



Finally Getting Ready for Dakota

**By Steven Bridges
Goldthwaite Eagle**

In the early 1980s Mills County was covered up with quail. They were so plentiful that my friends and I hunted them without dogs. We just spread out and walked in the pasture with our shotguns. Coveys of 10-20 birds flushed at our feet as we tromped around.

Every once in a long while one of us got lucky and bagged a bird from the covey rise. More often than not, we were too rattled to hit any birds on the initial flush. But we watched singles land in the distance. We would then surrounded a single and flush it. This is when we bagged most of our birds. It was a lot of work for a little quail, but we were young and energetic. We didn't know any other way.

The first time I ever bird hunted behind a dog was when I was around 12 years old. Danny Long was the Mills County Extension Agent and Danny's wife Becky worked for my parents at the newspaper. One day Danny came into the newspaper office and asked me to go along with him on a quail hunt just outside of Goldthwaite that afternoon.

Danny ran too beautiful pointers in front of us as we casually walked behind. After a little while, one dog went on point and the other pointed right behind it. Danny urged me to walk right in and flush the covey. I did as he asked. When the covey flushed, I dropped one cleanly. I was so surprised that I didn't even think about trying for a second bird.

I turned to Danny with a huge smile and yelled, "I got one!"

One dog raced right to my bird and picked it up. It turned on a dime and sprinted to Danny.

Danny chuckled as the pointer dropped my bird into his hand. He

casually said, "Good shot Stevie. Now lets get my three and see if we can pick up a few singles."

My jaw dropped as Danny's dogs picked up his three quail in order and delivered them to Danny. Danny never moved an inch. He just stood there with a little grin while his dogs had a grand old time running around with noses on the ground, grabbing birds and sprinting back.

I was sold on hunting birds with dogs from that moment on. However, the next 20 plus years of my life

was not conducive to owning a bird dog. I wasn't in a pet owning family. I was barely responsible enough to take of myself in college. And when I got a job out of school, I lived in a little apartment in downtown Chicago.

That all changed when I moved back to Goldthwaite and married my grade school girlfriend Debra. She already had two little Dachsunds. I was ready to add a third to our kennel.

As luck would have it my hunting buddy, Kris Sparks, had a little

of puppies out of his beautiful Vizsla female Sadie. Kris gave me a male out of that little. That male was to become Radar. And he was to take up a big piece of my heart for years to come.

I have written several articles in the newspaper and in the Mills County Hunting Guides over the years about Radar and our mishaps. I could write multiple books about the antics revolving around Radar. And maybe I will when I am ready someday...

It has been over three years since my beloved Vizsla Radar passed away. For months I cried every time I saw a Vizsla. Puppies especially got my tears rolling. My wife and kids were sad, but I took my grief to a whole other level.

Everyone, including my family, encouraged me to get another dog. "A puppy..." they said "That is just what you need!"

But I just couldn't seem to get over Radar enough to pull the trigger on a new puppy. I browsed the internet virtually visiting kennels for Vizsla puppies. I looked at a lot of cute pointer and Labrador puppies. I trolled for Brittannies and setters too. If the breed pointed or flushed, I took notice. But I just wasn't ready... yet.

I held onto this feeling of unreadiness as I went on our yearly trip to hunt pheasants in South Dakota last December. The back of my uncle Tom's truck looked bare without a kennel in the back. I even found myself thinking "What is the point of going on a hunt like this without a dog of my own?"

It was going to be another year of hunting behind my uncles' dogs. And then there are the comments I'd also have to endure...

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The author with his Vizsla bird dog "Radar" on a Mills County Dove Hunt. Radar passed away in 2016.