kay answered the phone this time and I told her who I was and that we were hoping to stop by to purchase the pair of books. She welcomed us with a "Yes, please" and was very gracious in offering us an invitation to visit. She informed me they did have the books and reminded me that we were still several hours away. I was apprehensive because we would be arriving on Christmas Eve and did not know

if they had Christmas celebrations planned. We stopped for gas before hitting the interstate and I noticed that ice was beginning to form on the outside mirror. Upon reaching the interstate we saw flares burning indicating icy roads. It was slow going due to the weather and neither Danny nor I knew the directions to Old Hemlock. We made several calls along the way to let them know where we were, and each phone call required getting off the interstate and finding a pay phone.

When we finally arrived at Bruceton Mills and exited off the interstate we couldn't find Old Hemlock based on the directions Kay had given us. There was something about "get off the interstate, turn right, and then turn right again and we live on the other side of the interstate" that became confusing for us. Couple that with the weather, that had improved to rain, and the early darkness at that time of year and we were lost. Embarrassed, I made one more call and now knowing our location off the interstate George was able to direct us to Old Hemlock. As we pulled up the lane we felt like we were going back in time. The small lamp post light was on at the end of the walk and I distinctly remember George coming down the steps under the hemlocks and greeting us. After we exchanged pleasantries we walked up to the house and as we entered the sitting room Briar came up to my buddy Danny, stood on his hind legs, put a paw on each shoulder, and looked him eye to eye. Two young boys from North Carolina were captivated. We were awed that people as famous as George Bird Evans and his wife would welcome us into their home on Christmas Eve.

I wish I could remember the time we arrived and how long we stayed but time passed way too quickly as we sat and talked about grouse hunting and bird dogs and guns. I remember George asking about our bird numbers in North Carolina and I'm sure we gave a higher flush rate than was accurate. During our talk George told us about Briar's sickness and his recent chemotherapy treatments. It was getting late and time moving swiftly when someone must have brought up the subject of books. George got up and went to the long room to inscribe my books and as he was doing so Kay mentioned that the Nash Buckingham book was also available. Of course I asked for it also. After settling up for the books we thanked them for the visit and their time. George then got his coat to walk us out to the car. He wanted to see my English setter Duke, who was from field trial stock. I will always remember the sight before me when George opened the door to go out. The ground was white and snowflakes the size of goose feathers were falling. I am sure that my feet never touched the ground as we made our way to the car. Here it was, Christmas Eve at Old Hemlock, and I was there watching it snow and talking to George Bird Evans. It was magical.

*Continued next page...*

Everything was white and the snow was falling rapidly. George insisted upon walking down and meeting Duke. We let Duke out for a few minutes and George blessed him with petting. We said our goodbyes and headed out.

As we left I asked Danny to drive because I was anxious to read what George had written in my books. Each book was inscribed with "For Tom Bowman and Duke, Christmas Eve 1978, George Bird Evans". There was also a short inscription taken from each book. As one would expect, I cherish all my GBE books but these three received on the evening of Christmas Eve, 1978 at Old Hemlock hold a special sentiment.

We made our way out the drive with no place to stay and no reservations anywhere. The confidence of youth. I am not sure which way we went other than north on a country road. We did not drive far as snow was coming down furiously.

We managed to find a small country school, pulled into the parking lot, ate from our stockpile of food, found our sleeping bags, and slept sitting up in that small Subaru. We woke up on Christmas morning still high from our visit to Old Hemlock with well over a foot of freshly fallen snow. Now that's a Christmas to remember.



*"The child tells you what he got for Christmas, the mature man tells you how he spent the day; the immature hunter tells you how many birds he shot, the mature gunner tells of the experience."*

# Quality

Hall Carter

In his first sentence of the chapter “To Kill a Grouse” on page 199 of *An Affair with Grouse*, George wrote that “Quality grouse shooting cannot be evaluated by numbers any more than diamonds can be measured by the pound.” At first glance, the statement seems true enough, and is easy to move past quickly, but it is apparent that there is a lot wrapped up in that sentence. Such a sentence is the essence of George, and of Kay too, as they both likely put much thought into those eighteen words.

The specific definition of quality grouse shooting must be defined by each person, as each will have his or her own standards. When it comes to birds and dogs and guns, many can agree on broad issues, but there will never be consensus on the details, as the matters are simply too personal. Further complicating such a definition is the fact that one’s standards of quality will change over time with experience. However, no matter what constitutes one’s individual definition, it cannot be evaluated solely by numbers. If numbers are the key element in the evaluation, then it is likely not quality he or she seeks.

I continue to enjoy grouse hunting in Virginia even though numbers can sometimes be disappointing, but even if it gets worse before it gets better, we will never stop looking for grouse. George expressed the sentiment very well of grouse hunters searching for sparse, seemingly isolated populations of grouse when he wrote “And yet, in these days of more hunters and fewer grouse, I find my experience of each shot becoming increasingly rich because it is rare, feeling the pleasure more exquisitely for the difficulty of finding birds and getting fewer shots.” (“To Kill a Grouse”, *An Affair with Grouse*, pg. 208) Fortunately, I cannot relate to the part about more hunters. It is this type of mindset George describes that allows some hunters to continue, and to search even harder when others have deemed it not worthwhile.

As I relive some of our hunts from recent years, one particular place in time stands out. Old Hemlock Stonewall had the lead role, and this situation reached such memorable status in my mind because it attained the quality we strive for. The particular sequence of events I am thinking about occurred in October of 2012 in Michigan. In hindsight, this particular hunt is highlighted because it is representative of the type of grouse hunting I am used to - well defined relatively small coverts with grouse that are almost always encountered as single birds - and it occurred in the midst of several days of grouse hunting I am not used to, days that revealed plenty of cover and plenty of grouse.

My dad and I had driven down a logging road approximately a mile off the main two-track road looking for an aspen cut I located on the map. When we arrived at the end of the logging road, we found the cut to be younger than what we were looking for. If that type of cover occurred in Virginia it would hold grouse, but our grouse are always in the “rankest” stuff, as Kenny Grandstaff used to say. Michigan grouse didn’t care for the thickest cover around like our birds at home do, and we had no problem with that.

On the way back down the logging road to get back to the main road, we noticed a small triangular shaped parcel of older aspen with a shrubby understory adjacent to the road and bordered by hemlocks on the far side. The aspen section was approximately seventy five yards wide and two hundred yards long. By Upper Peninsula standards, it was a very tiny covert. As we drove by, we debated whether or not such a small piece of real estate was worth hunting when we had huge tracts of land to get acquainted with all around us. We came very close to dismissing this small section of cover, but we decided to pull over and try it.

It was Stonewall’s turn to hunt. After contracting Lyme disease the previous spring, we were unsure if he would be able to join us on our first Michigan trip. However, the standard doxycycline treatment erased any signs of the disease, and he performed well all week. Stonewall immediately became interested in this sliver of real estate from the moment he got out of the truck. He began trailing scent that led him towards the corner of the covert where aspens met hemlocks. It is generally accepted that trailing foot scent should be discouraged, but Stonewall knows what he is doing, and if he can use foot scent to unravel the mystery he will, and he had everything figured out this time. After several minutes, he found the grouse in the corner of the covert and pointed with his head stretched out. As I walked past Stonewall, I knew the grouse was well in front due to his raised head, and the grouse flushed under the hemlocks thirty feet out. Its flight stayed low, but there was enough room under the bottom branches for a shot, and our luck in Michigan continued.

That small covert produced one point and one flush on one grouse, but in reflecting on that first week in Michigan, of all the grouse we saw and all the seemingly endless expanses of cover we hunted, I remember that tiny covert and that single grouse just as vividly as the first covey of five grouse we encountered. When facing a difficult day in Virginia, it is good to have experiences like that in my mind, and George and Kay’s words etched in my memory, because I know that one grouse can provide all the quality grouse shooting I need.



*“The difference between mere killing and a glorious sport is the manner in which you do it – over thrilling dogs, in magnificent country and with a near-reverence for the game.”*

George Bird Evans The Upland Shooting Life 1964



*This article is directed to all those who have yet to attend an Old Hemlock Reunion, particularly the newer owners of the recent litters. The old timers know all this stuff already, but we are concerned that recently the turnout of newer owners has been much less than we would like. Hopefully reaching out in this way will encourage you to join us.*

*Editor*

## *Old Hemlock Reunion*

Bruce Buckley

When the Old Hemlock Reunion convenes at Hunting Hills on March 12 - 14 2015, it will be the sixteenth. That is a long time for anything to last that is neither part of nor sponsored by any formal organization. The first Reunion was a spontaneous gathering of very different people united by a common interest. It remains so today, and we have all become friends in the process. Most of the original participants are still coming, and new faces are welcomed as more puppies and their folks join the Old Hemlock family.

The first Reunion was held in 1999, and that begs the question: Why hold a reunion at all? There is no simple answer.

George Bird Evans died in May of 1998 at the age of ninety-one, having hunted the last day of the past season with his beloved Kay and OH Manton.

While it is not at all clear that George would have had any interest in such a gathering while he lived, his loss created an enormous vacuum that could not be fully understood at the time. George was, with Kay, the creator and linchpin of everything we call Old Hemlock. It would be hard to exaggerate what a dominant influence he was in the lives of those who knew him, and even some who had only read his books and articles, but responded to their essence.

It is important to remember that there was at that time no "group", no gatherings, and no real reference to the Old Hemlock family that you hear so often now. With some exceptions, Old Hemlock setter owners were widely scattered and tended to know George and Kay, but not each other.

That summer of 1998 each of us wondered, what now? What will become of all this? Fortunately George had made wise provisions about many things, including passing the torch of the Old Hemlock line to Roger Brown thereby ensuring its protection and future. But what of the myriad intangibles of the Old Hemlock tradition with its lodestone lost and no possible successor?

That fall of 1998, Bob Rose (OH Sirius) was hunting with Kenny Grandstaff (OH Orion) who had traveled to Vermont from Virginia. Bob doesn't remember exactly how it came about, but during that time he hatched the idea of having a gathering of the Old Hemlock clan. Initially the purpose was to get the famous Catlett Ice Storm Litter - eleven puppies who would be a year old come January - and as many of the

other dogs and people as possible together someplace so we could meet and run and compare notes. Bob shopped the idea around with the Catletts and Roger among others to see how much interest there would be. There was plenty, so consciously or not, a major step was about to be taken to fill the vacuum and perhaps ease the sense of loss following George's passing.

Plenty of good ideas come along, and most die aborning for lack of focus and leadership. Not this one. Encouraged by the responses of those he consulted, and having taken the decision to hold the event as close to Bruceton Mills and Old Hemlock as possible, Bob began calling every preserve he could locate within a reasonable radius. That process led him to Roy Sisler and Hunting Hills. Bob was not aware then that Roy had known George and Kay well, and that they had come there often to train their dogs. As Bob tells it, Roy filled him in on that right away and said he'd be glad to host the outing.

Some things are meant to happen. Our long association with the Sisler family and their Hunting Hills has been an unalloyed pleasure and success. Regardless of how you feel about preserve gunning, Hunting Hills is a remarkable place, beautifully run by wonderful people, and a perfect place to train young dogs in controlled conditions. It is a substantial acreage with four diverse main hunting courses and room for more. They offer chukar and pheasant placed as you like in very nice cover. Roy and son Raz are particular about their birds, which are strong flyers even late in the season. The well-established switchgrass lanes are still knee deep standing cover in March.

Their guides are exceptional. Each is an experienced dog trainer, ready to help you but only if you want them to. We met them all in 1999. The same ones are still there and have become valued friends.

The lodge is roomy and friendly and there is always coffee and conversation. Lunch and dinner are served there each day of the event, all watched over by Sally Sisler. Roy has an impressive collection of hunting and fishing memorabilia displayed throughout, and his old friend Bob Faddis, a knowledgeable collector, usually shows up with an astonishing collection of very high condition Parkers to drool on and talk about.

*Continued next page...*

We have the place to ourselves, the days are unstructured, and we do just what we came for: visit with old friends and new, shoot birds and clays, and most importantly work our own dogs and walk out with each other to see our friends' dogs in action. A special thrill, and an important one, is a chance to see the new puppies. Raz Sisler is particularly adept at introducing young pups to birds. It's an important moment in their lives that must be handled right, and it's a real highlight when there are young puppies in attendance.

The one serious purpose the Reunion has is that it is the best and sometimes the only opportunity Roger has to see many of the Old Hemlock setters and to watch them run. It is critical to his decision making process for the breeding program that he has this opportunity to evaluate his possibilities.

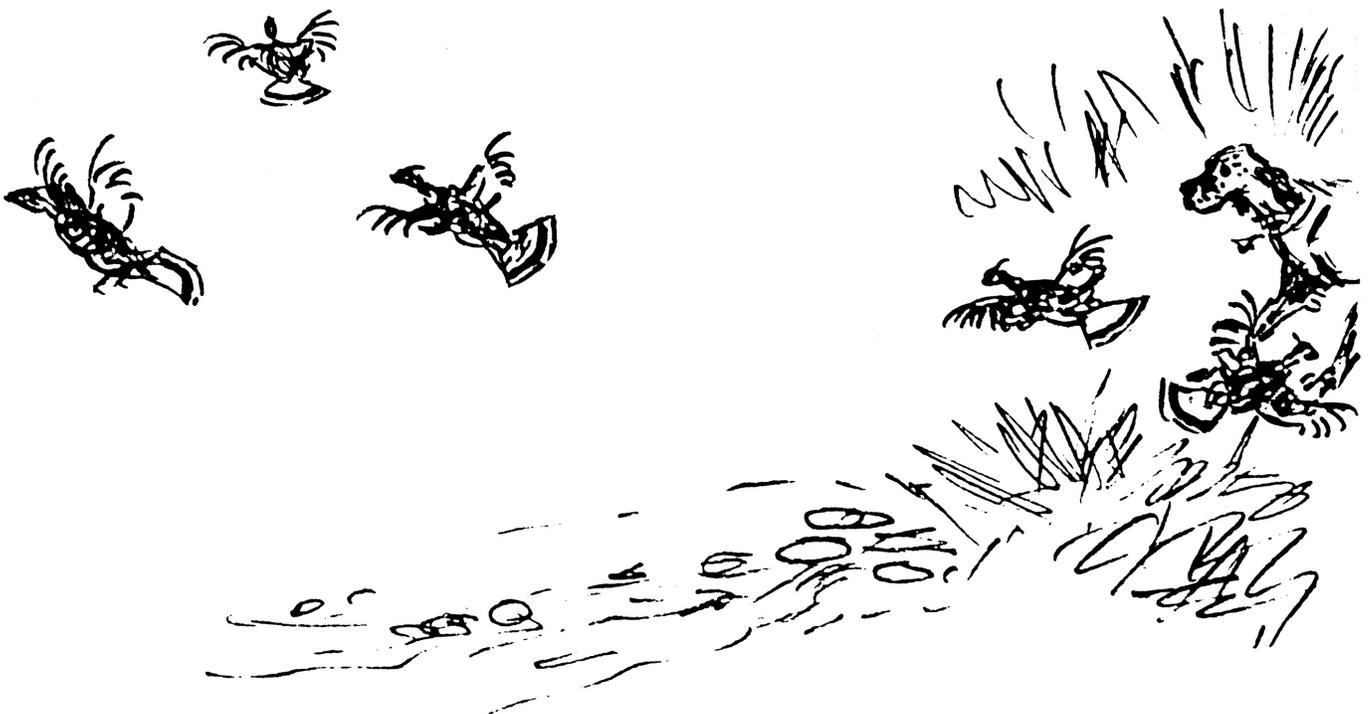
If you haven't come yet you should. It is a fine three days filled with Old Hemlock setters, birds, good people, and good guns. It is an unusual opportunity to get in the field and train your dogs, on your own if you wish or with very high quality help at your elbow if you want it. There is nothing competitive about the Reunion if there are any concerns on that score, and there are no expectations of how your dogs will perform. Do what we do: turn 'em loose and see what happens.

Arrangement details will be sent out to everyone well in advance, but save those March dates now.

We want to meet you and your setters, and bring your puppies.



*"A brash young shooting guest informed me over her second drink that preserve shooting was as artificial as patronizing a brothel. She hadn't shot on a preserve, and I have never visited a brothel so neither of us were too well qualified to discuss it."*



ALMOST TOO MANY!

WMS



On Benny Keen

# After the Reunion

Jim Recktenwald

## Travels

Barb and I headed south after the Reunion to Roanoke, Virginia to see my brother's family. My nephews are already six feet tall, in their first years of high school, and had never shot a gun until I arrived. We had no clay targets but lots of plastic milk jugs that we could fill with water. We took them out to a farm that we knew in the area and set up the milk jugs for an introduction to gun safety and getting acquainted with a shotgun. The gun safety part lasted most of the afternoon as gentle reminders needed to be given, but after an hour they were comfortable with the feel of the shotgun and how the gun will shoot where you point it. Hopefully this fall we will be able to have them come up and try hunting a little.

After leaving Roanoke we stopped in Knoxville at the headquarters of SportDog, the makers of TEK, their GPS system. My four year old collar had stopped working at the Reunion and I asked them to help me fix it. I offered to pay, but they just took both collars and the control. After a couple weeks I received them back with no charge. One collar was completely replaced and the other cleaned up to new condition. I have to give them an endorsement: they are the "Best" when it comes to customer service and eliminating issues.

## Competition

This year's US Pheasant Open was held the last weekend in March. I entered Bécasse and Patches McNab in the two pointing dog/two hunter open category. This category included professionals and amateurs. For a partner I asked Terry Correl, General Manager of the Minnesota Horse and Hunt Club, who had also turned sixty this the past year. The birds were placed across a six acre field surrounded by water. The lakes were still frozen and there was snow on the ground. The event is timed and points are awarded for holding point, backing, retrieving to hand, and speed. Points are deducted for more than one shot at a bird.

Bird 1: Bécasse demonstrated her experience and found the gate bird within seconds of the start. Quickly we moved McNab into position for a back which she did willingly. Upon Terry's shot, McNab retrieved the bird to hand. Bird 2: Bécasse then quartered towards the far left of the field and locked up with a high head and tail on a bird fifteen yards out. Again we moved McNab in to back, and upon a quick shot from Terry, McNab brought the bird back to hand. Birds 3 & 4: Both dogs went on point. We made a decision to take each bird and start with Bécasse's bird. Bécasse was a good ten yards from the bird. Terry quickly shot as the bird got up, and with McNab still pointing her bird, Bécasse raced to get the shot bird and when bringing her trophy to me,

promptly dropped it a yard from me. Ugghh. No points for a retrieve. Then I flushed McNab's bird which was trying to sneak away. Bécasse backed perfectly, but then she decided she would try to get the bird and I had to whoa her and let McNab retrieve the bird to hand. Birds 5 & 6: The next two birds were classic McNab. She raced into the wind and scented the bird, locked up with head cocked towards the bird, right foot cocked and tail straight out frozen in time. She retrieved both birds and we finished in 10 minutes, 34 seconds. We placed tenth out of thirty entries and would have been in the top three if we had one more retrieve to hand and an extra backing. It was a great fun!

## Passion, Avocation and Vocation.

In June I switched divisions in Cargill and I am now part of the meat group. We had bought a pet chew and treat business and the president of the division asked me to come over and help lead the sales effort. I could not be happier working on products for dogs. Traveling too much but happy. Tomorrow we pitch one of the big boys of mass merchandising, so I will see what we have learned.

## Training

We continue to run the dogs a couple times a week. I also trained for another five mile swim while spending three days traveling each week for the new job. The week before the swim we had a big convention in Las Vegas for the major retailers. I was up at four every morning to swim in Henderson, Nevada at an Olympic training pool. The race was yesterday and I finished and survived another swim, but I am starting to realize that I can't travel, train, and try to swim five miles. It has nothing to do with age. I think I will stick to one to two mile swims and just enjoy the lakes we have in Minnesota. A little sleep is nice.

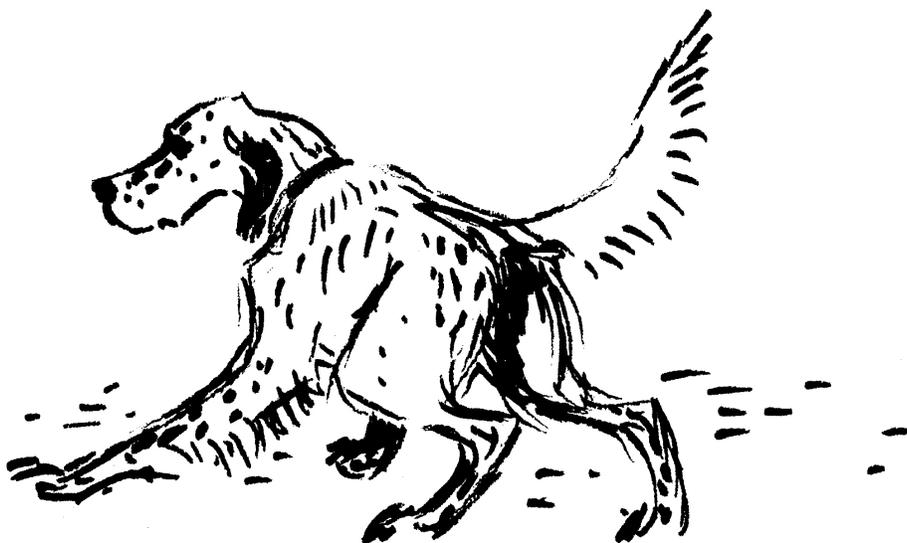
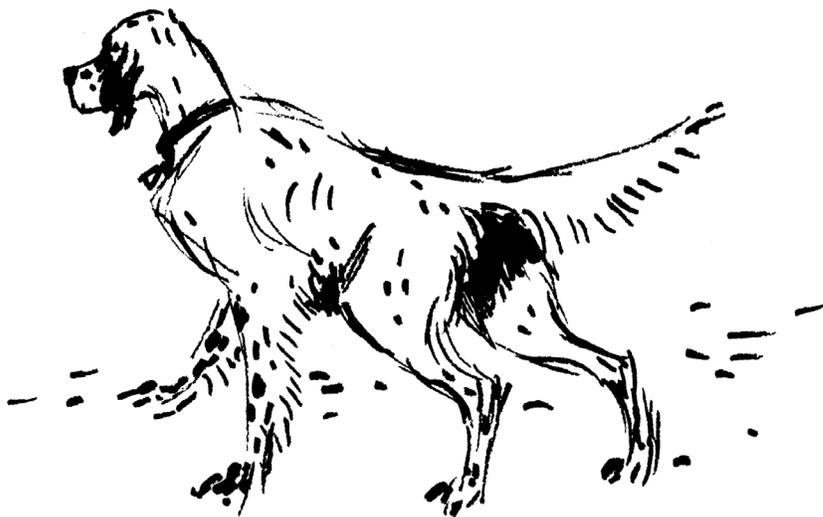
## The Future

Barb and I hope Patches McNab goes into heat this fall and we make our way down to North Carolina to see the Bowmans. I love their dog (OH Boswell) and just hope everything goes well.



*"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



# *Essence and Flavor*

LeJay Graffious

*“Drawing a delineating finger up the bridge of his nose, between his eyes and over that sensitive skull and occipital, I feel Quest’s understanding, share his uncertainties, know his love, give him mine. I press my forehead against his face and go deep inside him, as I have done with all by dogs from the time they were puppies until the day I have buried them.*

*The Hindu has a word, rasa, that means “essence, flavor,” used to convey that quality in music and poetry that makes it fine. I can think of no better way to express the character of the relation between a young bird dog and his gunner. “*

George Bird Evans [A Dog, A Gun, and Time Enough](#) 1987

This book has always had special meaning to me. When George was writing these words, our relationship was becoming closer. We had many conversations during the writing process about his thoughts on sections of the book. I was naive. I had read his words and had observed his relation with his setters, but I could not empathize. I had never experienced a close relationship with a dog. The closest I came was with a black cocker spaniel, Petey, when I was ten years of age. This was short lived. I witnessed George and Kay interact with Briar, Belton, Quest, and Manton in their home, on walks, and in the field training on quail. I had a cognitive understanding but not an affective knowledge. Now after six years of living with an Old Hemlock setter, I feel the rasa. Now as I read George’s words above, I can feel my finger move down the soft bridge of Willow’s nose. I can feel her occiput and her warmth. And when I hear of Old Hemlock Family member mourning a loss, my heart sinks in my chest under the weight of future’s sad inevitability.

Living at Old Hemlock, I felt a need to have a legacy setter always tread these treasured soils. Now I cannot imagine living without a setter. Her desire to hunt and run boils from her genetic past. This summer we are working to produce a video to share the passion of Old Hemlock setters. I have pored over a thousand archived photos of George and Kay’s setters which include hundreds of images shared by family members. Now I can see beyond the image to the rasa between person and setter. How do you project that feeling in pixels on a screen? Our video will show the history of development of the Old Hemlock setter, the present interaction of setter and owner in the field, and Roger’s view of the future. Those who have experienced the “essence and flavor” of a setter’s companionship, whether Old Hemlock or not, will feel the spirit with which George imbued his line.

In addition to the video, we have had many activities at Old Hemlock this summer. The Foundation’s mission is to promote and preserve the legacy of the George and Kay. Our AmeriCorps volunteer’s service is coming to an end. Eliza Newland has been a very valuable asset to us. She has a master’s degree in public history. She has applied her studies to complete the National Register Nomination application to get historic designation for Old Hemlock. She will defend

the nomination on September 25th in Charleston before the state’s committee. If she is successful, they will submit it for federal review. I feel very confident that her work will be successful. In addition to this, she has developed a docent guide to the Evans’ house. She was also key in developing a summer program called “Curious Kids.” She and a West Virginia University wildlife student developed a series of story time and nature activities open to children ages four to eight. Many of you know the work she has put into the Oral History Project to preserve memories of George and Kay for future use. We are posting snippets on our Old Hemlock Facebook page. She has been wonderful to have in our home, and work toward serving the mission of the Foundation. We wish her well in her new position as Assistant Curator at the Watts Museum at West Virginia University.

Old Hemlock continues to attract visitors to our public open houses and private tours. I am fortunate to be able to share the legacy of Old Hemlock with new enthusiasts and longtime fanciers. We enjoy meeting readers, hearing their stories of how they have been moved by George’s words, and sharing their love of setters.

This summer we have put much energy into landscaping around the residences. We focus on native species and an organic natural look. I want to thank Tom Bowman for his support in finding sources of native plants and advice on their care. Another project we look forward to completing in the near future will be a new website design to include a grounds map with trails and points of interest on Old Hemlock. Also, we will be welcoming a new AmeriCorps volunteer to assist in preserving and promoting the rasa of Old Hemlock.

In this month’s issue of “Pointing Dog Journal”, editor Steve Smith will be reprinting a selection from [The Upland Shooting Life](#) on woodcock. He believes George’s words promoting the “quality of the quest” need to be shared with the younger generation of readers. This quality manifests itself in the bonds between the hunter and his setter, his gun, and the natural world. Such appreciation and respect are the “essence and flavor” of George’s philosophy to be “Worthy of Your Game.”

## From the Old Hemlock Oral History

*As a young Investment Advisor, Jason Thompson “cold called” Kay and spoke with her about some investment ideas. Kay used some of those ideas with the Evans’ current advisor in Uniontown, but eventually Jason became their Investment Advisor. He oversaw the transition of their assets into a trust and then into the current Old Hemlock Foundation. He said of meeting with George and Kay, “We would spend probably a quarter to a third of our time talking investments and the rest of our time was spent learning about them as people, which was nice.” Eliza interviewed Jason at the Old Hemlock Reunion and wanted to share some of his interesting stories with the Old Hemlock Family.*

*Jason’s transcript is from his perspective of the visits to Old Hemlock. Although the essence is preserved, there may be inconsistencies in the facts.*

*LeJay Graffious*

Jason:

“[Kay] decided that she really, really would like to own General Electric. And we ended up owning several shares of it; the reason why she liked General Electric so much was not because of its dividend or growth prospects but because of its ticker symbol “GE”. This being the initials of George Evans! So she thought; of course it had to be a good investment, too. They were just wonderful to work with.

When George passed, my biggest fear for Kay was that she would give up on life. I have seen that happen so many times with couples who have been together as long as they were. But Kay was very strong and she told me that, “I cannot give up. George wouldn’t want me to do that. I have to keep going and do something with my life because that’s what George would want.”

Kay could be pretty funny; when buying bonds she would always want to buy longer maturities because they usually paid a higher interest rate. I would warn her that the longer the maturity date the more interest rate risk she would be taking. Her response was always “No, that’s okay; I’m planning for my retirement.” Kay was in her eighties when we had these conversations.

*“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

George was a very private person and George may not have envisioned Old Hemlock being necessarily what it is today: a place where people come to see his legacy. He did not necessarily want to be the center of attention and have a museum about him. But, at the same time, I’m glad that Old Hemlock has become what you see today because George and Kay were special people. I think people can better get to know what they stood for and how they lived their lives and can be an inspiration for others. Because they took risks and did what they wanted to do with their lives. It seems like many people are not brave enough to do that today.

One of the funniest stories about Old Hemlock was actually shared with me by LeJay.

“I was visiting with Kay after George had passed away” LeJay said, “You see this table? George was having a problem with it. The cats were jumping up on the table and it is a drop leaf table. So, when the cats jumped up on it, the leaf would drop and everything on the table would fall on the floor. So, George asked me if I could fix it. And I said, yes I think I can fix it. So, I took it home to my shop and drilled a hole in it and put a dowel rod that stuck out, so when the leaf fell it couldn’t drop all the way. So, I took it back to George and we put it back in place and then George said, “This table has a pretty interesting story behind it. This table actually belonged to Stonewall Jackson. And he traveled with this table during the Civil War and used it in his tent.” And LeJay said, “All I could think was ‘Holy shit! I just drilled a hole in Stonewall Jackson’s table!”



# Heaven Sent

Larry Catlett

I wrote of our first Old Hemlock setter, OH Heaven Scent, in the February 2013 issue of this newsletter. Our “growing up” as bird hunters together was one of the most initially frustrating and ultimately rewarding times of my bird hunting life. A little of what follows is repeated from that writing, but I have included excerpts from our letters from George and Kay that bring the events of getting my first Old Hemlock into clear focus again after all these years. The letters are typical of George and Kay, and will strike familiar chords in the “Old Timers” and hopefully be of interest to the more recent additions to the family as well.

Getting OH Heaven Scent to Cateslot, our home in Maine, was a process. I had wanted an Old Hemlock (and okay, a Purdey) since when in medical school in the seventies, I had found and become a convert to George’s book The Upland Shooting Life in a bargain basement at a local Atlanta mall. Years later, after summoning the courage to initially contact the Evans in the mid-eighties, we wrote to George and Kay frequently when Feathers, a Ken Alexander Ryman, was with us. I was hoping to have a brace of dogs with one being an Old Hemlock setter. On February 4, 1987 in one of her letters, Kay responded: “I’ve wanted so long to answer your nice letters of last fall. They made me want to say more than the mere cards with which we had to answer most correspondence. You asked if we are still breeding our Old Hemlocks. Quest has sired two litters we’re very proud of - November’85 and July’86. We always plan to have one litter each year: with 10th generation of our Old Hemlock line it would be tragic to lose it. George is at present writing a piece for “Sporting Classics” on breeding a line of bird dogs. George’s “My Purdey” (Sporting Classics Sept-Oct ‘86) took top rating for readership, so they are eager for GBE on bird dogs.”

No pups in sight then, nor were there on February 7, 1988 when a card was delivered announcing the arrival of our copy of A Dog, A Gun, and Time Enough with a side bar from Kay: “Still no pups started. Would you like to call in 6-8 weeks to ask if OH (?) is expecting?”

Somewhere here in this time frame we did receive an announcement of a possible available puppy, but SHE laid it aside for reasons known only to herself to this day. By the time SHE fessed up, it was too late - the offered puppy was gone.

But I persisted, and finally on April 2, 1989 Kay wrote: “Our Quest has sired another litter, born on 3/16, an optimum time of year but only 4 puppies. It may be our only litter this year. Do you want to call us to talk about them? We’ll look forward to hearing from you. Don’t hesitate to call late in the evening; we consider midnight early to bed”.

I called right then and there!

On April 27, 1989 our official acceptance letter arrived. In it, Kay wrote: “Almost time for your Old Hemlock puppy - 6 weeks old today. And it is time now for you to talk to Peter Liakopoulos about these puppies out of his OH Tey by our OH Quest. His pride in the puppies and enthusiasm is great, and it is going to be a wrenching experience to let them go. The other female is going to Lebanon, PA (Denise and Tom Kotay), and we may be able to work something out to get your puppy that far east.”

Kay went on to say: “I think you know that getting an Old Hemlock puppy means being and remaining in touch with us. And Peter, who has put so much of himself and his family’s loving interest in these puppies will need to know about these youngsters of his. Yesterday a nice middle aged, middle west couple were here, eager for an Old Hemlock puppy; but we sense that they feel that anything can be bought and have no understanding that getting an Old Hemlock puppy is not a commercial transaction; they would be good with the puppy, but not keep in touch with us. We feel sure the two of you will share with us the pleasure of your puppy.”

(Author’s note: Into the early 90’s Kay remained disappointed with one recipient of a puppy from Scent’s eventual litter with Thornapple (described below) who never bothered to let us know how the pup had fared, a circumstance that is becoming more prevalent in my experience. Kay lamented in one early nineties letter wondering “if the pup will ever be kissed again?”)

We did talk to Peter who told us Scent was his family favorite. She had been called Beth while in their care. A letter to us both from Peter dated June 14, 1989 starts out: “Kay Evans told me that Vicky was a delightful person to speak with and I must admit she was correct, and you hunt too! My! MY!” He continued: “Sent (sic) is smart as a whip, bold and a little head strong, but then all creatures human and otherwise that are smart and bold are a bit headstrong. It just

goes with the territory. I think as years go by Sent (sic) will develop into a fine hunting as well as personal companion for you both. Just like some people or fine wine, it takes some years and some gray here and there to make us a bit wiser and a bit smoother.” Prophetic words from a man who knew his dogs, and exactly the course Scent followed.

We did work something out with the Kotays and Old Hemlock Heaven Scent went to Pennsylvania with them. Before we could get down to pick her up, my father died unexpectedly and we were delayed in picking up our baby. The Kotays were gracious enough to hold her until Vicky and her Grandmother could make the trip to pick her up and bring her home, where today she rests just behind the Hemlock Garden with her daughter OH Bittasweet (“Sweetie”), her son OH Sirius, her granddaughters OH Dolly Sods and OH Belle, and Feathers.

Scent gave us our second generation of Old Hemlocks at age four, and this litter was the first OH litter to be whelped since Tey’s litter in March, 1989. She had been bred in New York to Galen Wilkins’ OH Thornapple, chosen by George and Kay. It was one of those last minute right before we were to leave “hook ups”, the only one we had, that brought us seven puppies on Mothers Day rather than the five predicted by ultrasound, one appearing twelve hours after what we thought was the last born. Six lived and five left us: Slate,

Sirius, Time, Skeet, and “Spot”, the cause of Kay’s lamentations. The puppy we kept, second generation “Sweetie”, gave us third generation Dolly and Belle, members of the infamous ’98 Ice Storm Litter, the last litter born in George’s lifetime. Belle, who along with Dolly Sods, was featured in a “Shooting Sportsman” article, “A Gathering of the Clan” which chronicled the first Old Hemlock Reunion, gave us fourth generation Whisper. Whisper has given us fifth generation She, whom we hope to breed again soon.

After two spectacular years on grouse and woodcock, OH Scent died much too young at age eight. It was one of the most painful things I ever experienced. She was sterling, no golden, on grouse her last two years. She was the start of our five generations of Old Hemlocks to date, and the beginning of a chain of so many wonderful memories. Looking back through our letters from George and Kay takes me right back to those early glorious days of dogs, guns, and time enough. Would that we could linger there forever.



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

# *The Blessing of Woodland Breeze*

Kandice Tuttle

After we lost Old Hemlock Rangeley we were anxious to bring a new puppy to the Tuttle household. We contacted Roger to be placed on the "Puppy List". Hope sprang with the possible mating of OH She and Bob Rose's Fionn, but it was not to be. Sadly, She's sole pup was stillborn. When OH Sass was successfully bred to OH Casey, we learned a trip to the St. Louis area was in our future. With puppy pickup day landing the end of March, we planned our road trip with OH Sage to pick up our new charge. For dear Sage, road trips usually end with lots of birds, but he was to be greatly disappointed. Not only did he not get birds, but a miniature version of himself was added to our return trip. While Old Hemlock Breeze was a trooper of a traveler during the day, he howled all night the first night away from home. We kept waiting for a call from the front desk asking us to leave. Sage refused to make eye contact with the new pup and would jump on the hotel bed to get away from him. Sage forgot how he tormented his father, Rangeley, when he first joined our family.

We forgot how much work was involved with a new puppy and even though Roger shared some prep tips, as soon as we got home we knew our house was not prepared for the Wild Child. Breeze is bold, smart, fearless, and as Steve Hitsman said, has two speeds, "warp and coma".

When we left Old Hemlock West (Steve Hitsman's) we started our trip back to Maine via Old Hemlock. It was our plan to make Breeze's first road trip a pilgrimage back to his roots. The film crew that is chronicling GBE's dogs, writings, and art learned of our planned stop and wanted to have a chance to film Breeze as the next generation Old Hemlock, and we looked forward to the opportunity for Breeze's first foray away from Mom to include the house and grounds of his heritage. It was an incredibly rewarding experience.

LeJay and Helen Ann graciously offered us accommodation at Old Hemlock in spite of the fact that they had been on a whirlwind road trip themselves, traveling to and from Florida and then up to Columbus Ohio to try to breed OH Willow to OH Casey.

On our arrival at Old Hemlock, Sage and Black Willow were very smitten with each other but the romance of the star-crossed lovers was not to be, as Willow was promised to another. Sage was banished to the crate.

Any trip to Old Hemlock is special, but to see a new pup run the woods and hills where all of George and Kay's dogs did, along with so many others of the OH family that have taken advantage of this opportunity, was truly magical. Breeze walked the stone steps down to the Spring House and drank from the trough; we climbed the hill in back to Ruff's grave (George and Kay's first registered Old Hemlock) for a family portrait; and Breeze ran with his new family members, Willow, Carmel, and Sage, in the snow between Helen Ann and LeJay's and Old Hemlock. It reminded me of one of George's sketches.

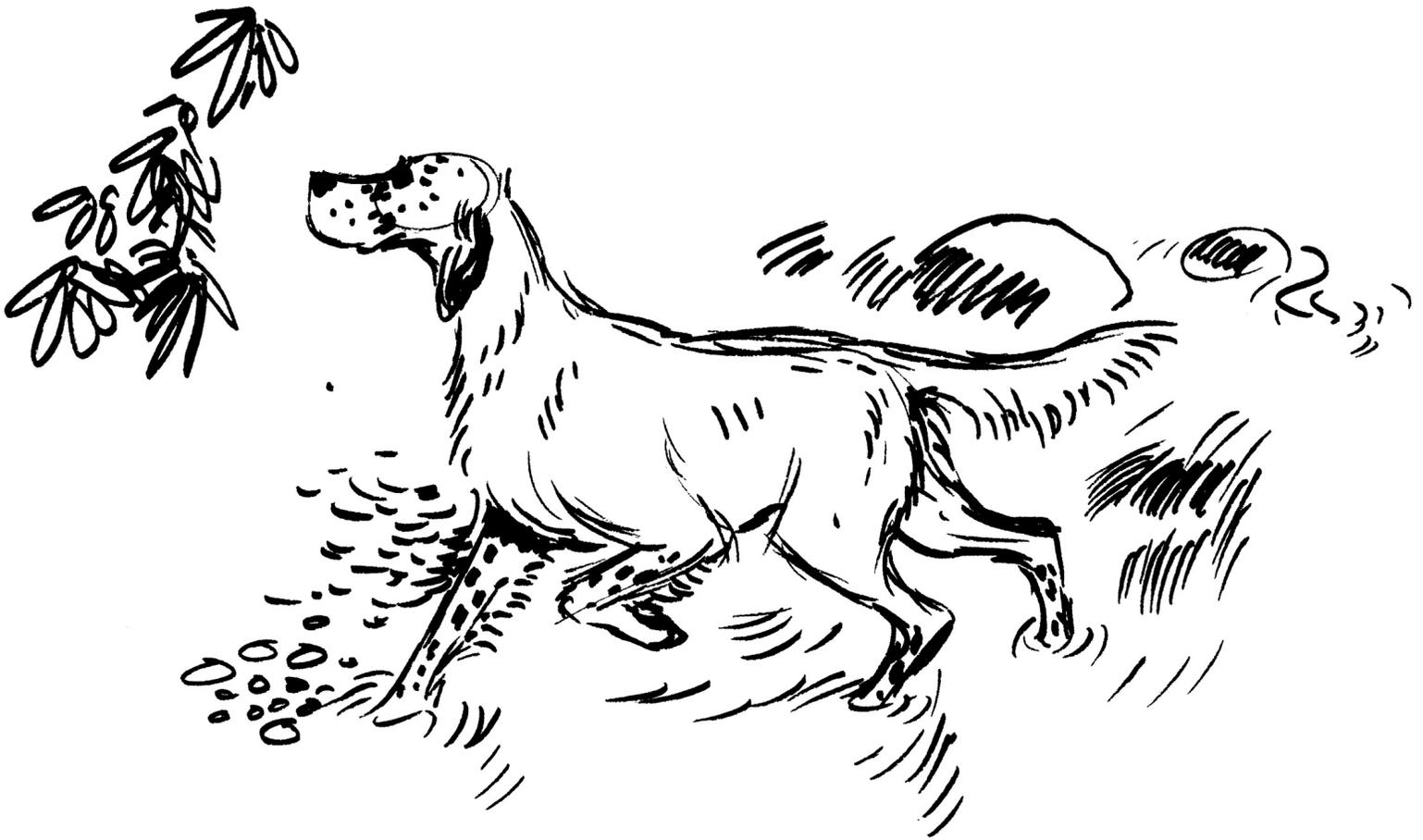
Back inside, pictures were taken on the bench below the gallery of Old Hemlock beauties, with the bust George carved, and in front of the fireplaces. I know we are not the first to take advantage of this treasure, but we cannot say enough how special this trip became. If you have not had the chance to attend a Reunion, or visit at Old Hemlock you are missing an amazing opportunity to share your love of these dogs with other likeminded folks. A definite must for your "bucket list".

Breeze is settling into life as a Maine dog and Sage has softened to his overtures. Bob is doing a fine job with Breeze's introduction to guns and birds and I think we may have a fun brace to work with this fall.



*"When you start out with a puppy, you are shaping a life, his and yours, which should be one. Like your gunning, your puppy will be what you make him by your attitude toward him, not as a tool to get birds but a bond between you that is the finest thing a human and a dog can know."*

George Bird Evans    A Dog, a Gun, and Time Enough    1987



*Yans*

# *A Legacy of Passion*

Eliza Newland, AmeriCorps Volunteer

My time as an AmeriCorps volunteer at Old Hemlock is almost up. When I started at Old Hemlock, I had two main goals: to place Old Hemlock on the National Register of Historic Places and to start the Old Hemlock oral history project. The National Register nomination is completed (we present to the State Historic Preservation Office's review board on September 25), and the Old Hemlock oral history project is off to a great start with 24 interviews transcribed and archived at Old Hemlock.

Our mission at the Old Hemlock Foundation is to preserve and promote the legacy of George Bird and Kay Harris Evans. The "legacy" of George and Kay means different things to different people. To some, it means long October days in the field. To others, it means a trip to see the lady slippers down by Little Sandy Creek in the spring. After a year of service, I have my own perception of George and Kay's legacy.

Part of that legacy was the deep love between two people. George and Kay enjoyed spending time together. They were inseparable. The love that they had for one another is beautiful, admirable, and inspirational. I think Jay Graffious said it well, "They were very complementary of one another. It was obvious that they knew each other inside and out... They meshed together almost into one person. It was never George. And it was never Kay. It was always George and Kay" (Jay Graffious, oral history interview, March 8, 2014).

While George and Kay tended to keep to themselves, they still had a wide and active social group. This group crossed many spectrums, but friends generally had shared interests that ranged from upland shooting to arts and literature to spending time outside. They had friends locally in Bruce-ton Mills and Preston County, friends in Morgantown, and friends more broadly across the entire United States.

The Old Hemlock setter line is another important part of George and Kay's legacy. We can thank George for the creation and growth of the Old Hemlock setter line (and we can thank Kay for being a devoted and patient partner throughout the process). These beautiful, compassionate dogs lit up George and Kay's life, and continue to light up ours today. "It's those soulful eyes," said Tom Bowman. "That head shake. They just had very attractive appearance. I guess, as any guy would say, you ought to date a pretty girl. As a bird hunter, you ought to hunt with a pretty dog" (Tom Bowman, oral history interview, March 8, 2014).

These pretty dogs brought the Evanses much joy, and encouraged George to write about his greatest passions: upland gunning and bird dogs. An important part of George's legacy, these books and articles are intended for a specific audience—others who share George's passions—but truly cross over to other genres. As one who has never been particularly interested in hunting, I've read and enjoyed many of George's upland game works. They speak to many of my interests: the outdoors, preservation, the importance of place, and the intangible concept of time. He had a poetic knack for expressing himself:

*"The years can do things good and bad for the shooting man. They can remove people from the land, rotting empty houses and turning old fields backward to regrowth that, during periods of transition, is a perfect setting for grouse and woodcock. 'Progress' doesn't like this happening to good saleable acres, but in New England and the Alleghenies with their sleepy version of Time, thousands of square miles remain in this suspended state, removed from man and his bright ideas"* (George Bird Evans Living with Gun Dogs pg. 133).

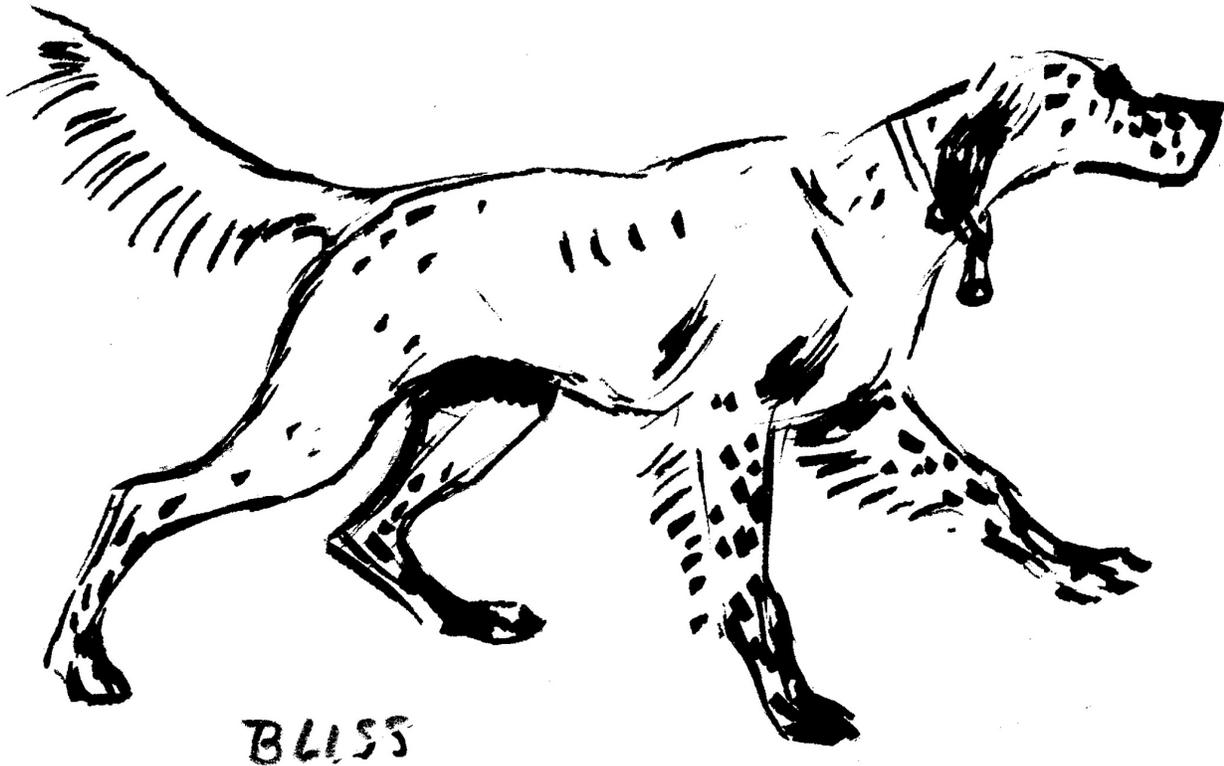
The Evanses sought to remain in this "suspended state." They preserved a beautiful log home and filled it with artifacts from their families. In their early days at Old Hemlock, George and Kay tapped maple trees for syrup, cooked on a camping stove, and had a garden in the side yard. After living in the modern, bustling city of New York, they searched out and found a lifestyle they wanted in the past. While their attempt at self-sufficiency deteriorated quickly, their passion for old homes and a simple lifestyle continued.

Most remarkably, the two individuals shared something that is hard to find these days: passion. They had passion for each other, for their dogs, for their work, and to live their lives as they truly desired. That passion often translated into optimism. As Bruce Buckley mentioned, "[Kay] said, 'One day, I decided that I was going to have a happy life and it was up to me to make it so.'" (Bruce Buckley, oral history interview, March 7, 2014).

We all have learned different things from the legacy of George and Kay Evans. Some individuals take away George's hunting philosophy, some their passionate love story, and others their love for their beautiful setters. The legacy of George and Kay has taught me many things, but most importantly their legacy has taught me to look further for my passions and to wake up every day with a headstrong determination to be a happy person.

It has been a year of professional and personal growth for me. I am so pleased to have had the opportunity to spend time working with such wonderful people in such a remarkably beautiful place. While I ultimately have George and Kay to thank for all of the knowledge and experience that I have obtained during the past year, I really need to thank LeJay

and Helen Ann Graffious. They welcomed me into their home and lives with open arms. They are some of the nicest, most genuine, and kindest people I know. I will leave this position with more than a great experience; I'll also leave with new friends.



*“It was another eon, a long ago faraway place where sunshine came through dappled. Those days in my gun diary are like the chaff in the corners of my game pocket mixed with peacocked back feathers conjuring old coverts. I lived the dream and the grouse were there, Heaven each time Indian Summer came, Paradise Lost each time it went.”*

George Bird Evans Grouse on the Mountain 1994

## Editor's Note

It has been a busy summer for everyone, and this issue of the Letter is a month late as a result. Hopefully it has proven worth the wait. It should not happen, and we do not have this luxury with the upcoming winter issue, as it must be in your hands well before the Reunion.

To put it plainly, I need better cooperation on getting submissions in hand in a much more timely fashion. The editorial and production processes are more involved and time consuming than I suspect many of you realize. This is not a full time project for any of us, but it can sure start to look like one when you push well beyond reasonable deadlines getting material in, effectively putting Toni and John and myself against the wall.

To make your Letter work, and excepting extenuating circumstances which we can deal with if necessary, please plan on having your material ready to send to me soon after the middle of July for the September issue and early January for the late February issue.

Okay, I'm down off the soapbox, with continuing thanks and appreciation for all who take the time and make the effort to share your Old Hemlock stories. We have a first time voice in this issue as well as our valued regulars, so how about you next time?

There is exciting puppy news. As you have read, we have at least the prospect of several litters in the near future.

Also we anticipate the imminent completion of a major Old Hemlock Foundation video project, "Old Hemlock Setters: The Legacy of George Bird Evans". The first of its three parts is a pictorial history of George and Kay with their setters. Then comes a section on the Old Hemlock setter today, featuring the footage shot by the folks from Flying Arrow

Productions who were at the last Reunion. Also there will be a discussion by Roger of the breeding program and his view of the future, set at Old Hemlock. Roger will also narrate the other sections.

The concept was born several years ago and has evolved from conversations between LeJay and author Craig Kulchak, who has been instrumental in doing the script and story board work so necessary to turn a good idea into reality. LeJay, Helen Ann, and Eliza Newland together found and evaluated over a thousand historic photographs as well as selections from Kay's years of movie films. Hall Carter has been instrumental in researching and contributing to the richness and accuracy of the final script.

I have seen a rough cut of the first section, and have no doubt this will be an important contribution to the Foundation's mission. LeJay tells me he has several more ideas for future videos.

Fall is in the air already and the setters know it. The best of seasons to everyone.

Bruce Buckley



*"The Mountain has been eighty-seven years of Time for me, aflame in October, burning down to gray November and the white ash of Winter, resurrecting in new May green and lush dark Summer. The Mountain has been and is my Life; I am of it and it is I. For so long as there are grouse on The Mountain, the Old Hemlock setters and Kay and I will exist in a personal eternity each time Indian Summer comes."*

George Bird Evans Grouse on the Mountain 1994

---

### *Old Hemlock Foundation Directors*

LeJay Graffious, Jeff Leach, Roger Brown, Hall Carter

*Past Director* Jeff Kauffman

*Editor* Bruce Buckley

*Graphics and Production* Toni McGranaghan

*Founder and Editor Emeritus* Mike McDonald





For more photos from the Old Hemlock Family Reunion 2014,

go to [oldhemlock.org/PhotoAlbum/OH\\_Reunion2014](http://oldhemlock.org/PhotoAlbum/OH_Reunion2014)

