1-2019

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70 YEARS OF HUNTING WITH DOGS & FRIENDS

Edward Crozier
The man with the dog on the cover and the individual pictured above is my great grandfather, Thaddeus Tschepe, who was a gamekeeper/forester for Count Nostiz of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Thaddeus presumably served as a guide for the Count when he hunted his estate in the Rokytnice area in what was known then as the Sudetenland area of Czechoslovakia, now known as the Czech Republic. His dog appears to be a Labrador type dog, but probably more of a hound type used for hunting hares, deer, etc. My grandmother told me that if Thaddeus’s dogs didn’t obey his commands, he would shoot them. That was probably a rare occurrence, but was vivid in my grandmother’s memory.
My first hunting dog was an Irish Setter called “Red”. He was given to me as a pup by Wayne DeSart, the Chevrolet Dealer across Main Street from our home in the Jasper, MN lumberyard. Wayne also gave me my first real shotgun – a double barrel 12 ga. shotgun when I was about 15. It must have had open chokes, as I was very successful with it. Red was never trained, as I knew nothing about hunting dogs, particular pointing dogs. When I was drafted into the army after college my folks could no long keep Red in the lumberyard so they gave him to a farmer friend. I never learned of his fate.

In a town of 700 where everyone knew about everyone, I walked up Main Street to school every day for 12 years (1940 – 1952) so the merchants knew me and being in a small town, they knew I was interested in the outdoors. Consequently, besides Wayne giving me a gun and dog, the banker, Hap Sanderson, loaned me his great duck boat for several seasons, the druggist gave me a canvas kayak and the tavern owner gave me a large cage and young raccoon that became a household pet.

This is Irish, Wayne DeSart’s Irish Setter, the sire of Red. Wayne spent a lot of time in the City Liquor Store and Irish was trained to do tricks for the liquor store inhabitants. Irish once saved Wayne’s life when Wayne was stuck in the mud of a duck slough and couldn’t get out by himself. He gabbed Irish’s tail who pulled him out of the slough.

Jasper kids roamed the surrounding pastures and creeks with guns starting at a young age, probably about 12/14 yrs., with no training. Guns going off at the wrong time & place were not unusual, sometimes in town & sometimes with serious results.
My second hunting dog was “Torg”, a Golden Retriever. He too was given to me, this time by Bart Foster, the Administrative Officer at the HQ of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge at Winona, MN who raised and sold Goldens. At the time, I was the Manager of the Cassville District of the Refuge. Bart brought down his Golden Retriever to help band Wood Ducks. Along with wife, Caryl, we herded wood ducks up to the end of sloughs and into the brush with the District’s 15 ft sport boat. Bart would send out his dog who would bring back ducklings or young ducks unhurt, which we would band and release. We lost only one duckling, probably killed by getting snagged in the brush as the dog brought it back to the boat. It was a phenomenal performance and I said, “I have to have a dog like that”. Later that summer, Don Gray, the senior Refuge Manager at the Winona HQ office brought a golden retriever puppy to Cassville in his govt. car saying the pup was a gift from Bart. We never understood why Bart gave the pup to me unless it was because of his blond coloring, which made him less likely to be sold.

Shortly after, we were transferred to North Dakota where I became one of the two first wetland delineation biologists selecting wetland areas to be purchased as Waterfowl Production Areas. We were stationed at first at the Jamestown Wetland Acquisition Office, and then soon I became the Manager of the Tewaukon National Wildlife Refuge in SE ND. This photo above of Torg and our daughter, Michelle, was taken on the Sisseton Hills just south of the refuge, which is on the flat wetland-scattered landscape in the background. I still did not know how to train a hunting dog, so Torg never reached his potential as a hunter.

We did have some successful hunts though as shown here which was a pheasant hunt with my father-in-law Ray Kinkner near his farm in SE South Dakota. Torg also helped me apprehend a hunter who was dropping ducks in deep water where he could not retrieve them, but continued to shoot. Torg made several blind retrieves putting the guy over his limit.
The best hunting dog I have ever had is Maize, although Patch, our current French Brittany is comparable. After being transferred from Twaukon NWR to the Mark Twain NWR in Quincy, IL, we had to transfer Torg to Caryl’s parents in SD where he could live on the farm. We didn’t have a kennel in Quincy to keep Torg contained and Caryl was pregnant and Torg was rambunctious enough to knock her down while I was out of town, which was frequent.

After two years at Quincy we were transferred to the Regional Office in 1965 and we lived in Bloomington, MN and we bought Maize from a backyard breeder in 1967. We built a proper kennel and I bought the book —“How to Train Your Retriever” and although I never got her to respond perfectly to hand signals, it didn’t make any difference for Maize retrieved countless birds that I didn’t even know I had hit.
Most of Maize and my hunting together was grouse and woodcock hunting in Pine County, Minnesota from 1968 to 1978. The grouse and woodcock populations were at their peak during Maize’s years and we discover some excellent coverts in Eastern Pine Co. Shooting limits was not unusual and she was phenomenal at finding and flushing them and then retrieving the downed birds. We hunted every weekend from Labor Day to Thanksgiving. Then hunted pheasants near my parent’s home in Jasper, MN to the end of the year. Often I took a week or two of vacation time and hunted those days too. I kept a fairly good hunting log in those days over her 10 seasons of hunting and it wasn’t unusual to have taken a 100 birds a year. She also retrieved countless birds for hunting partners too, so giving her the title of “A 1,000 bird Dog” is appropriate.

I remember one incident that demonstrated her excellent performance. We were hunting with John Ellis and Bill Dougerty, two USFWS co-workers who had pointing dogs. The fellow with a Vizala, a pointing dog breed originating in Hungary, had downed a woodcock that had fallen across a stream but his dog would not cross the stream. He asked me to have Maize retrieve it. I sat Maize down beside me and gave her a hand signal and command to cross the stream and “fetch”. She did cross the stream and shortly caught the scent of the downed woodcock, which she quickly found. Then she re-crossed the stream and brought the woodcock to me. It was a great performance! Another incident that comes to mind happened when we saw ducks landing in an open hole in a frozen swamp. We waded out to a muskrat house breaking ice all the way. The open hole was within gun range of our location and eventually a flock of pintails started to land and I shot two of them. Maize went out twice breaking ice on the way retrieving both - male pintails, an episode I have never forgotten.

As I have stated earlier, I have kept fairly good records of hunting activity in a hunters log. See the example on the next page. The originals are now preserved at the Minnesota Historical Society.
HUNTERS LOG

Oct 4, 1979

Date

Pine Co. Minn

Place

Hunters

Ed Manczuk

Dogs

Nursene

ESC

Maize

Notes

Ed & I started at Ercusens, formerly Sivasans, at 7 a.m. By 11:30 a.m. we had 10 woodcock & 2 grouse. We flushed most of the birds around Nan Hay field. Ed shot 1 Snipe. Some of the best shooting I have ever seen. I got my grouse near the old bridge like so many others in the past. It is a real favourite place.

Conditions

Covert

Later in day we hunted back toward Saunders Lake Co. Not too lucky. We flushed only 1 grouse.

Humidity

It was very poor hunting. We ended up in Stumpy Sharpheads.

Skies

Temp

The landowner requested we not

Wind

hunt where Sharpheads were. We

after Sharpheads Ed Saunders fired near Federal pen.

GAME

Bag

Shots

Woodcock

5

7

Missed Sharphead

Snipe

Pheasants

Grouse

Ducks
For several years during Maize’s prime years I hunted Ruffed Grouse and Woodcock with John Ellis, a co-worker in the Minneapolis USFWS Regional Office. John hunted with an English Setter named Heidi. Our favorite area was several miles north of the St. Croix State Park where Fleming Logging Rd. intersected with Cattle Drive. There was a developing cattle ranch of 7,300 acres owned by a Mr. Erickson. It was timber and brush land when he bought it and he had cleared much of it hoping to convert the area to pasture for a huge cattle operation. Unfortunately for him, the brush grew back before cattle grazing became practical, but it became great grouse and woodcock habitat. We got permission from Mr. Erickson to hunt about 160 acres where the West Fork of Crooked Creek nearly intersected with the Fleming Logging Rd. We called it the “Old Swanson Place” after the early settlers that had built a still-standing house just across a creek bridge.

John and I thought the USFWS should purchase the area as a Woodcock Research Area. Somehow we got a proposal developed in the Regional Office and even got it approved as a bona-fide land acquisition proposal. As part of that effort we arranged for a Regional Office hunting trip to the area.

This Hunters Log entry indicates that the Deputy Regional Director, the Regional Fisheries Chief, the Fed. Aid Coordinator and the Land Acquisition Chief joined us for the hunt.

The Washington Office disapproved the proposal but years later did authorize a similar proposal in NE USA.

Caryl and I then tried to purchase 160 acres, as we were sure we could restore the old house and improve the decrepit bridge across the creek. It was a dream that didn’t materialize. So we kept looking for a place and eventually found it.
During Maize’s early years, I was working in the USFWS Regional Office on Lake Street in Minneapolis, MN with a crew of older guys, some were WWII veterans and most were hunters. One weekend most of the crew hunted at the Regional Personnel Officer Goodman Larson’s farm in western MN. In the above photo is Harry Stiles on the left and Howard Woon on the right. Both went on to higher positions in the Washington, DC headquarters. It appears that Maize had a busy weekend retrieving all kinds of game birds.

The photo on the left was also taken in western MN on a separate duck hunt.
ENDERS FARM

A Grouse and Woodcock hunting Camp

After 10 years of my being off hunting for 30 – 40 days between the opening of the woodcock season at Labor Day in the north and pheasant hunting in southern MN and SD until the end of the year, Caryl thought we should purchase a bird hunting area in Pine Co., MN where the family could join me. After much searching we purchased the 190-acre John Ender’s farm a mile north of Markville, MN in eastern Pine Co. in 1975. John Enders was a bachelor who farmed (hay & cattle) the acreage from about 1920 until he died on the farm in the mid-1970s. Our timing was perfect as John’s hay fields were reverting to young aspen and birch growth – perfect woodcock & grouse habitat. Eventually, we upgraded the old farmhouse, cleared 5 mile of trails and converted some old growth aspen to better bird habitat.
Below is a map of the Enders Farm Grouse and Woodcock hunting area we owned from 1975 to 1992. The map was on the reverse side of the hunting log pages. The map (with north to the left) shows the buildings as white squares, abandoned farmsteads as blank squares, the trails we cleared as dashed lines that meandered through the old hay fields and woods. This record indicates only duck hunting, as I usually marked the grouse & woodcock flushes as penciled-in circles and kills as squares. The date on this record was Oct 20, 1978, which was probably after the woodcock migration, but before the first snowfall which usually ended the grouse hunting.
Ender’s Farm Hunting Camp photos – Dick Burger of the USFWS & I in the old kitchen before remodeling with LL.Bean boots drying in wood cook stove oven. NW bedroom (after remodel) where John Enders died and his bedding still remained when we moved in. Caryl and her mother – Elvera, antiquing an old wood stove, Ed with Maize and Caper hunting one of our trails, My assistant Refuge Manager, Paul Schneider, with his yellow lab, Copper, which was very well trained for hand signals/blind retrieves.
Grouse Hunting

The trails have been groomed, the stove wood cut and the leaves are falling. It is time to hunt the grouse and the woodcock.

The Crozier Grouse Camp in Pine County, Minnesota will be open for guests from October 6th to the 13th, plus several weekends. You are invited to participate in a two day hunt during that period. Please call for arrangements.

NOTE

Mr. Gordon Gullion, the nation’s foremost grouse authority, reports a statewide decline in drumming counts in 1979, a most puzzling factor in the general upswing to a population peak in 1980-81. Also, the 1,000 bird veteran hunting dog, Naise will no longer be with us which may further reduce our opportunity for starts.

RULES OF THE HUNT
- No more than 3 hunters including the host
- No shooting in the sanctuary
- Frequent rest stops plus long coffee breaks with cookies are required
- Extra dogs are welcome
- No shooting at low birds
- Vark your birds down
- Keep track of your partners

YOU SHOULD BRING
- Gun & shells
- Toilet kit
- Clothes
- Sleeping bag
- Towel
- Food, but not beef stew
- Shooting glasses
- Compass
- Boots & extra socks
- Hat, preferably red/orange
- Rain gear
- Hunting License

We provide the rest of your needs and together we will enjoy good companionship, plenty of gun, dog and bird talk, fresh air and the chase of the will-o’-the-wisp grouse and woodcock.

C. C. Crozier
854-5900 - Work
495-6130 - Home
In the 1970’s we bred Maize resulting in several nice litters of pups. Most were sold, but one female was given in about 1976 to my sister, Candace, and her then husband, Rich DeSplinter, which they called “Skeeter”. They in turn bred Skeeter and kept two of the pups – Tramp and Teke. On a couple of occasions Rich and I hunted pheasants with five Goldens. The photo below was taken at my parent’s (Ed & Ella Crozier) home in Jasper, MN. Eventually, Candy and Rich divorced and after Candy retired from elementary school teaching she earned her PhD at Hamline University and consulted on health education. Both her and Rich passed away at relatively young ages.

With Rich left to right are Skeeter, Tramp and Teke. With me are Caper and Maize.

Several people who hunted with Maize and I were so impressed with her performance that they decided they wanted a Golden Retriever. One was Richard Salonen who with his own Goldens - Knockout and Touch hunted grouse & woodcock many times (1973 – 1982) with Maize and me at the farm. Rick was very helpful in helping me cut brush on the trails with a brush cutter and then later advised me on operation and maintenance of the 1949 8N Ford tractor I bought for trail maintenance on the Enders Farm. On one of our early hunts before owning Enders Farm, I forget to bring a gun so we traded off using his 12 ga. pump. We still got our limit of grouse.
Another friend who was impressed with Maize’s performance was Dick Durerre. Dick was a neighbor who lived near us on Crystal Lake in Burnsville, MN. We met Dick in 1970, as he was cross-country skiing near our new house at the west end of the lake. Shortly after I started bird hunting with Dick and it continued for 45 years, hunting, mostly in North Dakota and at the Enders Farm, western Minnesota and some in South Dakota. Dick wanted his own Golden in 1979 and he knew I had been brush cutting trails by hand so he traded a weed trimmer that was converted to a power scythe for one of Maize’s pups which he named “Bridger” shown above with Dick at the hunting camp. Brush cutting five miles of trail was a lot of work, but the power scythe made it much easier.

This photo of Dick and Bridger was taken on a ruffed & sharp-tail hunt in the “Land Between the Lakes” area of Manitoba. We also hunted pheasants in western Minnesota and the Dakotas, mostly on a private farm east of Bismarck. ND.
Maize, one of our earliest Golden Retrievers, was a 1,000 bird dog. Now days, that is pretty hard to believe, but through the 1970’s, the ruffed grouse population was at peak numbers. Woodcock numbers were also high. Taking the daily bag limits was not uncommon. According to a hunting journal I kept, for 11 seasons Maize and I hunted every weekend day, starting the first day of the woodcock season, which used to be around Labor Day and continued to the end of the pheasant season, which usually fell after Thanksgiving. In addition, we hunted many weekdays, for a total of about 40 hunt-days each year.

Besides the birds I shot over Maize, my hunting companions shot other birds over her. Not many hunting dogs ever have as much opportunity as Maize did to learn the tricks of the trade. Although I spent more time training Maize than our other dogs, it was the many days spent hunting and the large amount of exposure to birds that made her a great hunting dog.

When I remember Maize's last hunt it is hard not to tear up. We were hunting pheasants in the weedy ditch along the railroad tracks north of Jasper, Minnesota where my parents lived. Caper, Maize’s daughter, whom we kept from Maize’s last litter of puppies, was along. Caper always hunted very close to me. On this day so did Maize, as she was getting weaker from some form of cancer, which is the typical cause of our dogs’ deaths. We flushed a few hen pheasants, and then finally flushed a big cock bird from the fencerow. I shot at it and knocked it down in the adjacent grain stubble field, but did not kill it. It ran like a rabbit away from us across the field. Both dogs crawled through the barbwire fence and took after the pheasant running hard. After getting over the barbed wire fence myself, I joined in the chase. At first, Maize was in the lead as she was the more skillful in getting through fences, but shortly, both Caper and I passed her. Caper caught the bird and brought it back to me. After taking the bird in hand and praising her, I turned back to look for Maize. She had stopped some distance behind us and was just sitting there in the stubble field watching us. She was in her classic “noble” sitting position that she was often photographed in.

It was a sad and touching moment. It was like she had passed the torch or lead dog role to her daughter, knowing that we could do it on our own without her. Realizing that we had just experienced a life-memory moment, I ended the hunt for the day and returned to my parent’s home. It was the last weekend of the pheasant-hunting season so it was the end of the season — and Maize’s last hunt.

About a month later, on New Year’s Day morning, my wife, Caryl, knew when she awoke that Maize was dead as she had heard a pick-ax hitting the frozen ground in the woods west of the house. I had gotten up earlier to let the dogs out and found that Maize could barely raise her head, but she did manage to take one last look at the lake shoreline that she had explored so often. I buried Maize on the hillside overlooking the lake behind our house, the first of all the family dogs to be buried there. The marker says “Maize – a 1,000 bird dog.”
After Maize, her pup Caper, became our number one hunting dog (1975-1985) Caper was a very laid-back dog. Our daughter, Michelle, took her to the 4 H Dog Obedience Training so Caper seemed more attuned to the females in our family (Caryl, Michelle and our other daughter, Cherise) than me. At the Grouse Camp, this storage shed was the overnight dog shelter.

Caper was a very obedient dog and a good hunter but never ranged very far from me when in the field, almost to a fault. But we had many good hunts together. Here we are with her brother, Bridger on the left, owned by hunting partner, Dick Duerre, when we were on our grouse-hunting trip to Manitoba.
After Caper, our Golden was Couri—a female niece of Capers (1987-1991). When looking for a replacement for Caper we went to Tom Ramsey, a Golden Kennel owner/operator near Hugo, MN who had provided a sire for our earlier litters. This time we wanted a high-energy sire. When we checked the prospective sire out he was really hyper which we thought would balance out our dogs laid back personalities. Unfortunately, it didn’t work out that way and although Couri was a pretty good hunter, she was a near-psycho dog in some regards. There wasn’t a kennel she couldn’t chew her way out—even wire chain links.

Since our kennel and home location wasn’t suitable for Couri we eventually time-shared her with my sister, Candace, who lived on the Mississippi River upstream from Elk River, MN. Candy had several acres of frontage on the river and she could let Couri range free much of the time. During the hunting season, we kept Couri at our place the best we could. Eventually, the freedom she required did her in as one winter day during her free roaming she fell through the ice on a pond on Candy’s property and couldn’t get out and died either from exhaustion or a heart attack as she was over 10 years old by that time.
By the time Couri was lost I was retired from the US Fish & Wildlife Service (1994) and still able to hunt and wanted a hunting dog. Our daughter, Cherise Barnes, and family were living on Lake Marion in Lakeville, MN and she wanted a medium size dog that she could keep in the house. At the time there was an article in the Star Tribune Outdoor Section about the L’Escarbot Kennels near Hampton, MN that sold French Brittany Spaniels from the top pedigrees in Europe. French Brittany Spaniels are usually less than 50 lbs and don’t shed hair like Goldens do. So, I talked her into purchasing Pepin, a black and white French Brittany, from the Hampton Kennels, which I could train for hunting and then time-share during the hunting season.

Pepin was the first pointing dog I had worked with. He was good at finding and pointing pheasants, but I never got him trained very well to retrieve.

The time-share arrangement worked for several hunting seasons, until on one trip to North Dakota on the morning of the third day Pepin couldn’t even stand up. We immediately took him to a Bismarck veterinarian who after examining Pepin said “You will never hunt this dog again as he has a spinal cord birth defect.” We had Pepin further examined by vets in the Twin Cities area and were told we could hunt Pepin a hour or so a day or every other day. So, I continued this restricted use of Pepin until Cherise and Caryl said, “You are going to kill Pepin, get your own dog” – hence Patch.

That started a whole new dog arrangement. After owning and hunting with Golden Retrievers for over 30 years I now had a pointing dog whose training and field management I knew nothing about. It was a whole new learning experience, but the result has been quite remarkable – Patch has turned out to be a hunting companion that rivals Maize, the 1,000 bird dog.

Since I didn’t know anything about training a pointing dog, Patch got sent off to a training kennel in South Dakota at 8 months old. It was a good decision as it jump-started him about 3 years, as his performance in the field his first ‘year was comparable to dogs several years older. He was a good retriever, worked cover very well, even hunted flooded cattail that other dogs wouldn’t. And, he had a good nose and was a fine pointer plus our bond is the strongest ever.

Hunting with a dog that tracks a pheasant, then holds a point until ‘you are in position to shoot, followed by a big rooster pheasants bursting out of the cover is quite a thrill. And, if you are lucky, the bird falls when you shoot and the dog retrieves it to your hand. That is quite extremely satisfying.

Here is Patch at 10 months retrieving a Sharp Tailed Grouse in western SD.
Caryl & Caper on Tamarac River near Enders Farm Hunting camp.

Pepin on ND Hunt.

Dick Duerre with Bridger & Caper and my Toyota crew cab 4 X 4.

On left - Don Hultman with yellow lab, Cadi, on 2004 South Dakota hunt. Don was one of the best in the Fish and Wildlife Service and responsible for much of my rewards and recognitions.

My shotguns: Browning Superposed. The 12 ga. is chambered for 3 ½ shells with variable chokes & 28” barrels. The 20 ga. Citori is chambered for 3-inch shells with variable chokes. I bought my first Browning with earnings from a summer job as a student asst. at Agassiz NWR in northern MN.
THE SOUTH DAKOTA FAMILY FARM

My wife Caryl’s parents, Ray and Elvera Kinkner, owned and farmed 160 acres two miles east of Beresford, Lincoln County, South Dakota. The farm has been in the same family for over 100 years and for most of those years it was a self-sustaining operation with chickens, pigs and cattle with a variety of crops and pasture. By the time Caryl inherited the farm it was purely a corn and soybean operation and farmed by the next door neighbor who has a huge operation of about 3,000 acres of both owned and rented land. Nearly every year since we were married in 1960 I have hunted pheasants on the farm and nearby areas. The farmhouse is still habitable so it works well for pheasant hunting jaunts.

Soon after Caryl inherited the farm we enrolled most of the north 80 acres into the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP native grasses) so with the CRP acres and the wooded creek there are about 50 acres of excellent pheasant habitat that provides good hunting after the adjacent corn fields have been harvested. We did plant the remaining 25 acres on the east side to native grasses with a pollinator strip, but that seeding failed because of a severe drought and I was unable to find someone to reseed it.

The area around the farmhouse is still cropland as is the far east 25 acres. Through the center is a narrow creek with trees and brush on its edges. The renter of the farmland controls the noxious weeds and mows walking trails around the edges of the fields and plants the one-acre food plot.
Patch and I on the SD farmhouse lawn with CRP grasses in background

Grandson, Nate Barnes, with Patch after SD farm hunt
After I retired and we had sold the Pine County Ender’s Farm Grouse and Woodcock Hunting/Camp, I and long-time hunting partner, Dick Duerre started concentrating on pheasant hunting, mostly in North Dakota. The grouse hunting habitat (primarily aspen) on the 190 acres of the grouse camp had advanced in age so it was no longer ideal habitat, plus the grouse population seemed to be declining. In addition, there had been some severe windstorms in the area knocking down trees making it difficult to hunt the area.

The lake place and extra acreage we bought on the Minong Flowage in Douglas County, Wisconsin (1993) was not grouse or woodcock habitat. There was good habitat in the area, but I never found the same quality I was familiar with in the good old days in Pine County. The lake property was located on a wild rice bay of the Flowage and occasionally there were geese and ducks to hunt, but not enough to take the place of the old time upland bird hunting.

So, Dick and I began hunting pheasants in North Dakota probably in the mid-1990s. We started in SE North Dakota near Tewaukon National Wildlife Refuge where I was the refuge manager for about two years in the early 1960s. I knew a local landowner there – Milt McLean who provided overnight accommodations and land to hunt. We hunted there several days, but pheasants seemed scarce so Milt called a friend – Monty Burke, who was a fellow officer in the Farm Bureau and who owned 3,000 acres near McKenzie, ND and asked him if we could come out and hunt the Burke farm. Monty said sure and that he had lots of pheasants and he was right!

I don’t remember exactly, when we switched from Golden Retrievers, but think it was around 2002. Pepin was our first of the pointing bird dogs and not too long after Dick Duerre bought Scout, a French Brittany from the same the L'Escarbot Kennels near Hampton, MN. The photo below is Dick Duerre and his Brittany – Scout - on the Burke Farm.
We hunted the Burke farm near McKenzie, ND about 20 miles east of Bismarck for about 20 some years. When we started, the 3,000-acre farm was nearly all planted to grass in the US Department of Agriculture’s Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). When we stopped hunting the farm in 2015 there was only about 300 acres of CRP remaining. Naturally, the pheasants’ numbers dropped accordingly. Mostly, except for the opening weekend of the season when Terry Burke, son of Monty, would gather a large bunch of his friends for a bird hunt, we had the entire 3,000 acres all to our selves.

After our many years of hunting the same land, we had assigned names to specific fields where we hunted so that when planning our hunts we mutually knew the areas being discussed. Some areas were consistently good for bird numbers. Others, like the RR Triangle, which we also called the Golden Triangle only produced significant numbers of birds once or twice, but we never forgot those times and kept returning hoping for that “Golden Time” again. One area just west of the Old Farm we called the “Rectangle” as it was a corn or soybean field with wooded edges around it. It was our favorite as two of us could hunt it very effectively by each walking around the separate edges then returning together to the SUV on the road to the north by walking down a brushy center strip that nearly always produced birds. It was a very reliable area for us.
Paul Duerre, Dick Duerre’s son, with Paul’s labs, Rudy, and Dick with Scout

Paul at lunchtime on the prairie of the Burke Farm. This was a favorite place to park just south of the creek as we could hunt for hours from this location
Lunch time on a Burke Farm pheasant hunt - Dick, Paul and Paul’s brother-in-law. Cory Mathiowetz

Paul, Dick and Marc Dulong with his dog Beretta, a German Wirehair. The flat prairie landscape was nearly covered by CRP prairie grasses on the whole 3,000 acres of the farm when we started hunting there.
Ed Crozier, Patch, Riley, Scout and Dick Duerre on Burke Farm pheasant farm.

Paul Duerre’s labs – Rudy and Riley
THE OLD HUNTERS

Patch and I hunted the South Dakota farm for four days in November of 2017. It was a good hunt for old hunters (Patch - 84 in dog yrs and I a year younger). We could walk out of the farmhouse and within 50 yards start hunting the CRP, spending an hour or two in the morning and again in the afternoon. Walking the trails and thick cover the first day was tiring but eventually manageable.

It is humbling to learn that your dog is smarter than you are, especially two days in a row. This time Patch pointed a pheasant and when flushed, it caught a strong SD prairie wind. I shot and it sailed down with the wind 60 yards away. I carefully marked it down calling the dog to me, as I was certain with the distance and tall grasses he hadn’t seen where it went down. Finally he came and sniffed around finding nothing. After a futile search we headed back. Patch wandered off to a new area & miraculously came back with the rooster. The same thing had happened the day before. He had found a downed bird right away then dropped it to respond to my persistent calling him to where I thought it was. He must think I am an idiot as a hunting partner - and he may be right!

After hunting with good dogs nearly 70 years I should know better.

We flushed a number of birds, once or twice 20 or more. It was a good hunt for old hunters.

Back at home we continue our twice daily hike on the nearby 1.5-mile woods trail. Some days it has been bitter cold, but probably worth it, presumably beneficial to both of us. Maybe there will be another opportunity to chase the wily rooster pheasant and enjoy hunting with great partners.