

Just The Wife's Dog

By: Marc L. Gibbs

John drove a truck for a living. He made a decent wage but his heart had never been in it. It had been four years now since the plant closed. He had lost his job and the small farm that he loved. Oh, it was nothing fancy, only 30 acres of rough ground. Just a place to raise a couple calves, a horse and, his passion, high tailed pointers. That farm had made it all worthwhile. But that was before hard times came to the heartland. Manufacturing plants were going south, leaving only broken dreams behind. John's dream was to be a field trialer. He had planned to buy a few more acres, build a kennel building, bird pens and even flight cages. John intended to have a first rate training facility built and paid for before his retirement.

It doesn't take long to go bankrupt when you have no income. There were not many employers in the area. All those other guys who were laid-off with John were knocking on the same doors. His search for a job was unsuccessful that first year. He managed to hold on for eight months before he and his wife decided that they had to let the farm go. With the economy in the dumps and the plant closing leaving so many out of work, small farms were not selling well. After the auction, they were lucky to pay off the mortgage. They had sold all the livestock except John's favorite little pointer. The apartment building John and his wife were moving into didn't allow pets, so he hoped to keep her boarded at a friend's place while he got back on his feet.

It soon became apparent to John that his only option was to take the job his friend Tom had offered him. Tom was the terminal manager for the trucking company and he had told John that he could use a good driver. The money wasn't bad if you drove enough miles per week. The downside was those long hours and the time away from home. The economy left him little choice. It was a hard life to get used to, but John knew he was lucky to get the job. Being gone all week, the weekends were filled with catching up with family and friends. There was little time left for that little pointer bitch and he let her go to a friend who had time to work with her.

After two years of truck driving, John felt financially

Marc Gibbs submitted this piece with the following note:
"It is my pleasure to submit the attached manuscript entitled "Just the Wife's Dog" for your consideration. The piece deals with how we are affected by our relationships with our hunting dogs."

secure enough to buy another home. He found a little bungalow in a nice, older part of town. His wife Sue had never really adjusted to being at home alone all week long. Now that they had a home of their own again, she decided she wanted a pet to keep her company. Although John wasn't without affection for his animals, he had

always seen them as functional. Every animal he had ever owned either performed some service for him or was edible. He had loved his pointers but never considered them to be pets any more than the owner of a race horse would consider his thoroughbred to be a pet. They were hard-working athletes, not pampered pillow pooches. But then wives see some things differently and so they decided to buy a pet dog.

Sue bought a book which described the various breeds of dogs and by the time John returned home at the end of the week, she had set her sights on purchasing an English Springer Spaniel. John told her that since he was gone all week she would be responsible for the dog so she might as well pick a breed she liked. This was her deal and he honestly didn't expect a dog in the house, regardless of the breed, to be anything but trouble.

Two weeks later, Sue located a home bred litter for sale in the next town. They drove over to look at them on Saturday morning. It was an ordinary litter of no particular breeding. John reviewed the pedigree which revealed only a show dog or two. His wife, of course, fell in love with the first little black and white ball of fur that she picked up. Still shaking his head and grumbling that he had paid less for well pedigreed pointers, John drove Sue home with her new pup, Jake.

As Jake grew, he was a holy terror. He chewed and destroyed everything in his path. Every weekend John would come off the road and spend a half day mending and repairing the destruction. He was not amused. Friends often stopped by to visit when he was home. Knowing how John felt about working animals, they would kid him about his pretty house dog. John always made it clear that as far as he was concerned, that worthless spaniel was just the wife's dog. Sue was attempting to teach

the pup some manners and had brought home several books from the library. Occasionally, in spare moments, John would glance at one of the books. As he read bits and pieces, he began to realize that the Springer Spaniel had a long history as a sporting dog from the time of the early falconers to the present. Although he knew that truck driving didn't leave him enough time to properly train a bird dog, he still remembered his pointers and the plans he once had. As he read more about the Springer's reputation as a bird dog, his interest grew. He was getting the bug again.

John had cussed that pup a lot and Sue was a little nervous when John began offering to take the dog out for a little exercise. As fall approached, the trips with the pup began to last longer. Sue began to notice a twinkle in John's eye when he returned home with Jake. When she asked him about the trips, he told her that he was just curious whether any of that old bird dog blood still flowed through Jake's veins. She was sure something was going on when the pup started spending the evening laying in the recliner with John. John and the pup had been taking their weekend walks together for a couple months. It was late October when, after a walk through a stalk field, John returned home with a big smile on his face. He told Sue he had never seen a dog track a pheasant and work out the trail the way Jake had done. He swore that the pup had a better nose than any pointer he had ever owned and he would retrieve anything you could throw. It was the most excitement Sue had seen in John for years.

With pheasant season around the corner, John hurried to break the pup to the gun and to find a place to hunt. When opening day arrived, he took a week off work and hunted every day. The partners filled their limit five days that week. Jake was a pheasant finding machine. John invited a couple of his buddies along to witness Jake in action. They both agreed that Jake was going to make a great bird dog. John was on cloud nine. He was every bit as proud of that pup as he had been of his pointers.

Sunday afternoon soon came around again and it was time for John to drive down to the truck terminal to check his rig over in the daylight. He normally left the terminal

before dawn on Monday morning and felt more comfortable if he had checked the truck over before pulling out onto the open road. Every time John's old pick-up had left home during the last several days, it was to carry John and Jake to another hunting spot. Maybe Jake thought his partner was going hunting without him when the pick-up left that Sunday afternoon. Whatever the reason, Jake jumped the fence and ran down the street after the truck.

There wasn't a lot of traffic on Sunday afternoon but it was enough. When John heard the squealing of tires, he looked in the rear view mirror just in time to see Jake ran over by the Ford sedan. He stopped his truck and ran back to the place where Jake's broken body lay. The pup was already dead. John picked up the limp dog and carried him home to his own back yard. He went into the house with tears in his eyes and told his wife what had happened before going to the garage for a shovel.

As John left town the next morning, all the sense of loss which he had felt when his farm was sold came rushing back. He had allowed himself to get attached to that damn pup. He had allowed himself to dream again and now he was suffering because of it. He told himself that he should have known better and to grow up and stop dreaming like some starry-eyed kid. John had a week alone in that cab to grieve the pup and to grieve the loss of his dream, all over again.

When his rig pulled into the terminal on Friday afternoon, John was met by his friend Tom, the trucking company manager. Tom had seen Jake in action and he had heard about the accident. He told John that the pup being hit by a car was really tough luck and he was sorry. Tom was sure that Jake was going to be a great dog. John thanked Tom and said, "Well, he was a lot of trouble anyway, Sue's house pet you know, really just the wife's dog."

Somehow, John looked older after that. He and his wife never did buy another dog and, as far as anyone knows, he never hunted again. They lived in that same little bungalow the rest of their lives. He drove a truck until he retired and passed away soon after that. Those who knew him later in life said that after he retired he just didn't seem to have any reason to keep on living and so, he didn't.