

Gun Dog In The Cayman Islands

BY KUNI Y. SMITH

MY AMERICAN COCKER PUPPY AND I MOVED TO GRAND CAYMAN ISLAND FROM NEW YORK CITY WHEN HE WAS FOUR MONTHS OLD. I WAS NOT SURE HOW MY "PUPPIE" WOULD ADAPT TO THIS NEW, BEACH ENVIRONMENT. I NEED NOT HAVE CONCERNED MYSELF. IT TURNED OUT TO BE A MOST UNIQUE "SCHOOL" WHERE PUPPIE'S INSTINCTS TO BE A GUN DOG CAME ALIVE.

His typical day was hardly typical for an American Cocker. Arising at 6am he went for a run on beautiful Seven Mile Beach. He soon noticed the air holes of the sand crabs. He put his nose to the sand checking them out. Before I knew it, he dug a hole in the sand to try to catch the hiding crabs. He would not stop! One hole after another, each hole bigger than his own body! One day I heard a little girl on the beach telling her mother, "now I know why there are all these holes every morning, it's that dog!"

When he had enough of the digging business, he would move on to flushing birds from around the neighbor's back yard swimming pool. After that it was time to cool off with a swim in the ocean.

His schedule never changed. Not even during hurricane season. As soon as he saw birds bobbing on the sea, in he would go. No matter how big the waves were, nothing scared him. I read about the great stamina of the Cocker, but he was incredible.

Now it was time for breakfast and a much-deserved nap just inside the screen door. Awakened by a rustling noise just outside, he spotted a Gecko. Puppie went crazy! He went right through the screen door after him, the gecko escaped up a palm tree. I can't count the number of times he broke that screen door!

In the afternoon, I liked to sit on the beach reading my book. Every now and then a pelican would come flying in and plop himself in the water right in front of us. Bang! Into the sea Puppie would go. He would swim after that pelican until he couldn't see him anymore. He would even track planes in the sky just hoping they would land in the sea by us so he could give chase. Luckily, that didn't happen.

During low tide, he would walk around with his



Seven Mile Beach

face in the clear, clear water trying to catch these most colorful fish. He would do this for an hour or more! One time he leapt, startled straight up into the

ON WEEKENDS THERE WAS OFTEN A SEVEN MILE BEACH SWIMMING RALLY. THE FIRST TIME WE SAW THIS, PUPPIE JUMPED INTO THE WATER AND STARTED SWIMMING FASTER THAN THE RACERS. THE PEOPLE FROM THE HOTELS WERE ALL LAUGHING AND TALKING ABOUT HIS SWIMMING ABILITIES.

air, two women who were passing at the time, laughingly told me that he had stepped on a sea urchin!

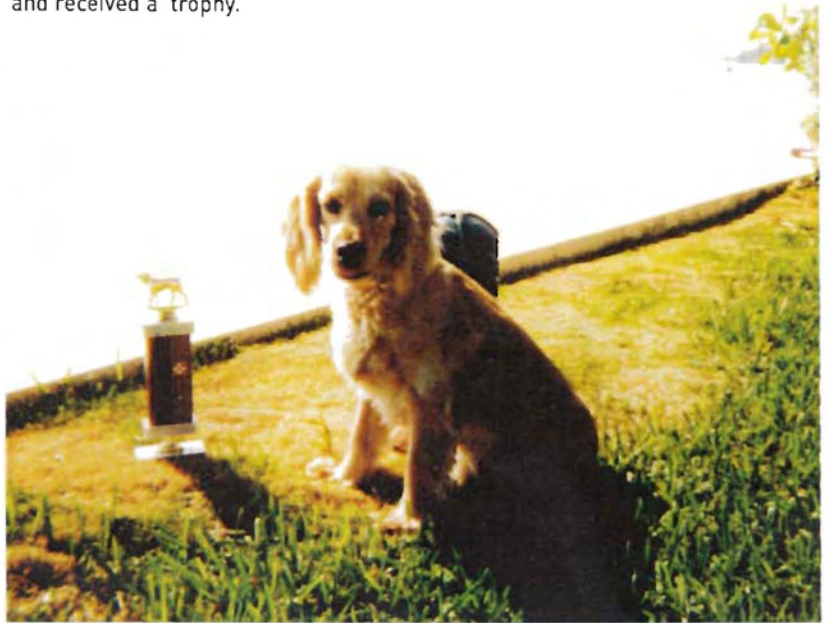
On the island, there is a turtle, or "Cayman" farm used for conservation. I read in the local paper that there was going to be a release in a Seven Mile Beach of 300 turtles. The people were asked to help out by putting any turtles found on the beach, back into the ocean. Sure enough Puppie and I found one and I picked it up and put it into the ocean. On the way back, I was looking at the water to see if the turtle made it out. Puppie spotted him before I did and was quickly out there swimming right next to him, showing me where the turtle was. I think Puppie learned to be a better swimmer by watching the turtle's sidestroke. That is exactly how Puppie swims.

On weekends there was often a Seven Mile Beach swimming rally. The first time we saw this, Puppie jumped into the water and started swimming faster than the racers. The people from the hotels were all laughing and talking about his swimming abilities.

Later in the afternoon, Puppie got into the routine of visiting with my next-door neighbors, Mr. And Mrs. Thompsen from Virginia. They happened to have a cocker of their own back in Virginia. Just before the sunset, Mr. Thompsen would fix himself and his wife cocktails, his being a Dewars Whisky. When he finished his drink, he would give the ice to Puppie. I told him that Puppie was not old enough to drink but he said he always gave some to his dog back home. So Puppie tasted Bourbon at the age of 4 months!

Months later, my friend, Kathie Kipp, introduced me to the Cayman Humane Society where I became involved doing volunteer work for their fund raising events. One such event was a dog show with an agility trial. Though it was a much easier trial than the stateside ones, it was well run and even had a judge who worked the Westminster dog show in New York. I never trained Puppie for this trial. He picked it up by watching the other puppies go first. When it was his turn, he did great and actually got his first award by finishing second place and received a trophy from governor's wife from England. I was so proud of him! For Puppie, the Caymans had truly become his paradise.

Puppie finished second and received a trophy.



Puppie swimming in the ocean.



Puppie with Mr. Thompsen.