

## Finally Getting Ready for Dakota - Continued

My uncles had been trying to persuade me to buy another dog too since I lost Radar. Their quips and comments about my being dogless during the hunt hurt. Stuff like... "Nice job shooting my dog's bird - Don't you miss having a dog? - Steve... quit moping and get a dog already!"

It was clear for the beginning of this hunt that the pressure was on me. It was evident that my uncles had had enough of hunting with "Dogless Steve". Each uncle took turns talking to me about the merits of THEIR breed of hunting dog.

"Steve, look at my setter. Doesn't she look beautiful running in the morning sunlight?"

"Hey Steve! Did you see my lab flush that rooster and then retrieve it from where it fell all the way across that pond?"

"My dog is on point! Steve come over here and see this beautiful sight. Aren't pointers awesome!"

Then, during every break, little comments began to surface.

"Aren't you having fun Steve? Oh yeah, that's right... you still don't have a dog of your own."

"I can see that you sure do miss Radar! You know, there are good puppies out there that would love to have a nice owner like you."

I endured all this right up until the last day of the hunt.

Our plan on the last morning of the hunt was to hunt one last field after breakfast and then everyone was going to begin their long drives to their respective homes.

But after breakfast, my uncles surrounded me in a semicircle after breakfast. My Uncle Steve Shetlar said, "We have all put up with your moping around during this hunt for three years now. We are tired of you not having a dog. If you don't buy a dog, we are going to buy one and ship it to you!"

I stuttered and stammered around for a bit. I did not want these guys picking out a dog for me. I love them,



*The author with his brand new Black Labrador puppy named "Dakota".*

but they are pranksters. I could just imagine a Teacup Yorkie, not a bird dog being delivered to my door. I couldn't take that chance.

I had to head off the mob and take back a little control over the situation. So, I pointed down at one of their dogs and just spit out, "If I could get a Labrador Retriever like Maddie, I'd get one."

I was referring to my Uncle Gary's 18 month old female black Lab named Maddie. This was my first time seeing and hunting with Gary's

new dog. For such a young dog, she had hunted great and was very well behaved. For years, Gary has had one great dog after another. I knew he researched Maddie's kennel and her blood line extensively. He had already done all the leg work. And best of all, she was a not a Yorkie.

This seemed to break the ice and satisfy my little mob of uncles. So we broke up into our trucks and drove toward the last field of the hunt.

We parked at the edge of a corn field and we all piled out of our

trucks. But instead of pulling out shotguns, dropping tailgates and unloading dogs, my uncles again surrounded me. I thought to myself, "What now?"

Uncle Gary said, "On the way here, I called Maddie's kennel and talked to the owner. He has an eight week old half sister to Maddie ready for you to pick up right now."

I knew Maddie was named after Madison, the town where she was born. So I simply stated, "Look Gary. I just drove over 1,000 miles to get here from Texas and I'm about to drive 1,000 miles back home. I'm not about to drive all the way out of my way to Madison, Wisconsin to buy a puppy on my way to Texas."

Gary smiled and sprang his trap. "No Steve. I didn't name Maddie after Madison, Wisconsin. I named her after her hometown of Madison, South Dakota. It is about an hour from here right on your way home to Texas. We are all going to skip the last field and go with you."

I knew I was cornered. I had no more excuses. I began to get nervous all over. Was this really about to happen? Of course it was... my uncles were going to make sure of it.

On the way to pick up my puppy, I broke down and said a little prayer to Radar. I told him that he will always be my first bird dog. I also told him that no dog could ever take his place in my heart.

After that prayer and calm came over me. It was like now even Radar was telling me that it was time for me to get a puppy. So, I relaxed and let my emotions flow over me.

Visiting the kennel and purchasing my new little puppy is all now quite a blur. I remember it, but it was like I was watching someone else.

It all became real when I got into Uncle Tom's truck and I put Dakota (Yes I named her Dakota) in my lap for the long ride home to Texas and the waiting arms of the rest of my family. I was finally ready.