

Two years ago, my wife and I lost our very best friend Gracie, a Golden Retriever. At the time (I suppose it is the same with most dog lovers) we vowed, “never again”. It rips your heart out to lose such a loving companion and integral part of your family. Then as time passed, the house seemed to be empty and we were saying “well how about a cat”. That was quickly dismissed. We missed the companionship and love that a dog brings to the house, and slowly started to consider another dog. Not another Golden! No dog could ever replace our Gracie. And the Hair! My god the hair!

Long story short, we looked at and considered many breeds, and in the end, yes, we decided to start looking at Golden Retrievers again. Once we started looking at Golden Retrievers again we were sure that we were on the right track. Playful, smart, perfect temperament for the many friends and family we welcome into our home on a regular basis. We are blessed to have a lot of friends in Pewaukee and they are at our house a lot. Our Gracie was as good a friend to all of them as she was to us. That is what we wanted.

Enter “Bella”. We found our Bella at a breeder in Illinois, a loving family where the dogs lived in the house and were surrounded by love and affection. The mother of the litter, Bella (our Bella’s namesake), was the spitting image of our Gracie. About as docile as you can get and welcomed all as friend immediately. That part we remembered and loved about Gracie so we were drawn to that litter right away. The father on the other hand was a huge 112, cantankerous (in a good way), playful chap, but with the goodhearted soul only a Golden has.

We studied the litter for quite a while. Watching them play and interact. In the end we chose one that exhibited, not only the uniquely Golden quality, but also a bit of the mischievous qualities that we liked in the father, “Hunter”. The “Hunter” quality turned out to be prophetic.

We got Bella home and began our relationship with this incredible dog. We quickly learned this was no Gracie. Much more outgoing and not afraid of anything. She was born on New Years day, and in the spring we started to get dead robins brought to us at the back door (proudly of course). After a few, I started to get a notion that something might be possible here. And they kept on coming.

I grew up in rural Southern Michigan and was an avowed pheasant hunter for most of my childhood. We had 80 acres of prime pheasant habitat (at the time), and we had Brittany Spaniels as hunting companions and house dogs. That time in my life was some of the best and was how my father and myself were able to bond and build a strong relationship. Little did I know, as I extracted yet another robin from Bellas soft mouth, that Ed Kerr and his wife Emily would bring all of that back to me. A gift as precious, in my mind, as any.

I was introduced to Ed and Emily by a good friend of mine, Kevin Yonke (owner of Gustof, a Shining Star GSP dog). Kevin suggested I at least sit down and talk with Ed to discuss the possibility of turning my Golden, Bella, into a pheasant hunter. Bella does not come from “hunting stock” and although she is a pure bred Golden, we were made to sign an agreement that we would not breed her. So the point is, Bella was not bred to hunt and I had never entertained the idea as we were choosing a companion.

Nonetheless it didn’t take too much urging for me to make an appointment with Ed to discuss and for him to take a first look at her to determine if there “was anything there”. We sat in Ed’s kitchen and I could tell immediately, that this man has a way with dogs. Bella was a puppy and acted like one of course, and Ed expertly handled her and started an

evaluation. He told me from the get go that he would be brutally honest in his assessment and if he didn't think we could achieve the goal of turning Bella into a top notch bird dog, he would tell me.

During that visit I was able to see the environment that Ed operates in. I loved the idea that his dogs and the ones he was training were being molded in a home environment. Several dogs greeted us and met Bella. All were extremely well behaved and you could tell Ed was in complete control.

Then we went out to the bird pen. Ed handled Bella on a leash and she didn't like that very much. Even that, he got under control very soon and Bella intuitively understood who was in control in that short period of time. Bella finally realized that there were Birds! in that pen and Ed let her bounce off various parts of the pen and scatter birds from one side to the other a couple of times. At that point, Ed divulged that he thought he could do something with this, otherwise destined to be, lap dog. I couldn't have been more excited. It's like your child being accepted to Harvard.

Actually, the week before I took Bella to meet Ed, I had just paid well over \$1,000 to have her puppy trained by a different trainer. After my meeting with Ed, there was no question where Bella needed to go. I never got my money back from the other trainer, but I didn't even bat an eye. I made the right decision, hands down!

First came puppy school. Ed vowed to turn Bella into "a better citizen" with this part of her training. He was spot on. When we got Bella back after 2 weeks, she was a different dog. All the good parts remained and 95% of the bad parts were gone (regarding the 5%, she is still a puppy).

Then came the 6 weeks of training her to be a bird dog. It's hard to be without your dog for 6 weeks, but we never questioned it because of the relationship Ed and Emily have with their dogs and the dogs they take in to train. I think the thing we were most worried about is that Bella would not want to come home! It's a good feeling to know your dog is being taken care of the way you yourself would.

During the six weeks we were able to visit whenever we wanted, and I was even able to hunt over Bella a couple of times to see how things were going. And they were going great.

I have had Bella back now for two months and have been able to get out hunting with her quite a bit. Probably have had here on over 50 birds since returning from Ed's. Bella is a well trained bird dog. That was the goal. She stays close (she is a flushing dog), finds birds, gets them in the air, and brings them back and retrieves to hand. I cannot express enough how much this has enriched my life and Bella's. I now have a hunting companion and friend that brings back my childhood, and Bella has a passion and drive that can be expressed in a healthy and positive way.

Ed may have taken some good hearted ribbing from his circle of GSP friends for training a "Golden", but I think in the end he took on "the project" because it was a different challenge, but for the most part I think he did it because he loves dogs and wants them to live to their potential. Ed did that for our Bella. And I think he enjoyed it, just a little bit, too!

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