

SCHATZI HUNTED UP A STORM BUT HATED CATS AND PORKYS

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Pets are real big business. Some estimates place the dollar amount Americans spend on them at \$13 billion for this coming year. Based on what our family spends on them, I have to believe it's true.

My guess would be dogs and their care is the biggest contributor to that figure. It seems more households have dogs than do not. My last two columns were a discourse on dogs and from readers' comments; we are not alone in our associations or interest in them. Based on those reactions, I will carry on in the same vein with one final edition on the topic.

I was remiss last week in not including an incident that happened with our English Setter Penny. It happened in Florida and was absolutely hilarious to witness.

We were taking a walk in the country and she flushed an armadillo. She quickly overtook the fleeing animal, but try as she might she could not get a grip on him with her teeth. His rounded, plated armor-like hide was impervious to her teeth. He escaped unharmed down a burrow ending the confrontation. Fortunately, the weather was cold so we encountered no rattlesnakes. She made short work of any snakes encountered here in New York.

After her demise, another pointing dog followed Penny. It was a German shorthaired pointer named Schatzi. The name is German for "my treasure," and she lived up to it in every sense of the word. She came our way when she was seven by way of a gift. A local lad who was entering the Air Force placed an ad in the local paper offering her to a good home. I knew both parties, which hastened my response. It was one of the best decisions I ever made.

Schatzi was an excellent example of her breed with the carriage and disposition of a queen. Her every move exemplified the beauty and grace of her breed. Although her actions displayed all the earmarks of a hunter, she had never been given an opportunity to prove it. It was a situation I planned to correct with enthusiasm in the coming fall.

The appointed day finally arrived at the Upper and Lower Lakes game area in St. Lawrence County. My best friend and his family had a home adjacent to the facility. We sallied forth opening day on foot from his yard.

It was a defining moment for none of us knew what to expect of if Schatzi would live up to her heritage. The questioning was over very quickly when as she worked the cover ahead of us and quickly locked up on a classic picture-perfect point. My friend's son was given the shot in deference to his youth and a school bus deadline.

We moved up behind the dog and a beautiful mature cock pheasant rocketed into the air. The youngster's shot was sure and Schatzi registered her first kill. She went on to put in a flawless performance the rest of the day.

She only tested our faith on one occasion when a search failed to produce a bard ahead of her point. We became really perplexed when in spite of our search, she refused to relax her point. Finally, a closer look directly in front of her nose proved her assertion when a bird, unmoved by all of the activity, was spotted frozen not a foot ahead of her.

Quickly grabbing the bird, we learned it had a broken wing and a broken leg on the opposite sides of its body.

It strengthened my long held conviction that all game birds should be hunted exclusively with a dog trained for the purpose. The hunter who wounded it not only lost the bird, he caused it to suffer needlessly. A large percentage of killed or wounded birds are never found or retrieved.

Observing a good hunting dog work, regardless of the breed or the game, is the best part of the sport. Schatzi went on to put in nearly seven more years and several pheasants and grouse on the table before she went to her final reward. Always a lady, she was reserved and businesslike to the end.

She only had two faults I was ever able to perceive. She did not like porcupines or cats. The porkys made her pay dearly for her aversion. Her less than solicitous attitude toward cats was amended after my counseling, at least when I was around.

She was my last hunting dog for far too many years. Win, lose or draw, the fat is in the fire and I have a new hunting partner. I am looking forward to working with him and helping him fulfill the promise hundreds of years of selection and breeding have instilled within him. Come to think of it, I will be able to continue to fulfill the same promise in myself.

Speaking of hunting reminds me of hunting camp and a poem by Jim Christopher of Dexter and a member of the Middle Branch Hunting Club. It goes like this:

WHY HUNTING CAMP?

A patch of woods, close to home

In a tree stand all alone

When suddenly a buck appears

Your heart starts pounding as he nears!

You aim, you shoot and down he goes!

But no one saw, no one knows

Quietly you stand on that lonely hill

There's no one there to share your thrill

But pack your truck and drive far away

Back to the "Big Woods" where the coyotes bay.

To a place where old men drink and tell lies

And young boys listen with widened eyes.

Where success isn't measured by antlers or mean

But measured instead by the friends that you greet.

A camp filled with laughter, old friends and good cheer

Now that's what I call....huntin' deer!