

# *The Gun Dog Supreme*

NEWS BULLETIN of the WIREHAired POINTING GRIFFON CLUB OF AMERICA  
EDUCATION & RESEARCH FOUNDATION

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Let me first off apologize for the delay in getting the June GDS out earlier. Just to keep things interesting, life somehow has a funny way of throwing out a few roadblocks. In any event, here we are. I hope the end result was worth it.

First in this issue, you'll find a beautiful tribute article written by Mary Jo Finley (and family) about **Elmo of Auger Falls** who recently passed away. He was their first griffon. Mary Jo's article is full of nostalgia and reminisces over the funny & not-so-funny moments of **Elmo's** life in the Finley family. Look for a follow-up article to be written about this special dog that will celebrate his legacy and important contributions to the WPGCA breeding program.

We also have an excellent technical piece co-authored by Laurie Connell and Rick Sojda that introduces club members to a new and exciting collaborative effort between the WPGCA and the College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University. The goal of this canine DNA project is to uncover the genetic basis of certain desirable traits in our dogs (pointing instinct, hair coat, etc) as well as non-desirable traits (e.g. orthopedic diseases). Having a genetic "blueprint", even if only partial, would be very helpful in making future breeding decisions.

Last, but certainly not least, Charles Dahlstrom writes about his dog **T.J's** serious knee injury and their experience with a non-surgical approach to helping her heal.

*Anna C. Ziedins*

## EDITORS

Rem DeJong  
Greg Hurtig  
John Pitlo  
Anna Ziedins

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Judy Coil  
49625 Waldo Rd NE  
Kelliher MN 56650  
Ph (218) 647-8451  
jcoil@paulbunyan.net

## ARTICLE SUBMISSION

Send articles or proposals 2 months prior to the issues printing to:

Rem DeJong  
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Marquette, MI 49855

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**Cover shot: Argo of the Hundgaard** (left) and housemate **Elmo of Auger Falls** show off their birds after a successful grouse & woodcock hunt with proud owner Dave Finley

*Photo by Dave Finley*



## **Tribute to Elmo of Auger Falls**

*Born February 5, 1996, Jerome, Idaho  
Died March 28, 2010, Plymouth, Indiana*

**By  
Mary Jo Finley**

“We don’t need no stinking hunting dog.”

I can’t believe I uttered those words. If anyone ever ate her words, it was me.

Soon after Dave and I got married in 1990, and Christa was born in 1991, Dave wanted to get a hunting dog. He researched breeds. He knew he didn’t want a pointer. He had one of those in high school and learned how much fun it was trying to catch up with his dog in another county without a horse. He had Irish setters too, but didn’t want a dog with a high-maintenance coat. He had numerous friends with labs....

“We used to hunt rabbits and quail with beagles, and that was fun, but they were kennel dogs,” Dave said. “I knew there had to be more.”

In 1993 Dave was wiring a school in Valparaiso. He met a plumber who had a Griffon. For some 20 years Vic headed a trip to Creston, Iowa. He and another Griffon owner invited Dave to go hunting in Iowa for the first time. After hunting with Griffons that October, Dave knew he wanted a Wirehaired Pointing Griffon. He researched his options. By January, he was a WPGCA member.

Dave pored over back issues of the “Gun Dog Supreme,” and read Joan Bailey’s book, “How to Help Gun Dogs Train Themselves.”

For those of you around in 1994, you may remember our splashing entry at the Heart-

land Chapter's Saturday dinner. Christa, then 3, insisted on wearing her Lion King Halloween costume headgear.

"I got on the list for a dog after I saw the impressive, intermediate tests of **Arrow** and **Abe**, both of **Dutchman's Hollow**, on Don Nicholson's farm in Iowa. The Heartland Chapter had just planted a tree in his memory a day earlier," Dave said.

"I was on the list for two years. I kept moving my name down because we wanted to be in a house in the country before we got him."

**Elmo's** sire was **Barton de Los Altos**. His dam was **Cassie of Dutchman's Hollow**.

Dave knew **Elmo** was a good dog when he arrived by Delta Dash from Idaho after being in a plane 10 hours and wanted to play.

Before he was tested, Dave was worried I would ruin him. Even though I knew I was supposed to give him a command only once, **Elmo** knew I wasn't the master. I would sometimes repeat my command. Dave kept saying, "We're going to be the only ones at the test with a retarded dog."

**Elmo's** interest in the piano didn't help Dave's confidence, either. He thought Christa and me teaching him parlor tricks like playing "Do" or sitting still with a dog biscuit on his nose till we said "ok," then flipping it in the air and catching it was going to make him soft.

"He got a Prize I in Natural Ability and Intermediate tests with an inexperienced dog handler like me," Dave said.

"I knew he was going to be exceptional from the first trip to Iowa in early October when he was eight months old. He started tracking pheasants out of the box and pointed and retrieved two the first morning. He tracked pheasants down the first fence row he came to. We had some flush wild, but then we hunted on and he had no problem with that. He didn't think about those, he just went on for the next birds. I was convinced there were more birds there,

Below: Dave Finley and daughter Christa in 1996, after picking up **Elmo of Auger Falls** from the airport. Opposite: Elmo keeps a close eye on Christa during piano lessons. *Photo by Mary Jo Finley*



and when we got to the first corner, he made the turn slowly and locked up and there was something right next to the fence. Any pointed bird, it was going down. As with **Elmo's** luck, it was a rooster. He did his job and I did mine. I shot the bird and he retrieved it to hand – all natural ability. He did it all again before we got back to the truck.

“I thought I can’t wait to get back to the truck to tell the guys – three guys with an experienced, seasoned Griffon. We were on a 960-acre plot with three ponds; we all had room to move about. It was one of those mornings that the farmer’s kid had gotten us permission that everyone was all excited about. My buddy Big Dave wanted to hunt with **Elmo** right off the bat, but everyone knows you take the pup out by himself, not putting it under a bunch of unneeded blazing guns to start out with.



“Eventually they got to see the **Elmo** in action before the trip was out. They were in awe. We all recognized **Elmo** was a special dog with huge potential.

“**Elmo** had a heightened sensitivity. Always in sync, he was acutely aware of his surroundings. He seemed to be almost human in that respect. He read our moods. He knew what I was thinking, almost before I thought it.

“I thought I knew how to hunt. I had harvested deer, wild turkey, rabbit, quail, pheasant, chukar, dove, duck, goose.... But I was wrong; **Elmo** taught *me* how to hunt”.

“In the very beginning I wanted a dog to goose hunt to get a goose out of the pond. I thought if I was going to get a dog for that, I might as well get a dog that could do everything. I narrowed down my choices to the versatile breeds so I could hunt my favorite game – whatever is in season.”

“With a high-quality gun dog, that’s what you get to hunt – whatever you want. **Elmo** was my hunting partner for 13 unbelievable years. For **Elmo** and me, 13 was not an unlucky number,” Dave said.

In addition to being a good hunter, he was an excellent house dog and family companion. When I went into labor with our now 13-year-old daughter, Andrea, I was lying on my side on our bed. Dave was too nervous to be an effective breathing coach, so **Elmo**, 11 months at the time, came up to my face, looked deeply into my eyes, and calmly helped me slow my breathing until the contraction had passed. Then he went and threw

up in his bowl and on Dave's boot.

When Andrea was born in January '97, it was bitterly cold. So when we went to the hospital, Dave put **Elmo's** doghouse, food and water in the garage and left the flipper door to his outside kennel unlocked. It was then that he chewed the broom – one of only two things he chewed as a pup. He shredded it, and when we came home and opened the garage door, a four-inch layer of broom corn covered the floor of a two-car garage!

We remember **Elmo** sitting and staring at Andrea's crib. He couldn't see her because of the bumper pads, but something in there smelled really different.

When Dave and I would raise our voices, **Elmo** would drop his head and slink off to his crate in the kitchen. Jim Seibel explained that **Elmo** was so sensitive, he thought we were directing our amplified voices at him. He thought he had caused the situation. So, in addition to settling our differences away from the children, we also had to be out of earshot of **Elmo**.

We had **Elmo** a long time before we heard him bark for the first time when a meter reader was in the backyard. He seldom barked. He didn't need to. He communicated with those eyes.

**Elmo** was so full of personality. He liked to help open Christmas gifts. He could deftly move through the room and you would barely know he was there. Other times, you could hear him pound his paws as he walked, usually when he wanted to play "I Have the Kong and You Don't" with **Argo**.

Although we accused affable **Elmo** of probably allowing any stranger to enter our house if the situation presented itself, he would not come into the house from the garage until he made sure we closed and locked the back door.





Above: Dog-tired. **Elmo** finds Dave a very agreeable pillow.

Opposite: Another memorable day for hunting buddies Dave, **Argo** and **Elmo** in the U.P. *Photographer unknown.*

**Elmo** opened so many doors for us. Because of him we have countless valued friendships with other WPGCA members throughout the country, truly extraordinary people and dogs in our lives. The fondest memories of our lives include **Elmo**.

Christa, now 18 and a 10-year 4-H member, took **Elmo** in Dog Obedience her first year. The other kids didn't really have a chance. **Elmo** and she won the Champion Award. An aggres-

sive dog bit **Elmo**, so **Elmo's** 4-H career was cut short. Christa has taken Veterinary Science since eighth grade (the first year she was allowed to enroll). Last year at the county fair, her poster won Reserve Grand Champion, qualifying her for State Fair entry where she was awarded a blue ribbon. Purdue University School of Veterinary Medicine invited all Veterinary Science State Fair entrants to exhibit their projects at its spring open house. (Thank you again, **Elmo**.) Her project focused on aging dogs and their special needs. For background she used the book "Speaking for Spot" by Dr. Nancy Kay, DVM. In it Dr. Kay cites Sir Walter Scott: "I have sometimes thought of the final cause of dogs having such short lives and I am quite satisfied it is in compassion to the human race; for if we suffer so much in losing a dog after an acquaintance of 10 to 12 years, what would it be if they were to double?"

Three weeks after **Elmo** died, Vivian and John Pitlo's dog, **Ayla of Ancient Kennel**, had six pups. John knew when it was time, Dave wanted a female. We hadn't given much thought to another dog; we were still mourning **Elmo**. John told us we were expecting. We pick up **Francesca of Dutchman's Hollow**, "**Frannie**," June 27. Through the miracle of science and the artificial insemination efforts of the club, **Frannie's** sire, **Blue Mountain Brew**, is **Elmo's** grandfather.

Thank you to everyone in the WPGCA for putting so much tireless effort, blood, sweat, tears, and resources, literally their lives, into this club. We are profoundly grateful.

# “A New Partnership for Understanding the Genetics of Jeanie with the Light Liver-Ticked Hair”

By  
*Laurie Connell & Rick Sojda*  
(Introduction by John Pitlo)

*We are very fortunate to have two dedicated Griffoneers who also have extensive and strong backgrounds in the biological sciences. Dr. Laurie Connell is a research professor in marine biology at the University of Maine . Dr. Rick Sojda is a Wildlife Biologist for the USGS’ Northern Rocky Mountain Science Center and serves as the Science Coordinator for the Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative and works out of Montana State University in Bozeman , MT. Laurie discovered a group at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine that is developing information they hope will link DNA and specific characteristics in canines. This genetic research has the potential to help the WPGCA select dogs for breeding in a much more accurate manner. The breeding committee and the BOD have strongly endorsed the program described in this article.*

While watching **Buckingham** and **Bonita of Salmon River** (Ted Coon of WI and Bernie Schmitz of IA, respectively) in their IHDT last Spring at Mazonamie Wildlife Area in WI, Rick (**Ander of the Hundgaard**, Bozeman, MT) was struck with how similar their general windshield-wiper search pattern was to their sire’s typical pattern (my **Ander of the Hundgaard**). Was that an inherited trait? Or, had we as handlers developed our dogs in similar fashion? Whenever you get more than one Wirehaired Pointing Griffon Club of America (WPGCA) member together, especially at field tests, it seems like the discussion invariably turns to how traits from one dog are passed on to another. Wouldn’t it be cool if we could look at our dogs’ genes and assess the possibility that Dog A would pass along its tight hips or its strong pointing instinct to its progeny? And who among us has not been in discussions, probably beer in hand, about how closely related WPGCA Griffons *really* are to Czesky Fouseks, AKC Griffons, and even many of the other versatile wire-haired breeds developed in Europe during the last 150+ years?

Last summer, Laurie (**Allagash of Coyote Hills**, Old Town, ME) ran across a journal article from the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine about a canine genetic archive that they are creating. It turns out that scientists at Cornell have hundreds of thousands of animals in such databases, everything from domestic dogs to Simmental cattle. They are experts at linking actual genotypes (i.e., inherited DNA code) to various medical conditions and other phenotypes (i.e. observable traits – such as bite problems, coat color, behavior, etc.). One canine archive designed for the study of inherited diseases currently focuses on hip dysplasia, and to a lesser extent other orthopedic diseases in the Labrador Retriever. About the same time that I first read about the Cornell research, the GDS arrived with an article about a number of dogs in our club that had Osteochondritis dissecans (OCD) of elbows and shoulders. Different members had received different information about the heritability of OCD, but the situation had





**Allagash of Coyotes Hills** held by Scott Craig, has her blood drawn at Cornell Veterinary School by Dr. Todhunter. She is officially the first WPGCA griffon to be entered into Cornell's genetic archive. *Photo by Laurie Connell*

me thinking again. Our breeding program has made great progress in bringing the Wirehaired Pointing Griffon back from the somewhat disappointing shape in which it found itself during the 1970s. It seems to many of us, that our current breeding program has shown a nice increase in our dogs' hunting ability, an increase in desire for game, and a decrease in the number of dogs with hip dysplasia (since the switch to PennHip evaluation for hip joints). Perhaps, it is now time to "kick it up a

notch" with our breeding program and bring an even more quantitative genetic component into our discussions.

Gosh, if the sleuths on CSI can use DNA from an eyelash to convict a heinous murderer, shouldn't we see if the WPGCA might benefit from learning about the latest developments in genetic science? The breeding committee encouraged us to follow up with the folks at Cornell. With the help of **Allagash's** local veterinarian, Dr. Julie Keene (who is a Cornell graduate), we contacted Dr. Rory Todhunter, the director of the Medical Genetics DNA Bank at the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine in Ithaca, NY. A subsequent meeting was set up at Cornell when Laurie and husband, Scott, drove back to Maine from hunting in South Dakota last Fall (2009). Apparently, **Allagash's** personality, like that of most Griffons, stole the show and opened doors for us. And, at that time, **Allagash** had her blood drawn and was entered into the archive as the first WPGCA representative! During the Spring 2010 Board of Directors' meeting, it was decided that the club should investigate further collaboration. Rick, who was visiting his mom in upstate New York only three hours northwest of Cornell, and Laurie, who drove west from Maine, met with Dr. Todhunter's research group on May 19. What an interesting meeting it was. They had seven of their staff present to visit with us for several hours. They asked us all kinds of questions about our club, our dogs, our hip scores, and our testing program.

Several points became clear at our meeting with the veterinarians. First, the geneticists were VERY complimentary of what our club has done so far regarding how we control our breeding program, how we test our dogs, and how we keep our records. They did raise questions about whether or not our small gene pool might result in re-

duced fecundity. Similarly, is the increased incidence of OCD also a result of a small breeding population? They understand we are importing Czech bloodlines and we do not have one or two recent dogs that contribute to a “founders” effect. A founders effect would by definition result in a more severe genetic bottleneck. Second, they felt we could make immediate improvements to our breeding program using data the club has already collected. The quantitative analysis called Inbreeding Coefficients currently used by our breeding committee could be expanded to include the use of Breeding Values. This would require additional intensive statistical analysis. Third, adding a genetic component to our breeding program has the potential to reduce the incidence of hip dysplasia and other orthopedic diseases over the next several years. Fourth, the Cornell group has extensive skill in the development of selective breeding programs for animals such as cattle using Breeding Values that are based on linking specific traits through generations of pedigrees. Although we have considerable data from our tests and our health database, connecting this data to the DNA maps of our dogs will require fairly sophisticated statistical analyses. It would be a first for any dog breed club in the U.S., perhaps the world.

It seems that the WPGCA database has the potential to make a great addition to Cornell’s research since we have both deep (several generations) and broad (whole litter) pedigree information. About 95 percent of our dogs are hip tested, 95 percent are NAT tested, and 80 percent are IHD tested. Plus, our database which was initially developed years ago by Larry Semmens (**Glacier of Auger Falls**, Kenai, AK) and John Pitlo (**Ayla of Ancient Kennel** and **Ami of Agazzi Lowlands**, Bellevue, IA), can be paired with the pedigrees to assess heritability of hip ratings, other health problems, and hunting traits gathered at tests. To make the best use of a genetic archive, we must get as many dogs entered into it as possible. Targeting older dogs would be the most important right out-of-the-box action so that we can be sure of preserving their DNA before it is too late. The geneticists point out that each dog’s DNA analysis is important in this kind of work regardless of its contribution to the gene pool. Once as many dogs as possible are in the archive, we can begin to develop a genetic screening program and pair it with health records, behavioral tests, and results from our NAT and IHD tests. Eventually, we may have much better predictors to screen potential sires and dams not only for orthopedic diseases, but also for other inherited traits, like pointing ability and cooperation. But, this is a long-term plan. The primary statistician from the Cornell team suggested that we can use the information we already have available as a first step. They also hastened to point out that this should not be a “cold-potatoes”, mathematical approach to breeding Griffons, simply another arrow for the Breeding Committee’s quiver.

Here is the process we plan to follow:

- 1) *Cornell ships us blood collection kits to several central locations.*
- 2) *We ask members to make a special effort to attend this summer’s exposure days and spring and fall tests with all their dogs.*
- 3) *We ask (or hire) a veterinarian to attend and collect blood samples from all dogs attending.*
- 4) *We take pictures (front, side, rear) of each dog with a white board showing*

*the dog's name, WPGCA number, and the date.*

- 5) Each owner signs a Cornell permission form.*
- 6) The samples are kept on ice and all shipped to Cornell. Photos and other data are transferred electronically.*
- 7) Cornell extracts the DNA, keeping it in a frozen archive indefinitely (they have the best backup freezers and power supplies), and they enter the data into an online database to which the WPGCA Education and Research Foundation (E&RF) has access.*
- 8) The cost to get to this stage will be about \$25 per dog. We are suggesting that the WPGCA E&RF pay this directly to Cornell, and we are asking each national club member to make an equivalent, tax-deductible donation to the WPGCA E&RF.*

If we provide as much health information as possible on all our club dogs using our current WPGCA health forms that Greg Hurtig (**Max of the Hundgaard** and **Blazing Star of the Sandhill**, Rock Springs, WI) developed, we also can begin assessing the genetic nature of particular diseases. In addition, the Cornell team will provide a behavior questionnaire that is a set of simple questions the owner can fill out from home. None of the data will be shared with anyone outside the group at Cornell for any purpose without the WPGCA E&RF's express permission. Once an identification number is given to a dog in the Cornell database we can add further information as it becomes available. We are working on a formal cooperative agreement with Cornell to protect both our interests and to allow further collaboration. For dogs not able to make it to group collection sites, we still need their blood samples and collection kits and protocols can be sent to individual members. The main drawback is cost: individual blood collection and shipping individual samples will be more expensive. In that case, the member would be asked to pay for their own vet fee and to make a larger donation (\$50?) to the WPGCA E&RF to cover the individual shipping cost. By the way, Cornell has a special agreement with FEDEX for shipping such samples at a greatly reduced cost, thus passing those savings on to WPGCA E&RF.

The next step will be to actually analyze the DNA itself, mapping parts of the genome as recommended by the scientists. This will entail additional costs, primarily in scientific and technical staff time. Dr. Todhunter and others with whom he works would like the WPGCA and the WPGCA E&RF to apply for research grants collaboratively with them to cover these costs. In addition, they will work with the Breeding Committee to train them how to use the results and to do more analyses themselves. This all, obviously, is a huge undertaking but can bring us into some brand new genetic territory for continuing to improve our beloved Griffons. Maybe we will understand, someday in the not too distant future, much more about Jeanie with the liver-ticked hair. Not that we care about her hair color, but we do care about the probability of her loving the water.

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*For those interested, the URL associated with the Cornell program that was set up for Labrador Retrievers is (<http://www.vet.cornell.edu/research/bvhip/>). By the way,*

## No Easy Decisions

By

Charles Dahlstrom

I was resting comfortably in my reclining lawn chair, enjoying the thick, moist heat of mid-August in Missouri. The Italian tenor, Andrea Bocelli, was bellowing out an aria from the stereo speaker on the deck. I took a long, deep swig from my ice cold brewski. Three-year-old **Berkano of Hundgaard** had roused **TJ of Plum Creek** from a shady nap and the two were playing keep-a-way with one of their “shared” nylon bones. **Berk** was loping elegantly and confidently around the perimeter of the yard while nine-year-old **TJ** repeatedly attempted to *cut her off at the pass*. Compared to Berk’s powerful and graceful surges of fluid motion, **TJ**’s old legs could muster only meager and stiff-legged spurts which served as dim reminders of days gone by. I winced and felt a tinge of sadness in recognizing **TJ**’s growing limitations; I slunk deeper into my chair and closed my eyes.

“YOWL!” **TJ**’s painful scream jolted me from my tranquility. She stood at the far corner of the yard, precariously balanced on three legs, whimpering, her right hind foot several inches off the ground. She took a step and again howled in pain. I went immediately to her and had to scold **Berk** repeatedly for shoulder bumping the older, and now-crippled Griffon.

Within a couple days **TJ** was stepping gingerly on that back leg. I assumed the problem had been a pulled muscle, and since she was improving, we didn’t seek any professional help. But four weeks after the initial injury, with our annual trip to Minnesota to hunt woodcock and Ruffed Grouse with Paul Stadem, Bob Rock, the Coils, Todd Haugen and their sizable fleet of able-bodied Griffs fast approaching, **TJ** still had a noticeable limp; off to our vet we went.

“Sounds like a classic cranial cruciate ligament (CCL) rupture,” suggested our vet as I described the injury and **TJ**’s slow and limited improvement [CCL in a dog is equivalent to the ACL in humans and is the most common orthopedic injury in dogs]. She took an x-ray to rule out damage to the bones and checked the knee for the presence of “drawer movement.” Drawer movement means that the heads of the femur and tibia “slide” front and back across one another in addition to the joint’s normal hinge action. Both the x-ray and drawer test confirmed her suspicion and a diagnosis of partial CCL tear was made.

Our vet patiently described two possible surgical procedures: 1) Tibial Plateau Leveling Osteotomy (TPLO) in which the head of the tibia is cut, rotated 180 degrees and then reattached with plates and screws. This structural change provides more stability in the joint. In our area this procedure is performed only by specialists and costs about \$4,000. 2) Extracapsular surgery in which heavy suture material is used to replace the damaged ligament. Our general-practice veterinarian had performed many of these “fishing line” procedures to the tune of about \$1,000. But she advised that the stresses and orthopedic demands on a hunting dog were substantial; TPLO was the

treatment of choice for a dog like **TJ**. Almost as an after thought, the vet also mentioned the option of: “restricting her activity for a couple months...but that seldom works with big active dogs.” I felt like the proverbial “whipped pup” as we left the office. We would need to think long and hard about these expensive choices.

But before we proceed with this tale of canine injury and financial woe, here’s a bit of history. **TJ** has had more than her share of lousy luck and expensive medical care in her nine years, a few of which have been chronicled in this newsletter. Besides the usual number of losing-end encounters with barbed wire fences, skunks, and porcupine quills, **TJ** had suffered a broken bone in a front foot during her first season, a broken bone in a rear foot at age two, and a pneumothorax after impaling herself on a steel rod at age five. This escapade required an emergency midnight drive across three states and a week in intensive (read *expensive*) care. She’d sampled a few sips of antifreeze at age six, and a chewed a handful of Decon rat poison pellets a few months later, both of which required charcoal lavages. Additionally, x-rays revealed a moderate degree of arthritis in her bum knee.

I might be channeling my “inner standup comic” right now, but I’m on a roll, so please bear with me. At about the time that **TJ** nibbled on the Decon, whimsical **Berkano of Hundgaard** joined our family pack. She quickly contributed to the deflation of

our bank accounts with a course of bi-lateral osteochondritis dissecans (OCD) in her shoulders, which required arthroscopic surgery. **TJ** has done an encore with a relapsing and remitting kidney disorder in which her urine does not adequately concentrate. The diagnosis of this problem has yet eluded us and our vet (whom incidentally has officially joined the ranks of the nation’s wealthy), but **TJ**’s condition may turn out to be diabetes insipidus. If that’s the case, we can look forward to a maintenance medication for about three dollars a day. I’ve told my lovely and tolerant wife that if this keeps up, I’ll have to auction off my guns and boots in order to afford the luxury of my hunting dogs sleeping peacefully by the fireplace, while I defer my retirement well beyond my golden years.

Again, I appreciate your willingness to read on as I vent my frustra-

**T.J.** in the field with her custom-made stifle orthotic made by Animal Orthocare.

*Photo by Charles Dahlstrom*



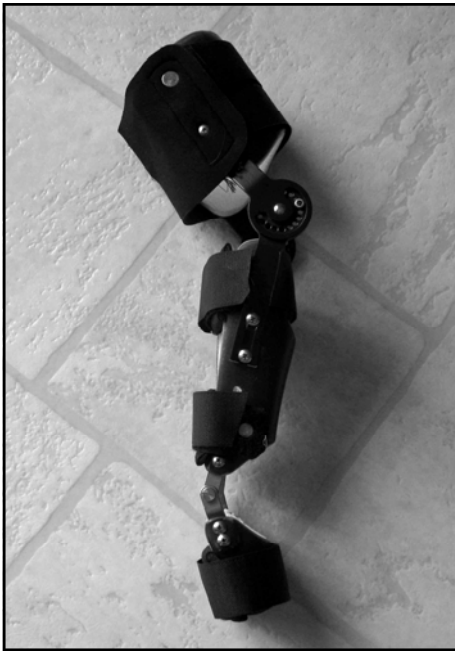
tions a bit and try to find some humor in the ways in which we sporting folks spend our hard-earned cash. If we can't laugh at ourselves and our circumstances, how will we ever learn anything worthwhile about this life? But I also recognize full well the sorrow suffered by club members who have had to say premature farewells to their wirehaired hunting partners. I suspect many of them would gladly trade places (and checkbooks) with me for one more season afield with their loyal Griffis. Nevertheless, we all have limits to which we must reconcile ourselves; I was bumping up against the limits of my bank accounts.

So here were the facts as we knew them at the time of **TJ**'s diagnosis: she was nine years old with a torn CCL in her right knee. She had a moderate degree of arthritis in both knees as well as the recurring and undiagnosed kidney dysfunction. The recommended surgery cost four grand and the "cheap" surgical fix would set us back a thousand dollars. Neither surgery could be performed with arthroscopy, so both were highly invasive procedures. Both surgeries also included several months of restricted activity and rehabilitation. Add to this growing list of complications the fact that when one CCL "blows out," the other ruptures within a year in about forty percent of the cases.

In our family, big decisions require face-to-face discussions at the kitchen table. Paper and pencil and a review of the pros and cons are mandatory. In the first go-round of discussions, we considered several rationales: 1) it's only money; 2) **TJ** is one of the family; 3) she's given her best in the field and now she deserves the best of care; 4) what line item of our current family budget do we X-out to cover the costs; 5) how much is four grand amortized over her life expectancy; 6) what is the life expectancy of a nine-year-old Griff with weak kidneys; 7) is there a mandatory retirement age for a Wirehaired Pointing Griffon. These were the questions with which we grappled as hours of discussion turned into days of uncertainty. Eventually we had reeled off weeks of indecision.

As the leaves of September began to turn colors, I did what all good academicians do when procrastination paralyzes the decision making process: I researched. I hit the books and read all I could on CCL injuries. But alas, my expertise is in human psychology so I was quickly lost in the maze of surgical procedures and technical orthopedic jargon of the veterinary science journals. Thus I lowered my sights, as it were, and turned to non-academic online materials and resources. Please remember that the recommendation by our very competent veterinarian, in whom we have enormous respect and trust, was TPLO surgery. What follows in this article is largely anecdotal information and a course of action pieced together by this (arguably) reasonably intelligent, but financially-limited dog handler.

As I searched, I began to encounter the term "Conservative Management" (CM) which I came to understand as the "restricted activity" approach mentioned by my vet way back at the beginning of this adventure. According to a listserve (see References below) I stumbled upon, CM of a CCL injury has largely been practiced with small dogs. It involves severely restricting activities for at least eight weeks. During that time, collagen from the injury collects around the joint and begins to harden into scar tissue.



Close-up shot of T.J.'s custom orthotic.

*Photo by Charles Dahlstrom*

During this highly restricted period, it is recommended that the dog be either crated or penned. No running, jumping, or stairs are allowed. Floors should be covered with rugs so that slips leading to re-injury are avoided. The initial eight weeks of restriction are followed by a slowly progressing rehabilitation program over the next several months. I was impressed with the number of success stories chronicled on this list serve. Something I found particularly interesting was a claim that the sutures of the extracapsular (or fishing line) procedure almost always eventually tear or break and it is the hardened collagen and scar tissue which provides the long-term stability for the knee joint. This was confirmed by our vet, so I started to seriously consider the CM approach.

I also began reading about canine orthotic stifle (knee) braces. These braces were often used post-surgery to protect the joint, but a number of folks were using the brace as an alternative to surgery. The brace prevents the

damaging drawer movement of the knee, thus allowing the collagen to develop and harden. There are several manufacturers of these braces. Some of the cheaper ones come in pre-made sizes (e.g. small, medium and large). These contraptions include rods and straps of various lengths which are adjusted to fit the dog and to limit joint movement. Other orthotic brace providers custom-fit their braces by having a cast of the dog's leg made as a model. Prices on these custom braces ranged from \$350 to \$600. I contacted the proprietor of one of these companies ([www.animalorthocare.com](http://www.animalorthocare.com)) and found the gentleman to be helpful and responsive to my concerns. He asked relevant questions about **TJ's** lifestyle and my expectations for an outcome. He was clear to caution me that using a combination of CM and an orthotic brace on a nine-year-old, high energy dog with arthritis would be challenging; a recovery to pre-injury status was not a reasonable expectation.

"If you are up to the discipline of the CM approach and work with me to get a proper fit of the brace, we can stabilize the knee joint and hopefully give her knee time to heal; but there are no guarantees on the outcome." Since I worked in the car business for several years in a previous life, I'd grown cautious of overly optimistic sales pitches; I appreciated his caution and candor.

So, we bit the proverbial bullet and ordered the casting kit (in the interest of full disclosure, Animal Orthocare agreed to allow us a discount on the price of the brace in exchange for writing an article on our experience with it). My nurse/assistant (who dou-

bles as my lovely and tolerant wife) and I managed to make a reasonable likeness of **TJ**'s limb and sent the cast off to the manufacturer. The brace arrived about ten days later and was easy to mount. Of course, **TJ** hated it and tried to chew it off immediately, but after some supervision, she began to put weight on the leg and brace. Her movements looked pretty strange at first and reminded me of the first time I fitted her with hunting boots. After a couple weeks of use, we sent a video of her walking with the brace to the manufacturer for review. In viewing the video, Animal Orthocare recommended some adjustments, which had to be done at the factory. The subsequent changes made it easier for her to walk and even run a bit. After a couple months, I actually took **TJ** on a short hunt in a level milo field, which had grown heavily infested with pheasants. She had several points, although I didn't dare take a shot. I feared I might wing a bird, and I knew I could never call her off a scrambling rooster.

By January, **TJ** was tolerating the brace well and I believed the dog-gods (try to say that phrase three times very quickly) had smiled on us. But as the saying goes: "... the best laid plans and mice and men..." **TJ** slipped on a patch of ice and came up lame on her left side. Our vet confirmed our fears: a CCL tear on her *good* side. We opted not to buy a second brace (no more line items in the family budget were deemed expendable) and actually we stopped using the brace altogether. I feared that even the slight awkwardness of using one brace would place additional demand on the other side. We simply chose to use the CM approach and limited her activity. Thus we awarded **TJ** a gold watch and offered her an early retirement from the field. She accepted this dubious promotion reasonably well. She goes along on all of our hunts and outings, although she is largely confined to the vehicle.

Despite her retirement, **TJ** still shows her tenacity by clearing all rabbits and squirrels from the back yard on a daily basis. She just does so more slowly; she sort of ushers them off our property. And I do not remember the last time a rooster pheasant crapped on our front steps. I attribute that good fortune to **TJ**'s keen game sharpness. Occasionally she slips or twists the wrong way and suffers for a day or two with a heavy limp. We manage those times with some aspirin. All in all, **TJ** does pretty well as she approaches her tenth birthday. Heck, in some ways she does better than I do. We've accepted the fact that she will never hunt again. But we're very proud of her, and despite the challenges, still pleased as punch that she came to our home to spend her life.

To those Griffoniers unfortunate enough to have their wiry cohort suffer a CCL injury, we hope this information is useful. In my non-professional view, depending on the age and health of your Griff, your expectations for their recovery, and your own financial resources, the CM approach +/- the orthotic brace is an option to consider during your own kitchen table discussions.

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