

## **PENNY LOVED TO HUNT ON HER OWN TERMS**

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Much like people, no two dogs are exactly alike. There may be similarities endemic to the canine family as a whole, but individuals exhibit traits not observed in others.

As you who read last week's column learned, we have a new puppy. Although he is only three months old his actions and demeanor lead us to believe the future will be enjoyable for both him and the other members of his family.

I say this with reservations, however, because like all really young members of all species, we sometimes see them at their best in the early bloom of life. Like humans, have you ever seen a puppy that was not appealing? So it was with our first registered purebred puppy.

She was an English Setter and we named her Penny after the popular skier of the day, Penny Pitou. She was a beautiful example of the breed that I felt would be both a hunting companion for me and a pet for the children.

From day one she demonstrated her hunting instincts and love for children. We lived on a back rural road in farm country in Cayuga County, four short miles due west of the south end of Skaneateles Lake. Our home was the same elevation as the dam in Old Forge. The house was surrounded by grassy meadows on three sides and it was there where she spent every waking moment when she was not with the kids.

Barely 10 weeks old, she foraged through the deep grass rooting out meadow mice. That was not all – she would crunch them down with relish. It was not hard to see how young foxes or coyotes could easily fend for themselves at the same age. By fall, she had graduated to woodchucks.

I hunted her that fall when the pheasant season opened and three of us killed our limit of two birds apiece on the first day. The following fall and a full year older, it was a different story. Oh she hunted all right, but on her terms. On the first day we sat waiting for daylight, or anticipation heightened by the predawn calls of at least four different cock pheasants in the field awaiting us.

We started the hunt whereupon she took off in high gear over the horizon leaving us to cool our heels for over an hour. That dog had foot and she showed us plenty of it the rest of the day. She was what I often refer to as a “nine lot dog.” You are hunting in one lot and she is hunting nine lots ahead of you!

Penny had more total hunt in her than any two other dogs I ever owned, but she did it on her terms. If it walked, swam, flew or crawled, she was on it, from frogs to bear. I gave up on her and let her pursue her passion which she did surrounded by kids.

She loved kids and they loved her. If our children were not around she left and took up with the neighbor children. Our son called her “dog” and his favorite phrase to her was “Get ‘em dog.” She treed everything from squirrels to bear and many a grouse that thought it was safe in the top of a lofty birch, greased or chins. Our son would investigate her call for help and drop the game if it was in season. Red squirrels were hers and she wolfed them down hide and all, with the exception of the tail.

A chow hound she was for sure and her eating binges were legendary. We had a cat that could flip the door on the sink cabinet open to get to her food, which was safe from Penny there. One night she flipped it open while we slept. In the morning Penny

was stretched out on her bed in the kitchen with a distended stomach and a pleased look on her face. Strewn about the floor were the wrappers from eight Gaines burgers. Two were the usual meal ration.

Unfortunately, it was her proclivity for eating anything that resembled food that led to her demise. She swallowed a dried up worm on a hook on the end of a fishing rod. The hook became imbedded in her intestines. At 14 years old and in already declining health, the vet felt it would be best to put her to sleep.

If one had to evaluate her standing based on the factors that make a dog superior in ways that would insure their own survival, she would rank up there at the very top. As a faithful family member and children's pet, she would as well. It would take a whole lot more space than is available here at this time to tell her whole story.

Until then, if and when I find both the time and space to do so, I have only this to say. In a long life full of a great many good dogs who caused far less frustration and anxiety, she certainly was the most interesting. If you had to choose a theme song for the narrative, it would have to be Sinatra's "I Did It My Way" She is still loved and missed, nonetheless.