

The language does not have to be verbal (?)

— sign language works ^{as well} fine — but whatever
it is, it must be learned before sexual

maturity. That comes in the early teen,

for humans, and at about one year (?)

for male ^(?) puppies.

— ~~He~~ ~~He~~ was for sure socialize 2, disposed
to cooperation.

(temperament)

When Huck's running like
that, something is re leaps
out there with him. Matter
of ego-projection.

If I go first, it is
not the kind of day that
would start a legend
by ~~camp~~ sleeping on my
grave, even though it will
~~be~~ be in a part of the
~~Wendy~~ ~~country~~ valley where
hearts. He'd go out

pointing birds in - but,
wishing I wouldn't get lost.
~~wishing for someone~~
~~to come along and do the~~
~~workday.~~

~~I~~ I Confess that
I am no good at training
~~dogs. One~~ my dog. On
the other hand, my dog
is pretty good at
training me. Maybe it
all even out.

— Huck taught me how
not to find a
pheasant. (The 1st loss)

We choose dogs ~~to project~~
as metaphors (?) for
ourselves — and succeed
very well. Dogs ~~are~~

do come to resemble their
owner, or vice versa.

(old story that dog +
owner come to look
alike.)

May 19, 1992

Mr. Bob Wilbanks
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Dear Bob,

Good to talk to you. I don't know if the enclosed is your kind of story, but I'd be grateful if you'd have a look at it.

Photo ideas:

1. You probably know Denver Bryan (406-388-2465) and Dale Spartas (406-585-2244), two local professional photographers. Both have good slides of Huckleberry and me -- the main protagonists in the story. I've enclosed some prints from Dale's slides to give you an idea.

2. Eldridge Hardie in Denver (303-756-5662) owns the rights to the illustrations in my pheasant book, if you'd like to run one or two of those. Some have appeared elsewhere; I could go over that with you.

3. Last and least, I've enclosed one slide of my own that refers to an incident in the text (pup clawing his way out of the kennel). Probably not good enough.

Yours,

Enclosed: "Language Lessons"
Photos

About 2170 words

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LANGUAGE LESSONS

There may be things that
only a puppy can learn.

Jim McCue is partly to blame for what happened, mind you. When I was looking for a pup with the right ancestors, Jim's dog was winning the biggest field trials for German shorthaired pointers, so naturally I inquired about the champion's social life. Jim told me of a promising litter and I bought Huckleberry over the telephone -- one of the quickest of life's big decisions. Jim and I met a few days later at an abandoned airport, turned the pup loose, and watched him try to catch a flock of starlings before they gained altitude. Jim said that I should let the pup tear around like that for his first year, building up enthusiasm. By the time Jim finished his sentence, Huck was out of sight and I was wondering how much more enthusiasm to expect.

Back home, I introduced the pup to a brand new kennel and concrete run -- built for my wife, in a sense, because she had

run out of enthusiasm for dogs that dribbled on her floors. It turned out that I should have used a thicker door for the kennel. Huck clawed a hole in the plywood and Anna thought he looked cute, peeking out for company, so she allowed him in the kitchen while I was armor-plating his quarters. By the time I was done, Anna remarked that the pup did not drool. A couple of hours later she reported that he had housebroken himself. After some few months, I sneaked out of my office and heard Huck telling Anna a tale that was making her giggle. His pronunciation was weak, you understand, especially on the consonants. What caught my attention was that he was imitating the cadence of my wife's speech and the pitch of her voice. Must have been a funny story, too, because she's Irish, with more feeling for tragedy than comedy. I'd never realized that she had such a pretty laugh.

Languages are easy to learn, at the right time of life, and that time -- for humans -- is before puberty. Little children can learn even Irish Gaelic, which is more than I have managed. The right timing turns out to be crucial, however. Neuropsychologists now believe that early childhood is a "critical period" -- the time during which a human must be exposed to his or her mother tongue. A child that fails to acquire language skills does not develop the necessary brain circuits and is impaired for life. Work is being done on critical periods in dogs, too, and it is going to change the ways we raise puppies. Meanwhile, most of us have probably known dogs with circuits missing.

I do not mean to push the analogy. Huckleberry is a

communicator, but neither his logic system nor his sound system have evolved in the same way as mine. What he thinks is language is, in fact, just a game. On the other hand, puppy-games made him a faster learner than the kennel-raised dogs I've worked with. In particular, the way he picked up trailing seemed unusual, for a pointing dog.

During that first fall, Jim McCue's advice gave me the excuse to do what Huck and I both wanted anyhow, which was to run wild. There were bigger things than puppy-training for me to worry about just then. I needed an optimistic little bundle of energy to exorcise my emotions, focus them at infinity. Optimism was part of Huck's personalities -- both of them. "House angel, field demon," Anna called him. When Huck glimpsed our pond for the first time, he took a flying leap into it and swam toward my wife, who thought he was drowning. "My puppy!" she screamed. I had not heard that tone in her voice since our baby rolled down the stairs (with similar results). Anna waded in to save Huck. He climbed out on his own, shook water all over her, then jumped back in and swam across the pond to me.

A pup this bold would not have been daunted by more early training in obedience. On the other hand, I do not regret my failure to train Huck on the usual tame bobwhites and pigeons. In lieu of them he pointed the meadowlarks, flustered the ducks, and chased the magpies. It might not have been everyone's idea of fun but the most important thing in matching man and dog, I suppose, is temperament. Part of me was right out there running with the

pup, eyes shining, tongue hanging out.

The first pheasant that Huck pointed was a hen, which I of course flushed with fanfare. There were not many cocks around but he started pointing those he ran into. I took the finds as serendipitous -- gifts from the angels. Any pup can run into a bird, and a pup of the right breeding is always going to point strong scent. It's in his genes. You don't know that you've got a real pheasant dog till he learns trailing.

When Huck was six months and eleven days old, however, my enthusiasm and his reached the same level. He started trailing in grass that was, I thought, too low for a pheasant. I watched for a while, concluded that he was doing a good job of hunting the wrong thing, and decided to ignore him. Hiked fifty yards. Realized that I was alone, looked around, and saw the pup on point. Ran back, caught the bird between us, waited out a great noisy glittering flush, and dropped a rooster in plain sight. Huck pounced and retrieved. He had done it all, seen it all, made the connection.

Two days later, almost at dark, he went on point in cattails. I tried extra-hard to shoot well, which is of course the best way to miss, and the rooster came down winged. I saw it land in a patch of brush and heeled Huck to the place. He tore off across an open field. I kept whistling him back, making him hunt the brush. The stars came out. We did not find the bird till the next day, by which time it was bones and pretty feathers, the rest eaten by a skunk. The bird had in fact headed across the

open field and Huck had been on its track, if only I had let him follow his nose. That was the last time I tried to teach him anything about trailing.

In his second season, when the pup was a year old, he lost none of the hundred-odd birds that my friends and I shot over him. Hardest to smell were the singles of gray (Hungarian) partridges. Members of the grouse family ran as well as the partridges but left more scent. Pheasants, of course, were the long-distance champions, covering up to a measured mile. It seemed, too, that they shared some of the partridges' ability to suppress scent in an emergency.

Huck was experienced, considering his tender age, but he was not trained by the usual field-trial rules. He remained free to creep or break point in order to stay with a moving bird. Perhaps some pups can trail as well as Huck without being allowed equal discretion. I just haven't seen them.

A year-old pup on his own discretion was, of course, often indiscreet. He would stand on point as long as his bird held, but when it moved there were various possibilities. Hardest of them to handle was a maneuver we'll call the Montana Sprinting Squat. Pickup drivers have a similar ploy called the Texas Rolling Stop, during which the truck coasts through an octagonal sign at 45 miles per hour. You are supposed to take good intentions into account. Pheasants intend to flush but not within 11 inches of a dog's nose, so they sprint till achieving the velocity of a Texas Rolling Stop and then go airborne, total elapsed time 0.7

seconds.

Fortunately, the Montana Sprinting Squat always worked and the birds always escaped. They were wild and strong, remember. You could not let a pup chase pen-raised birds or he'd catch some of them and perhaps decide that he could hunt successfully on his own. Huck learned that he only got pheasants when we worked together. I ladled on praise when he did things right, of course, but a bird in the mouth was all the encouragement he really needed. At the end of a day we'd both tell my wife that we'd had fun but it was not fun, exactly. It was the happiness that comes with pheasant feathers.

My system (or non-system) might be wrong for you. You might lack wild birds or the time to work a pup on them. Your wife might not provide language lessons for the youngster. You might have a kennel-raised dog, or one with less point in his genes. Your specialty might be eastern ruffed grouse, in which case you would be wise to insist that your dog point at first suspicion of scent and hold till released. For covey birds like the partridges and quails, I'd have preferred Huck steady to wing and shot too, because a dog that breaks can spoil a covey rise. But for the rest I wanted him to trail. I wanted him to get me shots at the old cocks that considered themselves immortal. I wanted him to find winged birds no matter how far they ran. The rewards seemed worth the risk.

A "dog that's going to be any good puts his nose where the scent is", high or low. That's what William Harnden Foster wrote

about grouse dogs back in 1942, and Huckleberry reached the same conclusion. When air-scent failed, he would work a patch of snowberries on ground-scent till I called him off, and a cock would flush the moment my back was turned. It turns out that roosters can run around for a long time in the same half-acre of brush. You might not want to waste time on such birds -- if you have easier hunting available. We did not.

Working air scent, on the other hand, was anything but tedious. The pup would trail from one end to another of a 200-acre field of grasses planted under the Conservation Reserve program. Or he'd follow birds out of a brushy bottom, up weedy draws, and into wheat stubble. Some of the pheasants would hold tight at the end of the trails. Others would flush wild. It's what most owners of pointing dogs would have predicted, and what some would call disaster. The pheasants certainly considered it disaster, because we got our share at the end of the trails. I earned the shots, mind you. My wife was teaching aerobic dance classes, working out on a ski machine, and watching her calories while I was eating like a sumo wrestler and getting skinnier by the week. Huck was going through ten cups a day of the expensive high-fat dog food. If you don't want exercise, stay away from pointer pups bred for all-age field trials.

When you run a young dog almost every day, something happens to its body as well as its mind. Huck put on ten or fifteen pounds of muscles that he would not have developed if he had spent his youth in a kennel. The weight was in the right places,

because running is complete exercise for a dog. Being light-boned, he did not look heavy. His brown hair was shiny as a seal's. His pads gave no trouble. His pace would have exhausted any other dog I've had in two days, but Huck kept it up all season. There was, however, a disadvantage that I learned when partridge season opened the next year on September 1: Muscles hold heat. I had to whistle him in frequently, sit him down in shade, and give him water. When duck season came, swimming was harder for him too, because his body was so dense that he had to work just to stay afloat. A serious water-dog needs some fat.

Perhaps trailing, the way Huck does it, really is a skill that must be acquired before puberty. I don't know. At various times, however, I have watched him hunt with seven other pointing dogs, and that's counting only the good ones. Some of the seven are competitive with him in shoot-to-retrieve trials; one is his half-brother. All can follow hot body scent. When Huck takes off after a really sneaky rooster, however, the other dogs have learned that the only way to get involved is to run loops in front of him. That maneuver takes brains too, of course.

I watch the other dogs when they realize that Huck is on a tough trail. They deduce what is going on but cannot get the hang of it themselves. They look at him as if he were speaking Gaelic, sort of.

In his third season, Huckleberry learned to keep an eye on me when he was working a pheasant, wait for me to get in position, break his point, and resume trailing. I made a point of looping upwind from him, when possible

When the wind was right and the angels on our side, we did miracles.

That was real hunting.

In his second season, when he was a year old, my friends and I shot about fifty pheasants over the pup, plus ruffed, blue, sharptailed and sage grouse. It was a good year for partridges, too. I don't believe we lost a bird. [] The grouse were seldom hard to retrieve but partridges were tough and one pheasant ran from a section-line to the next line -- a mile. The average winged cock went perhaps a hundred yards in an unforeseeable direction. For years I had been trying to show dogs where to hunt dead because I had no choice: they could relocate a bird, with luck, but they could not trail. I had a pup now that could do the job.

I did some training, eventually. In the summer I cannot run Huck where there are nesting birds, so he enters the field trials. He is aware, now, that there are two games -- the real one and the fake -- and likes the trials when nothing better is available. I feel the same way. The formal work keeps us in the

field together and is more fun than anything on the list of projects my wife has for me. For the trials, however, I had to train the pup to hold a point till released. [Training just for a training exercise.]

Problems arose where the ground cover is thin -- in woods or high brush. Pheasants can run forever in that stuff and Huck lost me a few times.

I'm always terrified when I cannot hear his bell or beeper, though I know by now that he's not lost -- I am. I'm easy to find because I smell worse than a bird. I wish he'd keep me under tighter control, though. He could get in trouble. A golden retriever belonging to a friend of mine got its head in one of those damnable traps that are supposed to kill instantly, and almost did. I've told my wife not to panic if I fail to show up for dinner some evening. I don't plan to leave my coat and come back for Huck in the morning. I plan to keep looking.

Did not insist on retrieves of any length at first. A cock can hurt a pup.

I've not given my dog much training that I'm aware of, but he's been good at training me. He is by no means what is known in the business as "fully broke." He clearly sees himself as not broke at all, and therefore not in need of fixing. By the time he was six months old, he knew more about birds than I did, which induced humility.

I wanted to run Huck in field trials during the summer when birds were nesting. Seemed like a god training exercise. So I wound up training him to be trained.

[Well, it's been hard to find time. There are four kinds of grouse needing attention, and partridges, quail, snipe, ducks, and pheasants, which latter are in special demand around my house for Sunday dinners and other nourishing occasions. One man and one dog can only do so much.]

[after-season hunting.]

[Note the breeding. Not everyone would want to crash through pheasant cover with a pup from wide-ranging field-trial stock.]

Huck also figured out that it was politic to sleep in his crate, stay off the furniture, and look at the boss lady with big

brown eyes, especially when she was dicing ham. Nothing unusual.

Thought I'd lost my investment in the first ten seconds, but Huck loped back as soon as he had exhausted the possibilities.

If I had tried Jim Martins' [] stop-to-flush training, I'm sure that I would have wound up with a different kind of dog.

Two days later I lost track of the pup in heavy cover. I whistled. No response. I waited. A cock flew out, Huck right behind it. He'd broken point, when I failed to show, and tried to catch the bird on his own. For the rest of the hunt he ran wild, chasing deer and ravens, ignoring the pheasant cover in front of me. "Start using a bell," my notes said. I could not afford many more mistakes with a pup this wild and hard-headed. He'd hunt on his own if I couldn't make myself useful.

At least Huck had not caught the rooster. If it had been a pen-raised bird, he might have picked it up, in which case I would have had a serious habit to break. You might think that I had a problem anyhow. The pup had learned to look for scent, point when he found the bird, trail when it ran, break point at the flush, trail a winged bird if necessary, and retrieve it.

It was not that I was aiming for a self-hunting field-trial dog. On the contrary, I wanted him to work in close cooperation with the leader of his pack -- me.

He had not just worked up enthusiasm -- he'd learned a method that would never leave him.

friends with good pointing dogs

Dennis - 3

Dave Carty - 2

John B - 2

The next day he started trailing in grass that was, I thought, too low for a pheasant, so I ignored him. Figured he was after a meadowlark. Hiked a hundred yards. Realized that I was alone, looked around, and saw Huck on point. Ran back, caught the bird between us, waited out a great noisy glittering flush, and dropped a rooster in plain sight. Huck pounced and retrieved. He had seen it all, done it all, made the connection. "Superpup," my diary said. At six months eleven days, he had clearly learned his language.

The only thing that hurt him badly was barbed wire, against which he had no natural defenses. He flew through the strands like a sparrow, which worked for the first hundred times, and on the hundred and first I took him to the vet for stitches. From then on he was wary of horizontal lines in the grass.

The pup was not crazy-wild. When he learned that I appreciated the finer things in life, he brought me the treasures he found on every trip: pheasant wings, rancid blackbirds, and deer bones. [Check previous article.] He learned about natural hazards as quickly as a fox cub. On one of our runs he picked up two quills in a front toe, and forever after he ignored porcupines. He buzzed skunks but ducked their sprays.

When he did things wrong, I made him listen. Like any other pup worth his salt, he pointed whatever smelled good, and if it turned out to have feathers I raised no objection. He learned soon enough that there was no sense wasting time on songbirds. Cottontails took longer. For deer I got strict and he got the message. For rattlesnakes and jackrabbits, I avoided exposure till he was a year old and then used a training collar. Those things can be fatal to a dog, in their different ways. A dog that can hunt by sight, air-scent, and ground scent can catch jackrabbits or get shot by a sheep-farmer in the process.

Like most pheasant hunters, I let the pup break and run after flushing birds. They are easier to run down when a dog gets on them at touch-down.

my friends and I shot about fifty cocks over him, plus partridges, ruffed grouse, blue grouse, sage hens, and snipe.
[quote from book.]

Researchers in canine behavior are asking the same questions as you and me, and perhaps getting more answers. Scientists, however, find it more convenient to work with dogs deprived of family, freedom, and work. One group [] of researchers recently tried to discover why dogs bark -- and bark, and bark, and bark. Huckleberry could have cleared that up: he hardly ever barks, because he's not in a kennel.

He can't use a shotgun, either. In most other ways, the dog-man comparison yields resemblance after resemblance, so close that they're spooky. When it is time for pack-hunting, for example, Huck knows me better than my wife. "I don't understand it," she says. "You guys get out of the house or there'll be no peace around here."

One or another of his humans was always looking for conversation and there was barely enough puppy to go around.

If you are wondering what all of this has to do with a working dog, you are exactly the man I was hoping to reach. (A woman would have figured it out.)

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it," Bert Lance said, so I never got around to fixing Huckleberry and he ain't broke yet.

Jim McCue shares the blame with Mr. Lance, mind you. When I was shopping for a pup, a sire owned by Jim was winning the biggest field trials for German shorthaired pointers, and naturally I inquired about the champion's social life. Jim told me of a promising litter and I bought Huck just like that, over the telephone. He was fourteen weeks old.

[All seven do well on gray (Hungarian) partridges, too. With them, trailing is unnecessary and can be a disadvantage, except in the case of cripples. For the other birds we hunt -- pheasants, Mearns quail, and all the grouse -- trailing is useful.]

If you get the impression that the training going on was mutual, you might be right.

I was not a victim of sensory deprivation, mind you. My job took me to four continents and one island, each of which had wild places, and I wore out boots chasing everything from 4-ounce [] snipe to game measured in tons. Serious upland hunting was the hardest to organize, which perhaps was why I wanted it most. I settled for mere shooting but hankered for a dog that could find secrets in the grass. Once in awhile it all came together -- the right dog in a field with tinamous or francolins or red grouse -- but mostly I thought to myself, at the end of a season: That was good, but it was not real hunting.

When I could at last choose what I wanted, therefore, I
moved to the right valley and picked

A One-Dog Man

~~Gap~~
I have not been much good at training my dog but he has been very good at training me, so maybe it all evened out. I didn't want a normally-trained dog.

Report on how it works out, at 5-year mark

(Do insist on some things: be chalking in to Shistle, heeling, letting me flush the birds. (Dennis didn't even do that.) Must know Shari in charge.

- No swim in the pond.
- Chasing magpie near the h.v.
- Teaching me how not to find a pheasant.
- Letting me go. Bats, complaints to wife - in her tone of voice.
- Long retriever-chases. Last year w/ David.

The self-releasing dilemma. You must let him do it to trait. Otherwise he's not training. maybe re-finding.

Apology to pro-trainers: they can't do it this way. Must train for the large majority who have little time, & maybe no wild birds.

Match temperaments: dog, bird, & man.

You have to let the dog know it through. Takes a special relationship.

Critical-period hypothesis - N. Locke.

I hunt all year... ~~just~~ ^{hard} don't always
shoot. Mt. Sept - Dec. Arizona Jan.
Non-shooting Feb - May. Trials & such May - Aug.
Chooses points by relocating: accustomed to
using brain.

Perch of ~~starting~~ ^{me} ~~early~~ - + virtues.
Dog will learn to
think. Just for pleasant wild birds.
Not so good for trials.

2) Muscles. 10 lbs extra?

- overheats in Sept. Needs water.
- but can go every day, except perhaps in C.R.P. Athlete.
- Sinks head in water. Remaining complete exertion for dogs.

3) What if something happens? Separation.
Will have to start another program just in case.

4) Brain: develop what he's got. Show every
human emotion. Tricks.

- Boots for me. (Boots & Saddle)
- Talks to Anna - in her pitch. Grusky.

5) ~~Don't bark unless~~ except when I would.
Barks less than the rest of us.

6) Intelligence comparable to (not equal) to human.
Soul. Same emotion. Reason.

Temperament

I want for emotions. Get a lot of them from the kind of tension that we call a point. Want points even on snipe & ducks, where I might well get more meat otherwise. Don't need any more meat. If anything, am a little embarrassed by the number of birds we get.

Around the house

Calvin. Does not fawn, but likes company except when sleeping. No longer the insecure pup that licked me on the face in S. Yellowknife. But expects me to be there if there's trouble. I expect to be there.

Cooperation

Looks at me when ~~present~~ on trail.
Lays. Tries to pin birds between us. Expects me to be there. I try.

Long trails. She on last winter.

Brings me nowhere more than 100% of birds shot.

Temperament

~~They~~ do look like their dogs, & move like them, & think like them. ~~But~~ But don't have as good a nose.

More precisely: do pick dogs to match our fantasies - dogs intended to be like us, but better.

One-Dog Man

how
I'm not much good at training my dog but
his good at training
he's knows how to train me he's able to
train me, so it all works out. I do
claim credit for picking a pup with the
right ancestor. What I wanted was a
dog for everything, or at least every thing I
want ~~to do~~ to do, which include
hunting to grouse, & partridge, snipe, woodcock,
ducks (etc) & above all pheasants, since they're
handiest. And to make my wife laugh, because
she deserves a giggle now & then.

Sight unseen from Jim McEne. all-age.
Speed plus trailing: unequal. The big thing
is to match temperaments.

He didn't have to be trained for things like porcupine + skunk. For deer, jackrabbit, + ~~skunk~~ or skunk, used a shock collar.

Training to crate + ~~kernel~~ so easy I was forgetful. + fun - ~~not~~ shy.

| ("There's something going on in there," says Doc.)

Whistle -

Winged birds: trails high if he get on them instantly. Otherwise low-down.

2-dog routine: Hawk trails, another cuts the bird off. or Gopher.

Doesn't take a smart pup long to figure out what's going on.

Placing me going: shoes, then complaint to Anna: I'm sad here.

Bone object + carrying genes + a lot of catch-'em! genes.

Stuff he brings me. Wings, bones, feathers.

Trailing as a language.