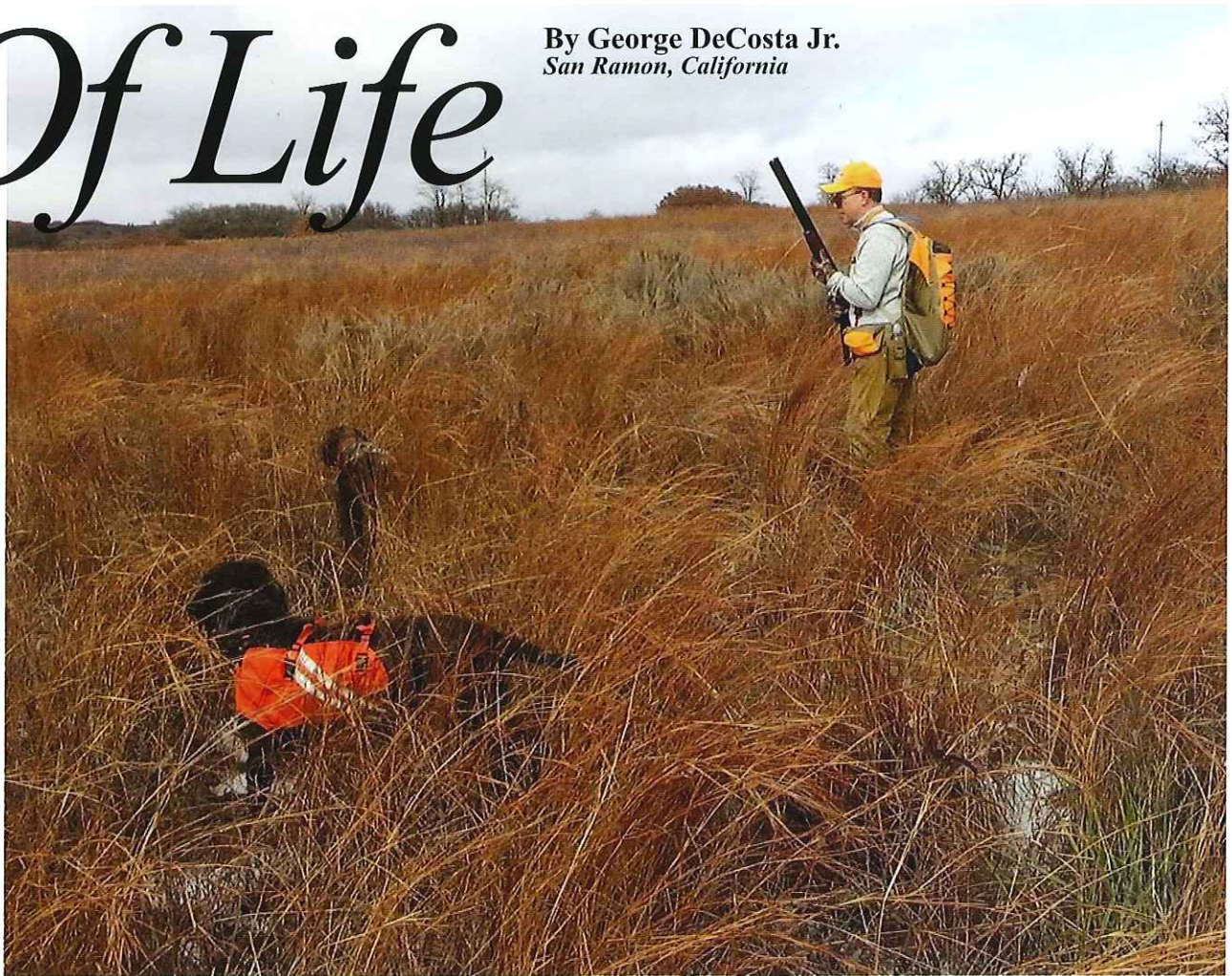


The Diamonds Of Life

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I believe we each have our own jewelry box of life. I find as I venture through my life's experiences there are diamonds that I treasure and place in my jewelry box to bring out from time-to-time. These diamonds are my treasured memories. You can take away my possessions such as cars, money, houses and all the other items I've acquire throughout my life's journey, but please don't take my memories. Those are the most valuable possessions, my precious jewels.

Many of my most prized diamonds are my memories of times spent afield with my hunting dogs, friends and family. I'd be willing to bet many of yours are too. Some of my diamonds have been shared with others time and time again. These precious moments are re-experienced in my mind's-eye over and over, and each time they give me a thrill and warm my heart.

If I may take a few moments of your time, I'd like to share a couple of my diamonds with you. I'm hoping that you will feel as if you were there, by my side, in the fields of bygone times.

I've been hunting with Bruce Collett for close to forty years. We've shared many special moments in the field with our hunting dogs. In our early twenties I had a German Shorthaired Pointer named Cheyenne. He was a pheasant-hunting machine. One year, way back when, Bruce and I got access to a large CRP field in central California. We had never hunted this field, and we were both excited to give it a go. Bruce had brought his old Stevens Double, and I had my Ithaca 300 O/U. As we unsheathed our shotguns, I noticed Cheyenne already had his nose in the air scenting game. Heck, we hadn't even left the car! This looked to be the makings of a splendid day.

Shotguns locked and loaded, vests on, water bottles full and our enthusiasm in high gear, we released the dog and headed into the field. Not fifty yards out, Cheyenne

locked into a solid, stylish point. I went in to flush the bird and, in a heartbeat, the pounding of wings erupted from the cover below. I quickly shouted "HEN," and the three of us watched the female pheasant glide away into the horizon. "Hunt 'em up," was my command, and off went Cheyenne into his search mode once again.

Within another hundred yards, Cheyenne slammed into another striking point, but the sound of "HEN" again rang in the air, and another female pheasant soared into the skyline. This became a common scene throughout the day, and by lunch break Cheyenne had pointed fourteen hen pheasants and zero roosters. I'll bet you can guess what the conversation was during lunch. It was about

Cheyenne's phenomenal performance and the sorrowful feeling we both had for him. He had worked his stubby little tail off and not a shot was heard, or bird retrieved.

Cheyenne was a marathon hunter. He could go all day and wake up the next day ready to go again. Before Bruce and I were ready to get up from our siesta, Cheyenne was up and prancing, letting us know it was time to go, daylight was a-wasting.

Tummies satisfied and shotguns ready, we headed back into the field only to have the same scenario repeat itself nine times over. Yep, if you're counting, Cheyenne had pointed twenty-three pheasants in a row, all hens. As we headed towards the car feeling badly for our hard-working pup, he



made game near a large thicket. We watched as he tucked his head and smashed through the brush and out of our eyesight. Oh boy, I thought to myself, he's on point somewhere in this dense mess.

I'm going in, I said to Bruce and busted my way through the thickets. There stood Cheyenne in a half-circle, rock-solid point. Not three feet from his nose was a hunkered down rooster. "Bruce, it's a rooster." I whispered, "Please don't miss this sucker!" As I stepped forward, up from the brush skyrocketed an explosion of color and cackling. My Ithaca hit my shoulder, and I felt the report. Feathers floated in the air, and the bird bounced to its left. At almost the same moment, I heard the report from Bruce's Stevens, and more feathers filled the air as the pheasant tumbled to the ground. I'm glad there wasn't anyone around, because the two of us danced about like a couple of high school cheerleaders. Not because of our shooting, but because Cheyenne finally got his due. I stepped out of the brush, and a moment later Cheyenne came running back with the beautiful pheasant hanging down from both sides of his mouth. I looked over at

Bruce and said, "Nice shooting." Bruce just smiled and said, "There was no way in hell that bird wasn't going down!"

Every so often I polish a shine on that diamond and bring it out to show friends and new hunting acquaintances. It's usually when Bruce is there to collaborate and relive that moment in time by my side.

Speaking of dancing in the field...

The morning was crisp and cold as my pup Cota and I got out of our Jeep and started to ready-up for a bobwhite quail hunt in the Oklahoma Badlands. As I looked out into the horizon, I could see aged windmills and oil pumps standing tall in the colorful sunrise. I could also see tall, thick cover. Really thick cover. Having hunted bobwhites in the open fields in Kansas in years past, I had discovered why bobwhites were given the name, Gentlemen Bob. But I wasn't in Kansas anymore.

Jimmy and Sandy Clark had put together a Hunting Griff Fest event, and I had taken them up on their gracious invitation. Twenty-one Wirehaired Pointing Griffons from all over the United States had shown up for a week of wild quail hunting. At this event, I got to put a couple of stunning



diamonds into my jewelry box of life, more than that if you count all the fun evenings around the campfire singing, playing guitar and telling stories.

On each day of the event, we were teamed up with different folks from all around the country. On day two I was teamed with George Kline, and Vernon and Leslie Cutler. George had brought his dogs Lucy and Zipper down from Maryland. Vernon and Leslie had brought their dog Razor up from Texas. Bruce and I had traveled from California with our pups Gus and Cota. We had come up a week before the event to hunt on our own, only to be greeted by an Oklahoma ice storm. But that didn't stop us, that's one of the reasons I've hunted with Bruce for close to forty years, he's a true hunter. Today would be a different Oklahoma hunt. Sunshine on our shoulders with Griffs from completely different parts of the country, I was looking forward to it.

Boots on the pups, chaps on the hunters and shotguns in our arms, together we all headed out into the thick brush. Whoever nicknamed bobwhite quail, Gentlemen Bob, hasn't hunted them in the tangled vegetation of Oklahoma! The birds were busting out at least fifty yards ahead, well before the dogs could get on enough scent to point. Cota and I headed off to the side of the group where I had seen a couple of quail land, and it wasn't long before Cota located one of the birds and froze in place. The bird flushed, and I dropped it with one shot. The seal was broken; the first bird of the day was in the bag.

It wasn't long before Cota slammed into another solid point. George was to my left; I looked over and pointed at Cota. A split second later thunder erupted from the ground below. My Beretta 687 O/U hit my shoulder, and I watched the bird drop to my left. Another bird rocketed to my right, and the Beretta's second barrel sounded off. Bird number two tumbled head over tail feathers to the ground. I had gotten my first Oklahoma double!

I looked back at George and asked if he had dropped any. He just laughed and said he hadn't gotten a shot off. All those birds had given him buck fever. I smiled and said, "Don't worry. I've been there and done that many times." To my right I saw Cota on her way back with the last bird I had dropped. Good girl... I then sent her in the direction of the bird that had fallen to my left. She searched her heart out,

but she couldn't locate the bird. I called Vernon and Leslie over with Razor to help find the bird. Cota, Zipper and Lucy were already searching for the downed little Houdini.

I hate to lose a shot bird. I mean I really hate to lose a shot bird. We looked and looked until I started to get some ribbing about how no one else had seen the bird drop, and was I sure I wasn't imagining my Oklahoma double. But Lucy came to the rescue and went on point not two yards from where I stood. I looked down, and there was the bird not a foot from her nose. She's got it, I yelled. George said fetch, and Lucy broke point and retrieved the bird. As we headed forward, Lucy started hunting in front of Cota and me. I mentioned to George that his dog was over by me. He again laughed and said, "No worries, she knows who the real hunter is." (Lucy hunted with Cota and me the rest of the day and didn't go back to George until the hunt was over. I loved it!)

The golden sun was now on the downhill slope towards the western horizon so we headed back towards the car. All of a sudden I realized I had made a serious blunder. I looked over at Leslie and said, "Hey, I forgot to do my double dance." She had the deer in the headlights look on her face and said, "Huh?" I explained to her that ever since I was a boy, I was told that whenever you got a double on quail you had to do a dance to thank the hunting gods for the lucky bounty. As I did my quick dance Leslie said, "Oh you're just showing off now." But as soon as I stopped my dance, we both saw Cota hit a stylish point to my right (stylish for a Griff, anyway). Once again the ground erupted with the heart-stopping sound of pounding wings. My Beretta sounded off with two shots, and, to my surprise, two birds fell from the sky. Cota retrieved one as Lucy retrieved the other. To me there's nothing more beautiful than watching a brace of dogs work as a team. As I placed the harvest into my game bag, I looked over at Leslie with a smile on my face. She just laughed and said, "Okay I believe you now."

That night I was one of the last people to arrive at the campfire, and, as I approached, I heard the group shout, "Hey, here comes Double, Double DeCosta, the dancing quail shooter." The story had preceded me.

I placed those last two quail in my freezer wrapped in a paper sack to be mounted and placed on the wall. I also placed another diamond into my jewelry box of life. 🐾

