

The Gabriel Chronicles

(...continued from page 7)

CHAPTER 6

A Very Nice Afternoon – Thank You

One of the things that I have missed while we didn't have a dog is the obligatory walk. Particularly with high energy puppies, a good walk seems to dissipate some of the demonic powers. I am fortunate to have access to a beautiful rolling farm about eight miles from the house. There are about 250 acres which are divided between woods and pasture. Two small ponds provide for special adventures.

Gabe is now thirteen weeks old. We began visiting the farm about a month ago. The first walks were short and somewhat tentative on his part as he explored all of the new experiences. But he is "growing like a weed" and each week his size, speed and stamina all seem to increase. Our last walk was a couple of days ago. We take it easy, allowing him to explore and play. But we must have covered at least a mile and a half as we wandered through pasture grass, down woodland trails and across the swampy area at the head of the pond.

It was a beautiful day. The sky was blue and cloudless with a temperature in the low fifties. Only the slightest breeze

rippled the water on the pond. There is a spot along the pond bank where the pasture comes almost to the water. The brown, dry grass was soft as I sat down and lay back. The sun shone warmly on me as I listened to Gabe rustle in the grass and splash in the water. As you may have guessed, I dozed off. One of the nice parts about getting old – you don't really need a reason. My eyes opened and I felt a short panic. Where was Gabe? No problem. He was curled up in a tight ball against my leg, taking his own short nap. As I stirred, an eye opened to see what was happening. It was a warm and comfortable feeling. We both stretched and, with what seemed to be a little regret, continued our pilgrimage.

We eventually got back to the truck via a circuitous route that was required because Gabe was seriously intent on tracking some critter. I couldn't find tracks, so there is no telling what beast he was chasing. When we got to the truck, he wasn't at all winded. He had taken a long drink at the pond and seemed disappointed that the walk was over. He continues to amaze me. I have missed these walks since my old dog Murphy died. He and I covered hundreds and hundreds of miles over his sixteen year life. After he passed away, I found myself taking fewer and fewer opportunities to hit the woods. Because of that, I wasn't seeing the wildflowers. I was missing those special places in the fall where the maples seem to be on fire.

Those fortuitous sightings of flora and fauna that create our best memories were coming and going without me. But now they are coming back. Thank you Gabe.



An older, tired-looking dog wandered into my yard. I could tell from his collar and well-fed belly that he had a home and was well taken care of. He calmly came over to me, I gave him a few pats on his head. He then followed me into my house, slowly walked down the hall, curled up in the corner and fell asleep. An hour later, he went to the door, and I let him out. The next day he was back, greeted me in my yard, walked inside and resumed his spot in the hall and again slept for about an hour. This continued off and on for several weeks. Curious I pinned a note to his collar: 'I would like to find out who the owner of this wonderful sweet dog is and ask if you are aware that almost every afternoon your dog comes to my house for a nap.' The next day he arrived for his nap, with a different note pinned to his collar: 'He lives in a home with 6 children, 2 under the age of 3 - he's trying to catch up on his sleep. Can I come with him tomorrow?'



Spotlight on ... Zeke

Zeke registered name is Pocaligo's Zeke Reg No BSR 023826LP. Zeke will be three in May. He has hunted two seasons now and has really gotten pretty good. We live in Fredericksburg VA and he was born at Pocaligo Kennel in Sumter SC. - Scott Horan, VA



The final word



Lil' Buck's first river hunt BY HANK BURDINE



Hank Burdine with duck hunting buddies, Skipper Jernigan and the late Colonel "Creeper" Jernigan.

One cold winter night I received a call from one of my dearest friends from Cleveland, Colonel Thomas N. "Creeper" Sledge, Ret. USAF. "The ducks are covering up the cockleburr flat on Choctaw Bar in the middle of the Mississippi River," he said. "Meet me at Mounds Landing at 5:30 in the morning, and if that little brown puppy dog you have can pick up a duck, bring him with you. I'll bring my boat and something to eat." What could I say but, "Yes, sir!"

Lil' Buck was my Boykin Spaniel that previously had only picked up wood ducks on my Yankee friend Charlie Potter's place on Black Bayou. I awoke mighty early the next morning, kissed my Sallie and told her I was going out on the river, not to worry as I would be with Creeper. I roused Lil' Buck and grabbing my boots, duck call, coat and gun, we headed to Double Quick for a thermos of coffee and six sausage biscuits. It was going to be a long morning.

I arrived at Mounds Landing at five a.m. sharp, not wanting to feel the wrath of the Colonel for being late and proceeded to stretch back with the heater on low in my truck and took a nap. I was awakened by a gruff voice saying, "Wake up, the sun's coming up and the ducks are flying!"

We hurriedly loaded our gear, jumped in the boat and headed across the river as the sun broke day. In no time, we found our spot on the flat and Creeper threw out five or six decoys as Lil' Buck and I found a big tree that had fallen in the water and set up our ambush point. Sure enough, as legal shooting time rolled quickly around, Lil' Buck was as anxious as ever, whining and shivering and excited to pick up his first Mississippi River mallard.

Here they came and because of my

expert calling, (yeah, right!) the ducks cupped their wings. "Boom, boom!" and a fat drake hit the water. Not waiting on my command to "back," Lil' Buck hit that freezing river water like a tempered pro and swam straight for the duck. Once he grabbed it, he headed straight for the bank on the other side of the slash. Not wanting him to start off wrong on his first ever big water retrieve, I rushed out and grabbed him and drug him back, reprimanding him and setting him on the log. I made him drop the duck and commanded him to stay on the log. Lil' Buck started whining again.

Soon, Creeper asked for a bite to eat. "The biscuits are in the bag," I said.

He replied, "Ain't nothing in the bag but shredded paper." Uh, oh. Where, oh, where, did six sausage and biscuits go?

About that time a flock of 25 mallards started circling overhead, and as we hunkered down and began to call, Lil' Buck began to prance up and down that log, whining and running from one end to the other, doing a little pirouette on each end of the log. "Control that dog and shut him up!" my pal commanded. "These ducks are wanting to work!"

Then, two ducks committed and BOOM, one fell to the water. Without waiting for my command, Lil' Buck lept off the log, swam rapidly to the duck and once again, lit out for the far bank. Upon reaching the sand, he scrambled up and down until he found a suitable spot, and with duck in mouth, took care of his bid-ness!

Creeper and I sat in awe as this young little retriever swam back across the water, dropped the duck next to me and crawled back up on the log and looked at us as if saying, "Okay, boys, you want to go duck hunting, NOW, let's hunt!" **DU**



Lil' Boogie in training off the American Bar in the Mississippi River