

## An Affair with GBE

George's life without grouse is impossible to conceive, like picturing him on another continent in a different time. Wherever and whenever it might have been, George would have been doing something creative. In the Paleolithic age he would have drawn storytelling pictures on cave walls. He would have had a wife—I refuse to think of her as other than me—and he would have had dogs—he would have trained and bred the first bird dogs. And there would have been game birds—I just can't believe they wouldn't have been grouse.

Without grouse my life would be different, too. I have never shot at one, if not having a gun in my hands and pulling the trigger is not shooting, but I have participated emotionally up to that instant and afterward so that the glory, or the frustration, have been mine. If I did not hunt with them, I could not fully know George and our setters, and I would miss so much.

A man we've come to know through George's writing and through placing a puppy with him came to see us with that young setter and without his wife. He explained her apparent lack of interest by saying her father was not a shooting man. Young unmarried friends confide that they would like to find a girl as interested in grouse hunting as I am. There was no shotgun in my family home, and I had not heard of a grouse until I knew George. The first bird dog I laid my hand on was George's Speck—actually his father's but Speck, too, thought he was George's. No, boys, they don't come equipped with setters and Purdeys—not often.

Prerequisites I brought to George were love of dogs, and love of mountains—the Alleghenies that are deep in the souls of both of us. George was born under the western slopes, I was raised under the side that is red in the sunrise. Early in our life together we knew that we must live within those mountains.

Back then we made-do with the trees of Central Park, and gazed south at the Manhattan skyline and vowed that

those skyscrapers would give us our hemlocks in our mountains. After eight years of what George called sweating blood, our break—and we worked for it—came from a magazine office high in one of those buildings.

We had spent most of the summers at George's parents' mountain cabin in southwestern Pennsylvania. The hunting car—an old Hudson coach—was turned over to us and we drove mountain roads in a radius that embraced West Virginia and western Maryland in search of the place of our dreams. By the time our luck broke, we had found this land of ours we named Old Hemlock.

Part of our plan was a setter, the start of a line of our setters, and before our old hewn-log house could be made completely livable, Blue moved in with us. His genes are with us still and always will be. To keep our line at first meant raising puppies here, and we even had an outside sleeping arrangement and fenced-in yard for some of them years ago, but not since Dixie. Occasionally someone will call and ask to come to see our "kennels." When they arrive they are greeted by barking but it comes from our screened porch, and to their surprise sometimes they see but one Old Hemlock setter and what looks like a mostly white, short-legged, too-long beagle with tail curled up over the back and dark intelligent eyes in an even-marked head, the muzzle grayed with years.

We have located homes for many drop-off dogs, and it is hard for George to pass any lost dog. The meanest abandonment was an ancient beagle curled up along our road on the day after the closing day of the rabbit season, no collar, and no hope. We found a compassionate neighbor who took him into his kennel. The gayest pair were littermates wandering along the road miles from a house, and when George tried to coax them to him, they ran into a culvert. We were returning from town, weren't dressed for culvert crawling, and I felt George must have dinner, so we drove the four or five miles home. While I fixed him a snack, George changed into hunting clothes, called Art Thomas to meet him, and with flashlights and ingenuity they were back in an hour with the pups. We enjoyed "Culvert" and "Gutter" for a day until we placed them.