

Auschwitz and the bird dog

Written by By DON HATLEY, Ph.D.
Tuesday, 03 January 2012 11:31

My chief bird hunting partner, Daddy, died in 1961. Several of the members in small country Methodist churches I served from 1958 through 1965 had known Daddy and his passion for the hunt.

So, when I asked around for hunting spots, one church member offered me a place with birds and told me I could hunt with his German short haired pointer, Red.

On a cold early January morning, I showed up in the church member's yard in my ugly 1962 Plymouth, a box of number 8 shot, and my 12-gauge Belgium Browning automatic, the one with the knot on the shooter's end of the barrel.

I gave Red the royal treatment by letting him ride in the backseat. Why? Riding in the trunk could've killed him.

The exhaust system on "my wheels" was leaking from several holes, one directly under the trunk, and, yes, some fumes leaked into the car itself.

Later, much later, my trusty Plymouth, the same one that got me through grad school and my first three years in Natchitoches, suffered a cruel cut from a fellow faculty member, a trumpet player no less.

He, Bob, had put his Volkswagen, Ivan the Terrible, in the shop so I agreed to give him a ride to pick up the VW. Thirty seconds in the Plymouth, Bob named my car Auschwitz, suggesting there was a connection between it and Hitler's gas chamber.

Back to Red, the bird dog. With Red in the back seat, I drove west from town on I-30, and, at Brashear, turned right on the farm to market highway leading to Ridgeway. Red's owner had told me to look for a sage grass field bordered by a small creek. It was easy to find.

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I assisted Red in the effort to get out of Auschwitz. Despite rubbing his eyes with first one paw and then the other, he seemed reasonably alert and enthusiastic about the mission.

A quarter mile into the hunt, Red pointed birds feeding out from the creek into the sage grass meadow. I stepped up beside him; the air exploded with quail. I killed birds with both my first and second shots, but missed with the third.

From the covey's rise, our birds flew several hundred yards and lit in the sage grass.

Keeping my eyes on the dead birds, I called for canine support, "Come on Red ... dead birds ... dead birds ... look close ... look close."

No Red. I picked up my birds and blew my referee's whistle ... still no Red. Tired of whistling, I headed back to Auschwitz.

Several yards from the car, I heard loud bumps coming from under it. I squatted down and saw Red hitting the gas tank with his head trying to knock a hole in the bottom of Auschwitz. I caught him by the collar, tossed him in the trunk and lit out for town.

In the owner's yard, I pulled Red out of the trunk. He wobbled to a flower bed to relieve himself. Nothing came out.

"You sure didn't hunt very long," observed Red's master.

I changed the subject by asking, "Did you know Red was gun shy?"

"I knew he didn't like shotguns. I thought you might work some of that out of him."

"Well," I said, "curing a bird dog of gun shyness is hard and time consuming. Most bird dogs are

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just not worth it.”

Watching his dog, my church member asked, “Is Red sick?”

“Aw, maybe a little. I don’t think he’s used to riding in cars,” the bird hunter part of me said.
“Some fresh air will fix him up.”

With that Auschwitz and I beat a retreat. In my rearview mirror, I saw Red still trying to restart his plumbing.