

# *The Gun Dog Supreme*

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Dear Readers,

Hooray!!!! At long last, the June GDS is finally complete. My sincere apologies for being so late. My dogs were a little less than thrilled (see above) that I spent so much time pecking away at the computer keyboard this summer but the work finally did get done.

There are four wonderful and distinctly different articles in this issue. John Pitlo wrote a comprehensive and very enlightening piece on the complexities of dog breeding. I have a new found respect for what it really takes to get the job done and get puppies on the ground! Jon Coil sent in a touching tribute to their griffon **Bartos of Marsh Stream** that includes a photo of the late pheasant tracking maestro. Glenn Lehrer and Andy Rupp also contributed articles related to training and hunting. I hope you enjoy them all.

*Anna Christina Artz*

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Cover Photo: "C litter" pup of Sandhill, bred by Pete Engman. Arthur's Pal of the Mid-night Sun x Andrew Phillip of Sourdough Trail. *Photo by Kirk Dilly*

## **Trials & Tribulations (or not) of a WPGCA Breeder**

*By  
John Pitlo*

It all started with a call from Jim Seibel (WPGCA Breeding Committee) asking me if I wanted to breed **Ayla of Ancient Kennel** again this year. I told him I would talk it over with Viv – after all, she is the one that really spends hours and hours playing with pups and getting them socialized. Viv said OK and I got back in touch with Jim – now we had to decide on a male. After some deliberation, it was decided to use **Badgah of Willow Springs** (owned by Ted and Sandi Silver) who lives in Maine. I had to check my calendar. I always write the date when I notice first blood on my females when they begin coming into the heat cycle. According to my calendar, she should have come into season in the first part of April. So, when the Heartland Spring Test date arrived (April 15-17, 2011) and no sign of Ayla coming into season, we both began to worry a little. But not to worry, 2 days after the Heartland Test we noticed the first telltale sign of blood.

Jim, Ken Hurtig and I had been to a canine reproduction, genetics and nutrition seminar in June of 2010 at Iowa State University (ISU). At the seminar, we learned about a new procedure called Trans-cervical insemination (TCI). We first heard of this procedure from Dr. Hutchison in a judge's seminar on reproduction he led several years ago. TCI method for fertilizing a bitch was now being conducted regularly at ISU. In this procedure, chilled semen is used and is shipped overnight and used the second day after collection. The advantages of this procedure compared to surgical artificial insemination (AI) of frozen semen are numerous and include:

1. no surgery required
2. no sedation required
3. chilled semen lives from 3-5 days in the female compared to 12-18 hrs for frozen semen (thus a much broader window of opportunity for a pregnancy)
4. several TCI's can be performed several days apart to increase the probability of a successful insemination and thus fertilization
5. the procedure takes only 10-15 minutes and is done in the lab with the owner of the bitch present

Once the decision was made to use the TCI method, I reached out to all the individuals who would be helping. First, I made several calls to ISU and also to Sandie Silver explaining our intentions. Sandie put me in touch with Dr. Julie Keene who would collect semen from **Badgah** and ship it to ISU. Dr. Keene had collected semen before from **Badgah** in a routine test to check on volume, motility, etc and was also very familiar with the method. At ISU, Dr. Linda Kauffman would do the procedure. In subsequent days, I also sent e-mails to all the people who were involved with this breeding to make sure we were all on the same page and things would go smoothly. Meanwhile, I had contacted our local veterinarians office about blood draws to get progesterone tests

completed and they had contacted ISU on how they wanted the sample handled. We were assured that at the local stop for UPS pick-up that we could get overnight shipments to ISU of the blood sample.

After we noticed the first signs of blood, I e-mailed Dr. Kauffman and asked her when she wanted me to take the first blood draw to check Ayla's progesterone level (Dr. Keene and the Silvers in Maine were cc'd on these e-mails). Dr. Kauffman said she wanted the first blood draw on Friday, April 22 for delivery at ISU on April 23. All went well until I received a phone call from Dr. Kauffman on Saturday AM that the sample had not arrived. For some reason the local pick-up stop for UPS had not made the right notations on the shipping label that would have guaranteed Saturday delivery. The sample arrived on Monday and the progesterone level was 0.77 and was considered baseline (for progesterone, anything less than 1.0 is usually considered baseline).

Another blood draw was completed on Monday, April 25 and shipped to ISU. This sample arrived in Tuesday and the progesterone was 1.3, so Ayla was moving along in her heat cycle. Blood was again collected on Wed., April 27 and shipped as before. However, even after having been given explicit instructions on how to ship the sample, a different assistant at the local veterinarian's office was convinced to use overnight AIR delivery. The sample ended up in Kentucky on Thursday, April 28, at the same time that area of the country was having terrible weather and tornadoes. We are unsure whatever happened to that sample.

Now we were in a real predicament. Should we take a Friday blood sample and hope that all would be well with a Saturday delivery? Or could it be entirely possible that her progesterone level could be at 5.0 on Friday and that would mean she had ovulated and we needed to get the semen there ASAP? We would not know this until Saturday. Excellent! This would leave very little time to work with. As usual, these things were happening on a weekend when no shipping is done.

After some consultation with Dr. Kauffman, we opted to drive to ISU early on Friday, arriving around 8 AM, got her blood sample, and then Viv and I returned directly home. The reason we needed to get there early was to get a progesterone level from the ISU lab and if it was high enough, Dr. Kauffman could call Dr. Keene and she could do a collection from **Badgah** that afternoon and ship it overnight for a Saturday insemination. About half-way home we got a call from Dr. Kauffman informing us Ayla's progesterone was 3.4, a nice elevation since Monday, but no ovulation yet. Oh yes, I forgot to mention the a round trip to Ames, Iowa is about 6 ½ hrs (440 miles). Well, at least I could enjoy the weekend because Andy Yeast and his young son Nick were coming over to hunt turkey this weekend and this would be Nick's first real chance to kill a gobbler. The weekend went all too fast and Monday at 4:30 AM, Viv and I were once again getting some windshield time, heading west to Ames and ISU. We arrived at 8 AM sharp and in no time Dr. Kauffman had taken Ayla's blood sample and we were back on the road headed for home. Viv and I both had commitments early Tuesday morning so we had decided that regardless of the progesterone level, we needed to be home Monday night. Half-way home we received the call from Dr. Kauffman. Great



news! Ayla's progesterone level was 14.0!!! In Dr. Kauffman's best estimation, Ayla had probably ovulated sometime on Saturday. Phone calls went out to both Dr. Keene and to Sandie Silver letting them know we needed to collect semen from **Badgah** that day and ship it overnight. About 2 PM (central time) I received a call from Sandie. They were having some problems collected from **Badgah** and Dr. Keene was on vacation, but she would be back around 4:30 (that's 3:30 central time). I'm already getting worried that they will not be able to collect the semen in time to get it to FedEx for next day delivery. I received an e-mail from Dr. Keene (5:30 eastern time) that she is on the way to the FedEx shipping station with the semen. Apparently, several dogs that were coming into season had arrived at her clinic for a blood sample to get a progesterone test. These bitches were far enough in their heat cycles to get **Badgah** going (finally we got the break and luck we needed!!!!).

Tuesday it was up at 5 AM to get our commitments out of the way, then hit the road by 8AM for our 11:15 appointment with Dr. Kauffman. There was no need to be there earlier because the FedEx delivery arrives between 10-11:00 AM. As I check in, I'm relieved to hear Dr. Kauffman tell me that my "swimmers" have arrived and they will be with **Ayla** shortly. Twenty minutes later **Ayla** and I are back in the parking lot, procedure completed and we are free for the rest of the day. I have lunch with an old friend from college that still lives in Ames, then drive to Johnston, Iowa and spend the night with Andy & Chenny Yeast and family. The next morning I make a quick stop at Bass Pro for an insulated sweatshirt and **Ayla** and I are back at ISU at 11:30 for a repeat performance. In Dr. Kauffman's opinion, it might be too late for a second TCI if we were

to wait until Thursday.

The TCI went smoothly. I was able to watch on the screen as Dr. Kauffman inserted the endoscope into **Ayla** and proceed along the tract that connects the vagina with the uterus. There were lots of folds along the way, but with the use of a small rubber ball to inject some air into the tract to open it up, the Dr. could see where she was and where she was going. After about 5 minutes, she said “there is the uterus opening” and with the scope aimed right at the opening, a very small hollow tube was inserted into the uterus. A syringe with the semen was attached to the other end of the small hollow tube and the semen injected directly into the uterus. **Ayla** was massaged for several minutes by a vet student while Dr. Kauffman put several drops of semen on a compound scope to check motility. It looked good, with about 70-75% motility.

Now for the “the rest of the story” of the no trials and tribulations of a WPGCA breeder. As Jim and I were discussing our breeding strategy for the coming year, we decided we would like to have Bob Bullock breed his female **Anne of Glacier Ridge** again. She had had a nice litter 2 years ago and Bob had kept one of the female pups. Jim called Bob and he thought **Anne** would not be in season for another month or two, but his young female (**Annabelle Star of Arrowrock**) was coming in. He was concerned about this because he was running **Annebelle** in the IHDT test in Idaho in March and did not want to affect his dogs performance. Several days later Jim received a call from Bob that **Anne** was now finally coming into season as well. This happens quite often in a household with several females – they may not come into season at the same time initially, but after a period of time, they almost always cycle together.

Now Bob had a dilemma, because right after he was to run his young female in the IHDT, he and the family were going on a ski vacation for spring break. Reservations and down payments had already been made. In addition to that, the male we intended to use, **Boone of Salmon River**, was not coming to the test as his owner, Greg Miyauchi had other commitments. Jim and I were going to the Idaho Test to help judge, so we talked about it and decided on the following plan. Bob Bullock would leave his female **Anne** at Gary (President of the WPGCA) and Ann Pool’s residence (Jim and I were staying there also). Andy Rupp (Greg’s friend) would bring **Boone** to the Idaho Test and to Gary’s house and we would see what happened. On Saturday night we got the 2 dogs together and after about 20 minutes of playing around, there was a good tie. We separated the dogs and did not let them together on Sunday. On Monday morning, just before Jim and I headed back to the Midwest, we had another tie. And on Tuesday night, Gary got the dogs together and had another good tie.

Greg Miyauchi finally arrived on Wednesday to pick up his male and Bob Bullock arrived on Thursday morning to pick up his female – all nicely bred and ready to take home – no hassles, no worries, no phone calls, no e-mails, no screw-ups with UPS or semen shipments, no long drives, etc!!! If we get nice litters of pups from both breedings it will all have been worth it, regardless of the effort it took. And as you can see – sometimes it takes the efforts of a lot of dedicated people doing whatever needs to be done to get the job completed.

## TRAINING YOUR WIFE TO BE A DOG HANDLER

By  
*Glenn Lehrer*

**Breely of the Midnight Sun**, our sixth griffon, arrived at the end of July 2009 all of nine weeks old. Lyla my wife of 48 years and registrar of the WPGCA for almost 20 years fell in love with **Breely** at first sight and decided she wanted to be **Breely's** hunting partner and handler for the Natural Ability Test. Lyla has hunted over gun dogs for many years, but never had been personally responsible for the proper field exposure and training of a gun dog. The comments and lessons learned that follow are the result of a husband trying to train his wife to train a dog and a wife trying to make her husband, which she has spent years training, understand her problems with the process. **Breely** was three months old when our Montana hunting season began and too young to hunt. She was exposed to wild birds at a bit before four months of age. Conditioning to a 22 caliber rifle and then a shotgun took place over a two week period before bird exposure.



COMMENTS: Lyla-Training your own hunting dog is a lot more difficult than just hunting over a gun dog someone else is handling. The time I spent exposing **Breely** to stores in town, travel, motels, other dogs, people, kids, working on a leash, and being staked out before she was ready to hunt really helped her deal with all types of situations later during our hunts together. The time I invested in exposing her to natural habit, conditioning both of us, and staying connected with me in the field really paid off. We did not lose each other even once during the hunting season! Bonding comes with time spent with your dog. I wish I had spent more time getting to be a better shot with a shotgun. It's important that you can hit the birds your young dog points. I had to get Glenn's help to get that first rooster we shot. I tried to let **Breely** concentrate on her work in the field locating birds by not talking to her much. This was hard for me to do as I always wanted her within sight and to work close to me. I learned that when she is on bird scent, it is up to me to let her take control and to be quiet. **Breely** bumped many birds before she pointed her first one. She tried to catch them as they flew. It was hard for me not to shoot, but Glenn reminded me that **Breely** needed to learn how to point,

not flush. When she decided she could not catch the birds, she started pointing. With every bird that she pointed and was shot, her pointing instinct became stronger. We did not hunt with Glenn and our older griffon, **Bessie**, as we did not want **Breely** to play, compete, or be distracted her first hunting season. We also wanted her to feel secure on her own with just me as her hunting partner.

COMMENTS: Glenn-**Breely** slept and traveled in a dog crate until she was 14 months old at which time she was secure there and the chewing instinct had abated as she had her permanent teeth. Lyla, at first, had a hard time at first letting **Breely** do what comes natural-search for birds in a large expanse of land. **Breely** would get out of sight for a minute and Lyla would want to call her back to work close to her. I advised Lyla to hide from **Breely** and let pup find Lyla from time to time. I also told Lyla to change directions from time to time so her pup had to stay in contact with Lyla. It worked! **Breely** was cooperative and wanted to stay in contact with Lyla even though she was a big running dog. Lyla also had to learn that when her pup was tracking a bird or had bird scent, it was up to Lyla to let the dog control the hunting process. **Bessie** and **Breely** played together all the time, but we did not let them hunt together this first season. **Breely** had not been taught to “whoa” at this point and Lyla could not be sure she would “back” a **Bessie** point. **Bessie** was really a help during the summer in getting the younger dog to cross streams and get used to swimming in a pond or lake. **Bessie** gave the pup more security in that particular situation. In hunting **Breely**, Lyla would only hunt her for short periods of time such as an hour in the morning and the same in the afternoon. **Breely** was never hunted in areas where there was an “overload” of birds to confuse her and cause her to want to chase. Hunting for short intense periods of time,





often, with single bird contacts developed **Breely's** pointing instinct very quickly. Obviously, we never used "planted" birds to expose **Breely** as we were afraid the pup might catch the bird and learn to "flush" and chase more than "point". Lyla would quit hunting as the season went on when her pup started hunting in a linear pattern or got "wild" by chasing flushed birds instead of concentrating and "pointing". If hunting is no longer fun for our gun dog, we should quit for the day. When **Breely** pointed, I told Lyla to shoot up in the air if it was a hen to honor the pup's point. I still do that with **Bessie**, our finished gun dog, if she has done a nice job on a hen and we do not have birds in the bag. Doing this lets our gun dog know that they have done the right thing. Whenever possible, I would put Lyla and **Breely** at a drop off point so that they could work into the wind on the hunt back to the truck. Doing that gave the young pup more opportunity to scent the bird and point without "bumping" the bird by mistake. By the end of the hunting season, both Lyla and **Breely** were ready for the Natural Ability Test.

LESSONS LEARNED: Lyla- 1.Exposing and training your own griffon is more work, more complicated, more fun, and more rewarding than I expected. 2. Outside temperature and proper watering of your gun dog, wind direction, and too many birds are all factors that affect the success of the hunt. 3. Knowing generally where your dog is at all times does not mean the dog has to be in sight at all times. 4. Be patient with your young dog on the retrieving of dead birds. Young pups will want to run around a bit with the bird before bringing it to you. Walk them down to get the bird if they begin to chew on it. 5. Lots of praise, love, and touch lead to a bonding that is closer than one based on harsh correction or harsh commands. Give commands to your dog when you know you have control of the situation. **Breely** turned out to be a hard running, big search dog that had an even temperament, was cooperative, was trusting of me, and even liked to be a lap dog once in a while. 6. Lots of touch on all parts of a pup's body to include head, mouth, eyes, ears, and feet before the hunting season makes it much easier to provide coat, eye, and foot maintenance after each hunting foray. Even though **Breely** had a good coat and tight eyes, we had to brush her especially around the ears and flush her eyes out with eye rinse solution after most hunts.

LESSONS LEARNED: Glenn-1. I hunted **Breely** also during the hunting season. If two people are working a dog, it is critical that both use the same commands and techniques or the dog will be confused and slower in the learning process. 2. Always end exposure sessions and lessons in the field on a good note for your wife and the dog. 3. Don't overwork your wife or gun dog to the point that they become bored or agitated, as that will cause problems! 4. Be patient, don't push, give room for mistakes, and give lots of encouragement if you want your wife to succeed. Breely pointed her first bird, a hen pheasant, at four months and six days and had her first rooster shot over her two days later. She was hunted 29 days during her first season and ended up with nine pheasants, all pointed, to her credit. Apparently, Lyla and **Breely** had a good first season together which was followed by a successful Natural Ability Test in Jerome, Idaho in March of 2010. Lyla was so encouraged with my help and teaching her while she exposed and hunted Breely that she is considering doing the same with **Addy of Wolf Fork Canyon**, born August 2010, our seventh griffon. I think we are going to make it to our 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary this August!

## A Sunny Day in January

by Jon Coil

It is zero degrees with a beautiful blue sky. The sweat is trickling into my eyes and where it beads in my hair below my cap. It is freezing. With the snow scoop, I had shoveled a twenty yard path through two feet of snow. I switched to a #2 shovel and cut through the sod, flipping the chunks to the side of the hole. I was soon into the soft wet sand and piled that along side the sod. It is such an unusual winter with no frost entering the ground even at the end of January because of the heavy blanket of snow.

***Bartos of Marsh Stream** had just found a crippled rooster by sound. The weather was beautiful for a Minnesota pheasant hunt, a still overcast day with an inch of snow. The cattails sloughs were frozen solid. It was great to be out. The rooster flushed wild from the edge of the cattails and dropped at my shot about thirty yards out in the solid stand of cattails. I went with **Bartos** to the drop spot and he got interested. I watched the cattail tops vibrate over **Bartos**, invisible in the thick brown mass, just a few yards away. Now he was stopped, there was only the sea of unmoving cattails, and I thought it strange he would point a wounded bird. He was better than that. He moved a few feet and stopped. After three or four of these short moves then stops, I heard a slight rustling a few feet in front of **Bartos**' location, he was listening and when he heard movement he rushed in. He finally trapped the old rooster with three quarter inch spurs. Great job, but the best was yet to come!*

The end of January, just six weeks after **Bartos**' best track and his run is almost over. **Bartos** had redness around his eye for a couple weeks and the Doctor thought the redness was an allergic reaction. When his hindquarters failed I got him back to the veterinarian and they observed him over the weekend.

*We hunted the edge of the giant slough for another quarter mile to a clump of willows and several pheasants flushed from the far side of the willows. I noticed tracks headed towards another willow clump a hundred and fifty yards away. **Bartos** and I headed there while my brother hunted the cattail edge around the slough towards the willow clump. Seeing tracks adds excitement to the winter hunts, especially in Minnesota where pheasants don't flush in flocks of hundred and one track is discernable in the snow. **Bartos** pointed just into the willows and when I moved in a rooster flushed from the far end of the willows and flew along the edge of the cattails. I took a long shot and the rooster flew down crippled at the cattail edge, we moved up to the spot and **Bartos** entered the cattails. In a few minutes he pointed and I moved up. He moved ahead for a distance and stopped, I moved ahead of him. We did this slow dance for fifteen to twenty minutes through the cattails. I would peer down through the cattails and would often see a pheasant track. The wounded bird or other birds, I couldn't tell.*

*We eventually worked towards the edge of the cattails near a rise of higher ground next to a CRP field. **Bartos**, nose to the ground, took off and quickly disappeared. I went to the edge of the private land and waited..... I climbed up on a downed cottonwood for a*



*better view and waited. Finally I faintly heard the beeper collar and its exciting/annoying call from way out in the CRP field. There was nothing I could do, it was private land and I was stifled by the limits of law. After a couple minutes I heard a rooster cackle from the direction of the collar's beeps and from my vantage point I saw a rooster launch about ten feet into the air then flap down. I relaxed and waited. **Bartos**, carrying the rooster, found me a few minutes later. My brother caught up with us and while I was taking pictures, told me the whole operation took close to a half hour. I could believe it. I was so proud.*

A consultation with the Doctor over the phone didn't leave much hope for **Bartos** and I readied myself to let go. I decided to bring him home to say goodbye. I drove to the hospital early and made the hour long trip back home with a dog that wasn't **Bartos** any more. He did sit up when we turned on the gravel road for the last half mile to the house and while in the house he eagerly took a tidbit of chicken skin from Judy but he was obviously distressed at his body's failing and that helped me focus on the tasks to be done. Judy said her goodbye's and left for work. I finished digging the grave, took a deep breath and went to say a teary good bye to **Bartos**.

Before I buried **Bartos**, I let **Berta of ShowMe-Borealis** and **Aleksander of Cattail Storm** out of the house for a last good-bye. It was an interesting exchange with Berta slowly sniffing his body all the way around while Alek took a couple of quick sniffs and danced off.

I shoveled the wet freezing sand back into the hole. It's not fair...it never is.

## Walking with Hanna

By  
*Andy Rupp*



It was October 2009. My good friend and hunting buddy Greg Miyauchi decided a “kid trip” was in order. We both had children in the 11 to 15 year old bracket. We could obtain North Dakota youth pheasant tags and access to the walk-in acreage one week before regular season. Greg and I would be dog handlers, mentors and guides.

We drove the twelve hours to our destination in North Dakota in Greg’s suburban pulling a small trailer. Besides Greg and myself, inside the SUV were two of Greg’s children. Taber and Logan, ages 14 and 11; as well as my two children Joe and Hanna, ages 15 and 11. Also included were our three Griffons; Blue, Brook and Boone. We arrived around 6 pm and eagerly anticipated the opening morning.

The first fields, while holding some birds, were disappointing. We eventually ended up at a favorite hunting spot, but with most of the crops still not harvested, birds were hard to locate. Late that afternoon we finally found a field with plenty of birds. I sent my oldest with Greg and his sons and concentrated on Hanna. Birds were flying everywhere, but I knew her best chance was a solid point, flush and a bird flying straight away. As Hanna and I worked the field, a cold drizzle set in. Bird after bird got up, I

literally stepped on two in the tall grass, but it wasn't working out for Hanna. Soon she was soaked through and we lined out for the suburban. Meanwhile "the boys" were having the time of their lives. Shouts of joy, dog commands and shotgun blasts could be heard in the distance.

Upon reaching the car, I'm not sure who was more grateful, my 9 year old Griffon Blue, or Hanna, they were both ready to get warm and dry. While the two of them warmed up, I watched the guys in the distance. Suddenly I heard something behind me and glanced over my shoulder. Pheasants were coming out of the uncut sunflowers in groups of fives and tens. I smiled. An hour passed as I waited for the guys to finish their swing and return. After explaining the situation to them we gave a quick push through the CRP. It was some quick furious action as the light began to fade. Smiling and content we headed for the motel.

The next morning after hunting several other areas, again with limited success, we returned. I was more determined then ever to get Miss Hanna her first bird. As we worked down a grassy drainage between fields, Brook my three-year-old Griffon made contact, but the rooster was running and getting child and dog coordinated was a difficult task. Another missed opportunity.

Through the CRP ran a very deep creek, just wide enough that I couldn't jump it, but Brook did. After a few moments she slammed on point, her nose down on the creek bank facing us. I ushered Hanna into position. "Gun up, close your eye, don't point at the dog, cock the hammer, it's gonna happen....it's gonna happen". The young rooster wouldn't fly. The tension was mounting. I couldn't flush the bird. Brook held. It was a standoff. Finally Brook had enough and literally put her nose under the bird to launch it. Hanna turned her head to the side and fired. "Great shot! Nice try!" I shouted. We were getting closer. Fifty yards later, almost the exact same scenario played out. "Hanna right here. Gun up, nose down, don't point at the dog, it's gonna happen, it's gonna happen. Brook O.K.! Brook O.K.! Brook.... " The bird flushed flying straight away, slow, another young bird. As I awaited the report of Hanna's single shot I saw her un-shoulder the weapon. "Hanna!", I exclaimed. "Why didn't you fire?" Very coolly she replied. "YOU, didn't tell me to cock the hammer!" My mouth agape, I muttered to myself and took a deep breath. Several more not near as perfect setups and our trip concluded.

September 2010. Another kid trip planned, this time new territory in South Dakota. My oldest and a friend's son were now too old to qualify as a youth in North Dakota. Negotiations with concerned mothers about missed school, gear packed, dogs loaded, and ten and a half hours later we reached our destination. Once again we were so excited we could hardly contain ourselves.

Hanna and I had practiced shooting clay pigeons out back on several occasions. I was very hopeful things would work out better this time around.

On this trip we had our original group, and several new additions. They were an old

college friend of mine Del Dawson and his son Eli, and a mutual friend, Greg Gingrich and his son Ridgley. Opening morning was a bust. An antelope hunter sat between us, and a lot of pheasants flying back into the uncut sunflowers. We quickly drove to a different area, where we hunted pastureland. Three roosters, two of which Taber shot off of points by **Boone**, Miyauchi's two year old Griffon concluded all of the action for the morning. We looked for new ground and soon pulled into an area with a lake, feed strips of corn and a tree shelterbelt. We unloaded the dogs and headed into the grass. Within minutes **Brook** went on point and a rooster got up. It had begun.

Birds launched from all directions. Shots fired. Still, I looked for a good setup for Hanna. After an hour and a half we circled back to the car. The group palavered a moment, caught our breath and Joe and Eli and Del headed for new ground. Greg and his sons were already underway. Hanna and I swung in next to the lake and followed **Brooks** nose, which was leading us through thigh deep grass. Hanna struggled to keep up, but her cross-country training kicked in and she was close when **Brook** pointed, re-adjusted and pointed again.

"Gun up, squint your eye, hammer back", I commanded. The bird flushed with a roar. A mature rooster sweeping left as it rose over the tall grass. Again, no shot fired. "Hanna!" I exclaimed. "Why didn't you fire!?" "I don't know", she replied. Shaking my head we tried to catch up to **Brook**. A hen flushed wild as I urged Hanna on and **Brook** doubled back, retraced her route, went into her frenzied, "I know you're here" mode, and then locked up. "Walk forward, gun up, it's gonna happen.....it's gonna happen." The bird exploded. Hanna turned her head and fired. Sigh, sigh, deep sigh.

I pushed Hanna forward again. Birds began flushing, a rooster jumped up wild. Another lock. With my hand between her shoulder blades, I literally pushed Hanna into position. "Gun up, hammer cocked. Nose down." The rooster flushed. BANG! The shot cup just missing the bird. "Wow, you were so close. I can't believe you missed him!" "You may have nicked him!" Great Try!" I exclaimed thoroughly pleased with the progress. We pushed on.

As we neared the lake edge, **Brook** went into high gear. "Cock your hammer." "I can't." "What?" "Cock your hammer." "I can't" Taking the single shot from her I tried and tried to cock the hammer. Meanwhile **Brook** had disappeared into some small trees and bushes on the lakeshore. As I continued to try in vain to cock the hammer on her little gun, a rooster erupted and flew straight overhead. Still, I tried to cock the hammer. It would only go part way. And then.....and then..... about fifteen birds blew out of the brush. Several roosters flew directly overhead. Hanna, **Brook** and I watched in silence as they disappeared into the distance.

Day two brought us more opportunities, but not near the rapid succession or quality of situations as the day before. Late that afternoon, it was getting hot. Dogs, kids and dads were wearing down. We made a new push next to a tree row and feed strip, located along the Missouri River bottom. At the end of the row roosters began to flush wild. Too quick and too fast for a 12 year old child. At the end of that push, I watched as

Greg and Logan, his 12-year-old son, follow **Boone** into the sparse grass. Three roosters got up and Logan bagged one of them! I was envious. I wanted the same for Hanna.

Not five minutes later, same road, same field, **Brook** pointed and then re-adjusted. Once again I readied Hanna. The bird flushed about 15 yards out in front of Brook. "Shoot!", I cried. Nothing. Now thoroughly frustrated and exasperated I incredulously asked her, "Why didn't you shoot?" "It was too far out", she replied. Enraged, frustrated, tired and disappointed I found myself bending over and snarling through clenched teeth, "If you don't shoot..... you will never hit one!"

We walked on in silence. I glanced at her. She was chewing on her lower lip trying not to cry. I reached out and touched her shoulder. "I am not mad. I am not mad at you. I just want so badly for you to get a rooster." She smiled a faint smile and we trudged on through the heat.

The next and last morning of our trip, I awoke more determined than ever to get Hanna her first bird. We drove to a new location. Now everyone in the group was trying to set us up. 'Lets hunt it this way, push it that way, put Hanna in the shorter grass.' I was grateful for their consideration. Our initial push resulted in no birds taken. We regrouped and I told them to take the interior of the plot of land. Hanna and I would swing around the corn patch we had just hunted. My belief and hope was a rooster or two lurked in the short grass. Easy walking and a solid point. It could happen. It would happen.

As we separated from the others, **Boone** went to lake, the other dogs followed. All hell broke loose. Yells and shouts of disbelief as birds roiled out from the under the brush. Most of the birds screamed overhead. Hanna never even mounted her gun.

My best hope was still ahead. As we worked the shoreline, **Brook** put up several birds. Hanna and I awaited our golden moment. Finally in the grass, on a small rise, Brook began once again her "I know you're here", intense search. Nose on the ground, tail wagging, first this way and that, she finally locked.

Hanna was in perfect position, gun poised, when the young rooster flushed. I yelled, "Shoot, Hanna shoot", as the bird arced overhead into the sun and then stalled in the stiff breeze, almost motionless. Hanna's gun had tracked him from the start. I held my breath as I sensed the perfect moment to pull the trigger.....

Hanna lowered the weapon, looked at me and said, "Are you sure that's a rooster?"

My jaw dropped, I bent over, and my hands covered my eye's to keep them from bulging out of my head. I felt like someone had just kicked me in the stomach. Quickly however, I erected myself, yesterday's transgression still fresh in my mind. I tried responding calmly despite my over the top blood pressure. "Yes, it was a young rooster, not fully feathered. As it flushed I could see it clearly. Silhouetted, you could not."



Sigh, sigh, double sigh, deep sigh.

We continued on as my hunter's blood, slowly went from a boil to a simmer. Not 45 seconds later Hanna asked, "Do you have a plastic bag? I found these really cool weed flower heads. See?", she said holding out her hand. "Mom would like these!" Several more seconds passed as we walked in the grass. **Brook** was still doing her best to shake out more birds. The sun was high, the sky was a crisp blue and the stiff breeze picked up. In the distance I could hear the reports and yells of "the boys". I could see birds flushing overhead and even a turkey got up and flew over the trees.

"DAD.....Dad", Hanna brought me around. "I need to get a sunflower seed head to take to mom. She wants one for her birds." "We'll make sure we get her one honey." Sigh. Her blaze orange fingernails painted especially for the occasion flashed in the sunlight as she brushed a strand of hair out of her face.

"Is the truck close?" "Just up the road", I replied. Slowly the light began to break through the dark clouds in my brain. I shook my head and smiled softly as it hit me. I wasn't hunting with Hanna. I was out for a walk with her. She just wanted to be there with me. This was our bonding time. Perhaps like no other time. I reached down and took her right hand into my left hand. We walked on in silence, enjoying the moment.

Walking with Hanna. How could I have missed it for so long?