

Saluting the 1st CNASA HOF Kennel

This issue marks the recent announcement of the first Hall of Fame Kennel for the CNASA, so it is with great pleasure that we acknowledge this wonderful accomplishment with the story of

Tucker Creek Australian Shepherds HOF III

Our thanks to Tanya Wheeler for providing us with this *bit of history* – it's a fun, and fascinating read – enjoy!

Tucker Creek Australian Shepherds

In 1993 I started a search for my first Australian Shepherd. I had grown up with horses and had a very special mutt named Trixie who went everywhere with me alongside whatever horse I was sitting on, in those days it was Jesse, a homely horse. My dog was my best friend even then and years of training and trialing horses ended with University and cash shortfalls... Dogs were a fair shot cheaper to keep than horses. Or so I thought - ha ha ha!

I met the first Aussie – who belonged to lady who I now have known for almost 20 years. Her dog was a beautiful blue merle with half blue eyes like crescent moons. I fell in love and started my search.

20 years ago it was much harder to find an Australian Shepherd – especially in Canada. So I turned south of the border and still found not a puppy available in the Midwest. I talked to many Aussie people – to no avail. But somewhere along the line someone told me that if I was going to get an Aussie, in the meantime, I should invest in the Book “*All About Aussies*” by Jeannie Joy Hartnagle Taylor. The “*Aussie Bible*” as it is affectionately and aptly named, was where it all began.

In a herding magazine I found somewhere, I found an address from which I could call and order a copy of my new book. I was prepared to speak with an order desk and start my journey by waiting for a book – at least until I got the puppy.

The man who answered the phone asked me if I had an Aussie and I explained that I had not yet been successful in finding a pup, but that I would start with the book. He politely asked me my name and we carried on a conversation. Because of the dog I had met (and I had done some preliminary reading) I told him that I thought they were the perfect dogs for me. We talked about horses, dogs, cattle, stuff I loved because I was a country kid and could relate. I told him I had no particular plans for a dog but to live in the country – train and take the dog with me everywhere. At that time in my life I didn't know a whole lot about herding trials, agility, showing dogs or much else. But I knew how to train just about anything and I loved a challenge.

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At this point in the conversation, this man said to me “Sounds like you need a Tommy puppy”. He told me that “Tommy” was his son’s dog and that he produced pups like himself – tremendously smart, physically outstanding and great working pups. He added that Tommy was not young and that his son Joseph had quite a wait list, but he would ask him if he had any pups available. I was excited and thanked this lovely man on the phone for his help. I promised to send a money order with my mailing address and details and would wait to receive my new book.

Before we hung up, this man asked my name again and said I should send a letter to him and he would pass it along to his son Joe and see about a “Tommy” puppy.

I sent my money down and attached a letter including my mailing information, my enthusiasm for someday getting an Aussie and my expectations for a pup and myself and how I planned to build that relationship if ever I got myself an Aussie. I added that it was great to talk with this man who introduced himself as Ernie Hartnagle.

At the time, I never made the connection – but when the book arrived it struck me that he must be related to the author. Of course I had made the acquaintance of Mr. Ernest Hartnagle, father of the author of the *Aussie Bible* - Jeannie Joy Hartnagle, and his son Joseph was another of the Hartnagle dynasty – the family behind the *Las Rocosa Kennel*. And one of the first people involved in writing the breed standard for the Australian Shepherd, and one of the founders of the Australian Shepherd Club of America.

At the time, I didn’t appreciate the scope of the Hartnagle’s involvement with the breed but thought it pretty cool I had been so lucky to talk with this great man.

Two weeks later – I was still looking around for a puppy – from anywhere – since I didn’t know a lot about searching pedigrees, good breeders or bad, I would have taken an Aussie from anyone. But one day I got a call from Joe. The son – who owned this “Tommy” dog that Ernie thought I should have a puppy from.

Joe was the sweetest and funniest man to talk with and he carried on about my letter and said truly - “*that the Good Lord had told him that this puppy must be for me*”. I am not particularly a religious person, although not lacking in spiritual beliefs and accepting others for theirs. But I said out loud “*well praise the Lord*” because I would have converted to get this puppy at that point in time! I was thrilled.

We discussed how the puppy was originally meant for another person but something had come together for me and Joe felt this pup was for me. We made arrangements for the puppy and corresponded back and forth until my puppy arrived.

From then on...

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...things changed.

Tucker was the most amazing dog I had ever lived with. He was certainly the smartest. Sharpest, craftiest, most creative and most sensitive, emotional and the most unbelievable companion I had ever had the pleasure of sharing time with. I read about herding, I started obedience and by 6 months he had the Novice course down. We did agility and fly ball. Until one day I discovered I was pregnant with my first child.

My husband and I decided Tucker would be most devastated unless we found him a buddy. Tucker's new best friend came in the form of a Jack Russell Terrier we named Maggie. At 8 weeks and no bigger than a pound of butter, Maggie swiftly established who would be the boss. Tucker established that he was willing to accept her superior role just as long as she was fast enough to catch him for any future disciplinary action she deemed reasonable. They became fast friends.



Tucker

I started herding by auditing my first clinic in Wisconsin – without a dog. Shortly after that I put Tucker into an instinct test. The crowd convinced me he was “*special*” – I already knew he was special. They meant he had promise and should I decide to go anywhere with herding, he would be amazing. “*Go Big or go Home*” as they say – or as my husband mumbled on the way to a small sheep farm not far from our place to pick up my first 6 sheep!

Tucker and I began a journey that would definitely change my life. I never planned to breed dogs. Ever. I am not sure how it started except that every once in a while someone would ask about my dog, his pedigree, comment on how exceptional his working talents were. Often judges at stock dog trials, those that were long time ASCA folks, would tell me about my dog, listing names of famous dogs behind his pedigree. Tucker's father – Las Rocosa Tom Bull Wolf (Las Rocosa Little Wolf x Las Rocosa Tumbleweed of Coppertone) was older when he sired Tucker's litter, perhaps 12. His sire too was older when he was sired so I had this neat little dog with this very old pedigree right up front. I didn't know much about dog pedigrees, but my years with horses told me he was a fine blend of old blood line bred with a healthy dose of outcrosses keeping the pedigree clean.



Gracie

As the years went by, I learned even more about where my little dog came from. I had offers to buy him and was frequently contacted to breed him. I hadn't ever thought of this. Until I started to think I wanted another Aussie like him. They were hard to find. But I managed to find a lovely bitch who had been sired by the same old lines Tucker had (a Little Wolf grandson named Boulder). Gracie – (HOF

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Excellent dam (CNASA and ASCA) was my first female pup and in 2000, I had my first litter of Australian Shepherds. The rest is history.

I kept one blue male from this first litter and none from the second (a repeat cross to Grace). Flash was my first pup and he recently marked the eleventh year of my career in breeding dogs by celebrating his 11th birthday (May 1). Flash ran Elite agility last weekend in MN and needs only his 2 Gamble legs in Elite for his Supreme Versatility CH in ASCA. At eleven he runs and moves like a 6 year old Aussie. He has been a finals stock dog for 3 years in a row and has made the top ten as well as overall 7th last year in Texas for Most Versatile Aussie. Like his father he never grows old, acts old or shows his age in any way. He has earned his WTCH, and CH in Canada and ASCA, he has a CD, CDX, Herding Excellent in Canada, he is a Herding CH, Agility Elite titles, a Versatility Champion in Canada and the USA. He has earned Post Advanced titles on cattle and sheep in many programs. But mostly, like his father, he always asked "what next?" and always shows enthusiasm and strength, courage and willingness to outdo himself on the next bit of effort.



Flash

By this time Tucker earned his Can CH and his WTCH or was well on his way to this and his Herding Advanced in Canada, he earned his CD and ran agility at 13 years of age. He had titles on stock in the CKC, ASCA, AHBA. My Jack Russell was still busy playing in agility and tracking, and although not known to be herding dogs, Maggie was the enforcer at gates and doorways when it came to holding sheep at bay. She regularly participated in daily farm chores gathering sheep with Tucker from the river's edge down the big hill from the farm. Tucker would be trying to gather them while Maggie was searching for a chunk of wool to attach to for the ride back up the hill. I had a family of 3 Aussies and a very cool little Jack Russell now, and my first baby daughter in tow. From a family who never allowed dogs in the house – my new life was simply glorious – dogs, back in the country after years of travel and education, and lots of great friends in and out of the dogs world. I had dogs on my bed, dogs in the house, on the couch, dogs wherever I wanted!

I became a single mom and my daughter and I ran the farm – she was 2. But life was still even better than expected. My career was going great and not long after my second litter, I acquired another wonderful Aussie – the second of the foundation bitches to Tucker Creek. She had different blood but could be easily traced back to the old foundation Las Rocosa dogs. Again it was a healthy outcross to pull back into some of the old lines.

Hall of Fame Dam Panda (Hollings Panda Bear) had some very old Hangin tree blood and again was up front in her pedigree. She produced only one litter for us bred to Tucker but with 11 puppies, we didn't feel we needed more. I gathered the long list of criticism of the Hanging Tree lines was also prevalent in the Las Rocosa lines and all the other foundation lines particularly when these dogs win. Panda produced two breed champions (CKC) one

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who was also many times BOB and an ASCA CKC CH. Others in the litter excelled in herding with one finals stock dog (WTCH Tucker Creek's Tiger Coast HX – last year's Top Herding Dog and with three RWD last season) Tracking CH Tucker Creek's Hurricane Penny OTDscd HI TDX Urban Tracking dog Excellent plus many elite agility titles, Tucker Creek's Ballad o' Sally Rose OTDs STDcATDd HS and many more successes from that cross.

I was selective in my breeding, seeking bitches that were from lines I had watched and admired and was grateful to the people behind the dogs in assisting me with my research into pedigrees and health issues. It was paramount to me – and still is - that I understood some of the history of these dogs and the people behind them before I ever decided to breed a dog. I also felt that I owed a great deal to the people who collectively had literally hundreds of years of experience I could rely on for information. We all know how challenging that can be, but for the most part I was tremendously successful in producing dogs with exceptional structure, type, health and herding ability of course , which was my strong suit.

I had decided to make my own choices, and long before dogs I learned in the horse business that acceptance goes a long way. I respected that other didn't like certain lines and I too found myself preferring certain things and finding others down right criminal in the breed. At the same time, and over time, I came to the conclusion that breeding dogs was a hobby, not an assignment from God. I took it very seriously and with a Master's in Biology with a strong emphasis in genetics and animal behaviour, I decided that I would breed what I felt was sound, healthy, met the mental criteria and the herding ability I expected and met the breed standard. Past that, it really is a personal preference guided by ones' ideal in the dog breeding business. I have learned to keep my criticisms to real issues such as health, temperament and avoid areas where simple difference in taste doesn't match.

I have now been breeding dogs for a relatively short period of time. My third female came as a gift from my herding Guru, teacher, and close friend, Bob Vest. Sassy was a strong blend of working dogs, mostly Bob's blood. She had a nice body, athletic, strong eyed (as was typical of his dogs) and was hands down one of the toughest little dogs I had ever had the pleasure to train – easy on stock – but a very inflexible mind at times. She continues to teach me a lot. Her first litter of pups has gained maturity and will be hitting the ASCA world this year. I am excited.

I can honestly say that I am thrilled, excited, exhausted, and overwhelmed with our success as a kennel. We have achieved HOF Excellent in Canada in just 11 years of breeding and very few litters brought us there. We have achieved our Hall of Fame Kennel in ASCA and need only a couple more Breed CH for HOF Ex, and with three dogs hanging on a few points I hope to be able to do it. In these few years of breeding Tucker has earned his HOF ASCA and HOF Excellent sire in Canada, his two first partners are both HOF dams and one with her HOFX and another on a leg to her HOFX.

We didn't need to breed a lot. I was very selective in placing pups into homes that wanted the most out of their

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dogs but wanted more; a best friend. I thank all of the people who have our dogs for their tremendous contribution to the overall success of the making of a kennel.

We made some lucky choices. It could have gone horribly wrong. Over time we all have unexpected genetic interruptions, health issues and other hazards that come along with breeding dogs. The most important thing we need to do is share information. Breeding dogs is still a crapshoot. You cannot play God. You cannot expect to fix everything but you can make the breed better by sharing your successes and your failures. We all have the same goal in mind and that's to maintain the Australian Shepherd as a healthy breed, that expresses versatility and talent in its every action.

You will only make a difference if you share information, reduce criticism, accept others' right to their own opinion, and "When you haven't got anything nice to say.... Don't say anything at all."

I may come across as if I think my dogs are the best things in the world – because to me they are. But I also accept that they may not be to anyone else. But I will say that for many years my little Tucker wasn't given the credit he was due. In the conformation world even though he finished his CH. I was frequently regarded as the OH well gal.... I was told he should have more bone and coat, I was told I should breed him up to more superior bitches. Although Tucker matured late and when he came into himself he was incredible. He was late maturing as are all my lines. But today at almost 18 years of age, he can still run across the yard at elderly lightning speed to beat me to the gate, he climbs the stairs, does all his obedience and occasionally gets a notion to work the stock.



Flash at work!



On his 17th birthday last year on the 17th of September (making that his Champagne Birthday), we entered him into the CKC show just to have one more go around the ring. When the judge was informed of his age, she asked if he could do the down and back and all the way around, I said he would be most disappointed if he couldn't. He went smoothly round the ring as proud as could be, he baited, flirted with the judge and nearly took my fingers off for the bait.

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Around the ring an audience of people who have known us for years cheered and some cried. It was the most emotional moment for me as Tucker finally had his day and was seen for the great dog he is, physically untouchable, mentally brilliant, and even at 17 he trotted around the ring to the cheering of some who, many years earlier, recommended I get a real show dog. Hah! I did think to myself – where are they now – these better dogs? At 17 not many, or none, were alive.

I have to add that I apologize for all the bragging but we really struggled to keep our head up some years as any of you that breed dogs can tell it can be a *dog eat dog* business at best. Every time I think about it I find it amusing that I am one of those “*dog breeders*”. And I chuckle.

If I were to do it again I would do it the same. I was lucky and really, haven't been around for all that long. But what makes me most excited is to see whether the longevity I started with will continue, because in the long haul longevity is probably the most important thing in the world because you know if you have that – you probably don't have a host of other things you wouldn't want.

Thank you to the CNASA for their support and for permitting me to brag.



Photo credit Cathy Bishop