

A CITY DOG FINDS HIS ROOTS

PART 3 - BY KUNI Y. SMITH

ABOUT FIVE YEARS AGO MY AMERICAN COCKER PUPPIE, RETURNED WITH ME TO NEW YORK CITY. HE WAS AN ACTIVE TWO YEAR OLD AND I WAS VERY CONCERNED HOW HE WOULD ADJUST TO HIS NEW CITY LIFE. WE FOUND AN APARTMENT TWO BLOCKS FROM CENTRAL PARK. THE PIGEONS, SQUIRRELS AND DUCKS WERE GREAT FUN FOR HIM TO CHASE BUT IT STILL WAS NOT ENOUGH FOR HIM. I HAD TO SPEND ENDLESS HOURS EVERY WEEK THROWING A SOFT FOOTBALL WHICH HE WOULD RETRIEVE OVER AND OVER AGAIN. I BEGAN TO THINK THAT THE CITY LIFE MIGHT BE TOO MUCH FOR ME WITH THIS CRAZY COCKER!

A friend of mine observed this daily act of ours and noticed my dog's retrieving instincts. He asked if I had ever worked with a trainer. I related my attempts to go to obedience training with Puppie and how useless the results were. I was a total failure at getting Puppie to obey or even sit! The suggestion was then made that perhaps I should try a gun-dog trainer and turn Puppie into a hunter. I had no idea what he was talking about. I called a couple of shooting clubs upstate but I was not getting any recommendations for someone good at training an American Cocker as a gun dog. That seemed OK with me. After all, I had a career in the fashion business when I fell in love with cocker spaniels. I thought they were cute. When they told me that cockers were good flushers I just thought that meant they were easily house-trained.

A few days later, as I was returning from Central Park with Puppie, a man stopped us and said "nice dog". "I have a Springer", he said. He told me how he loved to go bird hunting with his Springer and that he was actually going up to Minnesota this summer with his dog to hunt there. This seemed a knowledgeable man so I asked "do you think my cocker could also be a hunting dog?" He took a bandana out of his pocket and held it to Puppies nose. Puppie responded right away. "I think he could be good. He seems to have the right instincts". I pressed my luck and asked him who trained his dog. He said he did it himself and stressed how important it was to have a good trainer. He said he knew of one exceptional spaniel trainer named Ray Cacchio at Pondview Kennels in Dutchess County, New York. Ray was for working with cockers, English and American. Ray's great grandfather Herman Mellenthin trained a dual champion American Cocker back in the 1930's. Ray also trained two springers that were National winners. I was finally on the right trail!

My first meeting was with Ray's partner, Dan Lussen. After some persuasions, Dan agreed to work with Puppie for a month to see how he did. I just knew I had found the right place.

After a difficult parting, mostly on my part, I left my "student gun dog" and returned to New York City. Of course, I was so anxious

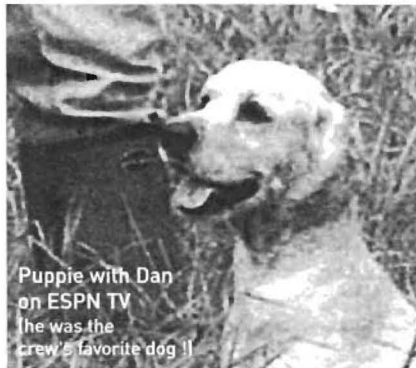


Puppie's JH title water retrieve with Dan Lussen

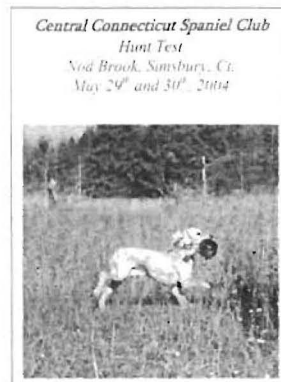
about Puppie's progress, that I was calling poor Dan almost every day. It was tough to get enough information out of those strong silent types to satisfy my curiosity!

When the month was up, I raced out there to see my little guy. My heart jumped as Dan informed me that Puppie might be able to make it! Early reluctance to pick up birds was overcome and his sense of smell was very good. Dan felt that a couple of months more work, and Puppie might be on his way to being an American Cocker gun dog! Dan said that Puppie had excellent natural instincts but I think Dan deserves a lot of the credit.

I saw Dan in England at this year's CLA game fair. I kept saying that Puppie looked just like all the other English cockers. He smiled at me and said "No. Puppie is a one of the kind dog!" We laughed aloud. Puppie is such a happy and balanced dog that he is at home walking into Tiffany's with me or breaking after a Fallen bird in the field. He jumps into the backseat of a Lincoln Town Car on the way to work with Dan with the same ease as he jumps into the cage on the back of Dan's truck. This city dog now has JH and SH titles. He has done it all. Maybe Puppie is one of the kind!



Puppie with Dan on ESPN TV. He was the crew's favorite dog!



Puppie on the cover of the CCSC Hunt Test Catalog



Dan holding JH & SH Title Ribbon with Puppie