

FC Diana Floss of Windmillwood "Millie"

Even though Brit and Lucy had been whelped in the United Kingdom, they had been raised and trained in America. Every other cocker I had championed since that point had been bred by Vicky and me or Cheryl and Art Person of Natchez, Mississippi. At the time I really liked that, no ambiguity. We were crafting our own ship, to sink or sail. Many of the dogs we competed against were initially trained in the UK before competing in American trials.

I love England, always will. In my opinion there are few, if any, truly civilized countries in the world with genuine rule of law that, at some point, have not seen the Union Jack fly above it. Having said that, the homage paid to the UK imported dogs, appears to me, like some national identity crisis. Right or wrong, I wanted no part of it. British trained dogs were not on my radar.

Shortly after we settled in our new place in North Dakota I received a telephone call from Harold Bixby from Buffalo, New York. He was inquiring about my working with his imported bitch, Millie that he co-owned with Martha Calabrese. I was initially disinclined. Bix had bought the young trained dog from Alan Gwynne in Wales. I had previously met "Bix" and the Calabreses at trials. I only knew them, however, as passing acquaintances.

If I had stuck to my guns regarding trialing British trained cockers, I would have missed out on working as good a dog as I have ever handled. Not only would that have been foolish, but I would have missed out on Harold Bixby's friendship as well as that with the Calabreses and that would have been tantamount to criminal. Mr. Gwynne had sent over a first class prospect in Millie. It didn't take long for Millie's obvious abilities to change my mind.

Millie was no athlete; she was heavy boned, with slightly bowed legs. She was also jet black, with a slight white blaze in front. I worried that combined with the fact that she had been raised in a damp culture, would she would be compromised by a North American hot day? It turned out that she happens to be the best warm weather dog I have handled to date. She had a really large chest that perhaps contributed to her incredible stamina. Regardless why, her stamina was stunning. She wasn't the fastest cocker, but she just kept going and going. She didn't need any scent to keep her motivated either. Millie accentuated the old adage, "Never judge a book by its cover".

I ran Millie consecutively with Freckles. There were striking similarities between the bitches. They were extremely confident. Both would lord over any other bitch that they felt they could sway. Each recognized the dominant personality of the other and developed a relationship which could best be described as a "Mexican standoff". There was no love lost between the two.

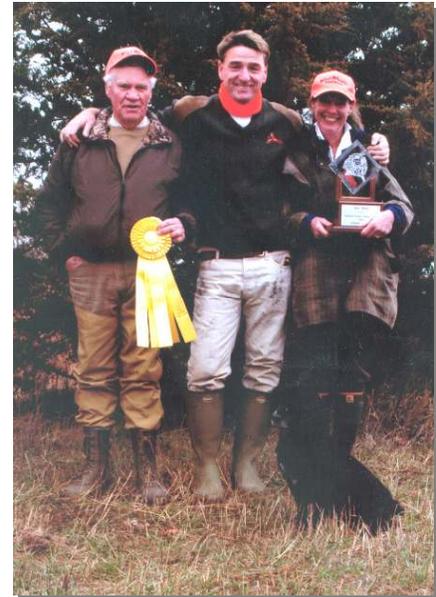


Like Freckles, Millie could be run in trials without a whistle. She just had that great knack of taking in the right amount of ground relative to the conditions. And she, just simply, was not going to break. These are pretty unusual traits. In the 2000 National Championship, I placed her second, behind her arch rival Freckles.

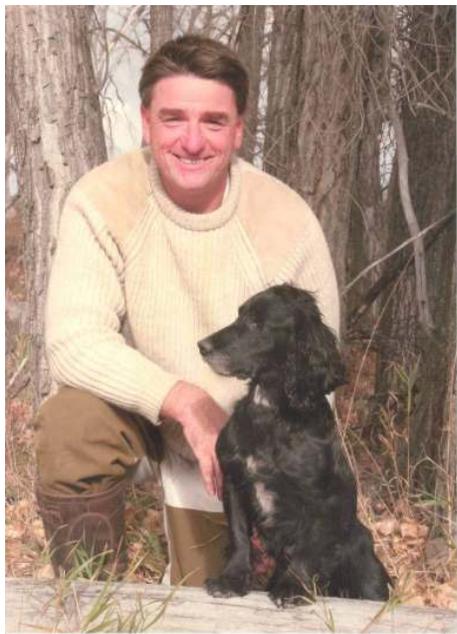
Everyone in America can remember where they were when the planes crashed on 9/11. On that awful day, engraved into our national consciousness we were competing at a cocker trial in upstate New York. When the rumors started to filter in about a light aircraft crashing into one of the towers. Millie took first place under the guidance of her owner Harold Bixby. I took second with a fourteen month old pup, Sydney, who turned out to be a great one.

Millie finished third at the 2003 Nebraska Cocker National Championship that I won with the British National Champion, "Megan". The next year she finished second in the 2004 New York Cocker National Championship. With three national championship placements on her resume, two seconds and a third, it seemed she was destined to be a perpetual bridesmaid. Fast approaching nine years of age, she entered what Harold and I had already decided would be her swansong, the 2005 Cocker National Championship, held that year in North Dakota.

The national grounds were incredible that year held on Gus Wobaum's farm, near McKensie, North Dakota. Pheasant numbers were booming, and there is not a finer managed piece of property for game and wildlife than the Wobaum's 640 acre farm. There must have been a thousand wild pheasants on that section of land. It wasn't a great national for me. I kept losing dogs on failed retrieves or passed birds. The wild hens would pop up like popcorn from under ones feet, at the most inopportune moments.



The fifth series grounds we had selected were in a wooded lot. I was down to one dog, Millie. She was one of the last dogs in the running order. It's funny how the brain works, how it encapsulates a seemingly insignificant few moments that consequently resonate forever. My preparation to run in that fifth was one of those times. I walked Millie in the gallery, on the gravel road that ran parallel to the wood lot. We walked it three separate times, back and forth, while other dogs had their run. Each time we



walked out, her tail wagged profusely and I could feel her anticipation through the leash. She would constantly flick her eyes up at me, saying loud and clear, "I'm up for this!" Each time we had to walk back without getting to run, her whole demeanor would change, tail tucked, head lowered, and the tension from the leash completely dissipated; abject disappointment. Then it struck me. This was the last time I would ever run her. I am not ashamed to say, for a moment, it was a little overwhelming.

We finally had our turn. I cast her off, and she owned the ground. She ran like a two year old, blessed with a nine year olds' brain. This day, she would be no bridesmaid. It was her day to shine. She would finish the day with the title she had long disserved, the 2005 Cocker National Champion.