

SAM

My first dog and first pet was Roger, a sweet, gentle golden retriever house dog. He lived to about 11 years old. I cried for a week when we put him down. My second dog was Bingo, a golden lab hunting dog that we kept outside in a kennel next to the birdcage where we kept the clipped wing pigeons we used to train Bingo. A professional trainer came to our house weekly to help train Bingo. One morning I came outside to exercise and play with Bingo but, overnight, he had bolted his kennel, forced his way into the pigeon cage and killed all the pigeons. He was happily sleeping back in his kennel with pigeon blood and feathers all over him. That was the end of Bingo. He just disappeared a few days later. I was never very attached to Bingo.

Pretty quickly our hunting French Poodle, Sam arrived. Mother was determined to have a hunting dog for father even though father did not like hunting with dogs. Sam was a very expensive hunting breed from Caroline Kennels just outside of New York City. To own one, we had to promise to train him and field trial him and hopefully actually hunt with him. We had to sign something that said we would do this. Because of all the super breeding he had to have a French name with three words. His was "Samuel Roy Beau." Roy was my father's name.

Sam was an unbelievably intelligent but loving dog. All the other dogs were retrievers or Labradors. Sam was pitch black and quite tall for a poodle so he looked a little bit like a retriever. Like other poodles he didn't shed and needed a haircut periodically. Sam's haircut was called a hunting cut; short and straight except for a puff on his short tail and another puff on his head. Once, the stylist made a mistake and cut Sam all fancy with a pretty poodle cut and a pink bow on his head but Sam was so ashamed he slunk around the house and tried to stay indoors all the time. When we made him look at himself in the mirror he shuddered, closed his eyes and cowered down on the ground. It was hilarious. We had to take him in and get his regular hunting cut.

Unlike Bingo, we trained Sam by accompanying him to a sports dog instructor and, at the same time, kept him indoors as a house pet. All the other dogs there were Labradors or retrievers, but Sam fit right in and loved being trained. Over about six months he learned to do many, many commands by voice and by hand motions. For instance, if he was lying down 30 yards away or so he would raise to sitting with an arm gesture then run towards me with another, then stop and sit with another and

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so on. He learned to retrieve without injuring the bird and so many other complicated maneuvers. He could be out in the field for pheasant hunting and retrieve more than one bird while being alert for signals from me in case another pheasant started running. At the same time, I was being trained to run him. My father didn't have the time or the interest. I would practice with Sam over and over in the evening. On the weekends we went to the trainers.

Finally, I got to field trial him against other dogs. Sam did exceptionally well for a beginner and got a first prize for a beginner dog. But unfortunately, about that time I left for freshman year at college and never got to work with Sam again.

My father never took him hunting and poor Sam became a highly trained, exceptionally intelligent house pet. When I was home I would work with him a little bit but without recurrent trial he slowly lost most of his skills. He was, however, the king dog of the neighborhood. In those days we walked without a lease and Sam was always under control anyway. Other dogs would come to play with him and he would subdue them with a snarl if they didn't behave. It was so much fun to participate with him.

Mother, of course, completely spoiled Sam. For example, Sam often got a bowl of chocolate chip ice-cream for lunch though we told mother that was bad for dogs. Same would quickly lap up the ice cream leaving all the chips at the bottom of the bowl.

Sam lived 14 years or so, but I slowly lost contact with him. I got married while attending graduate school in New York City. When we packed up to move back to Minnesota, I was determined to pass by Caroline Kennels and buy another, wonderful Samuel Roy Beau. The owner was excited to see me and as we chatted, she looked through her files next to her desk. Suddenly she frowned, pulled a file from the cabinet, read carefully and then announced sternly that she would NOT sell me another Caroline Kennel hunting poodle. We had not followed though on hunting Sam or field trialing him. I nearly wept out loud. Just then a poodle that looked exactly like Sam trotted in and sat next to the owner staring at me and wagging his little tail. I really did break out crying then and had to sit down. The owner was relentless though, and I never got to see another Hunting French Poodle.