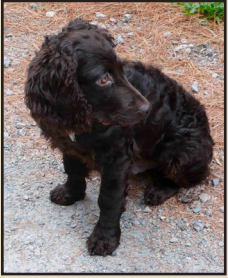


Otis THE BOYKIN SPANIEL

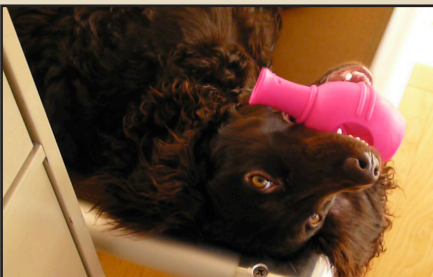
by Magda Fernandez



This quarterly column is about life with Otis, my companion Boykin Spaniel. His full name is Hollow Creek's Otis on the Go, but you can call him Otis. In the 16 weeks that I've owned young Otis,

I've learned more than I used to know about dogs because Otis really left me no choice! My little guy is all at once willful, energetic, curious, slightly shy, elegant, scrappy, gruff, mouthy as heck, and wildly capable of outfoxing me without proper handling. By handling, I mean smart and humane handling -the kind of positive handling that keeps you three steps ahead of your dog and that works with-not fights against-those keen hunting instincts so that he comes to see you as his master companion instead of prey or adversary.

All I can tell you is that when my affectionate, eight week-old, seven-pound Otis started biting my pant legs, growling at me over the leash, and shying away from other dogs, I knew that I had to quickly learn to unravel what seemed, at the time, a little curly, brown bundle of contradictions. I realized that this was not the mellow lapdog that I used to have. This time I had a more complex firecracker on my hands! So right away I enlisted the help of a trainer to teach me how to transform my little snapping turtle into a spirited companion



dog. Seizing the window of opportunity in his development, I enrolled Otis in three back-to-back puppy socialization classes to work on his dog shyness, while making sure that he greeted other dogs during our many long walks. I read selected books, blogs, and talked to many dog owners about their experiences with

tough puppy stages. All of these efforts made a world of difference, and I can say that I'm now in full charge of my adolescent Otis, and have no fear of extricating something from his mouth if I have to growl or no growl. Speaking of which, I also have learned to distinguish Otis' bluff from gruff. We're still working on "Drop it," but we're getting there. But golly can Otis fetch and retrieve, come



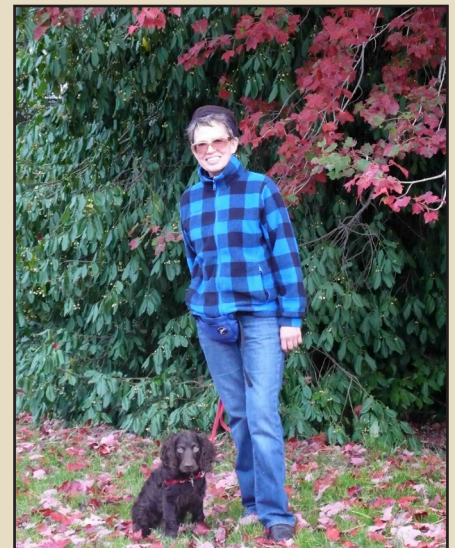
when called, and stick with me off-leash during our daily walks in the woods and parks. Folks who pass us cannot believe he can do all these things at his young age! Although Otis is still hesitant with some dogs, he now jumps right in there with most of them, chasing and wrestling like there's no tomorrow. It is a joy to see Otis' self-confidence blossom, as he continues to excel in his obedience class. His teacher calls Otis an extremely operant dog and thinks that he will shine in agility class. Sounds like fun to me!

How did I wind up with Otis? This time around I wanted an active dog that could share my love of the outdoors. I wanted him to be of moderate size with a trainable disposition. I definitely wanted him to be energetic but not high-strung. There's a difference. Of course, I wanted him to be healthy and beautiful, at least to my eyes.

With this checklist in mind, it should come as no surprise that my search led me right to the Boykin Spaniel breed and to Pat Watts' outstanding Hollow Creek Boykins. I knew I had found my match made in heaven. So after eight months on Pat's waiting list, my husband and I drove to Leesville, SC, to choose and take home our eight week-old Hollow Creek puppy to his new home in

Jamaica Plain, MA. Pat knew that I favored a curly-haired male, so she singled out a pup for me. Although I didn't want a dominant pup, I also didn't want a prohibitively shy one, either. Otis definitely was not an alpha dog and he seemed slightly shy towards another visitor in the house. But Otis let me pick him up and hug him close without resisting. Otis also voluntarily plopped himself onto my husband Greg's lap and claimed him with lots of wet licks. Pat was right when she said, "Otis has chosen YOU!"

This first encounter cemented the start of our new life together. We got to see Otis take a last run around his lake front home with his mom, Hollow Creek's Brown Sugar Watts. Watching them together brought tears to my eyes. It was a beautiful sight, and I vowed silently to Sugar that I would give her pup a good life. Originally I had worried about young Otis' ability to handle the strain of a long-distance drive, right after being plucked from his first family. Sure enough, Otis did vomit his breakfast after driving only a few yards away from his kennel. But after that Otis never cried and instead just slept on my lap or looked up at me or out the window with great curiosity with his beautiful hazel eyes. The long drive up the east coast was a blessing because it allowed me to physically bond with Otis and communicate to him that he was in good hands. We all know that you can't do much with your dog without first gaining his trust. That long drive home was a wonderful start that I'll never forget.



THE GABRIEL CHRONICLES

by Doyle Bickers



CHAPTER 1

“A New Ruler in The Kingdom”

His excellency Gabriel (already known to new friends as Gabe) has arrived home. After approximately sixteen hours here, he has begun to settle into his new home and to completely rearrange our lives.

Some background is in order. Gabe is a seven week old Boykin Spaniel. He comes from Hollow Creek Kennel in South Carolina. If you Google “Boykins Forever,” you will get their web site. I learned of Hollow Creek when I saw the breeder, Pat Watts, on an outdoor show. I was so impressed with her approach to breeding and starting puppies that I knew, if we ever had another dog, I wanted one of hers. The fates smiled. After initial conversations, I was even more impressed. It turned out that a litter was available about the time that my wife Phyllis and I were feeling the pull to have another dog. Our wonderful old Springer Spaniel Murphy had passed away the previous spring. I had a strange feeling that even Murphy approved and that his spirit would somehow mentor the pup.

We reached the kennel and three male

puppies tumbled out to greet us. After a short while, it became apparent that we had been selected. We probably wouldn’t have chosen the largest pup in the litter, but it was clear that he had made his choice. We were his.

I am, of course, already biased. But the little dog is amazing. He handled the six hour drive home beautifully, sleeping in Phyllis’ lap and taking advantage of rest stops. When we got to the house, he came inside, hopped in the bed that we had prepared for him and began to play with a toy. By the next morning, he was in complete control. He woke me once during the night. I took him out, he did his business, and after a little snack and some warm milk, he went back to sleep. I had put his bed beside me on the floor. When I awoke this morning, he had crawled out of the bed and was sleeping protectively on the carpet beside me – just as Murphy had done for 16 years. It felt right.

He waddles around the yard with his nose inspecting all the new scents. I can’t wait to see how he reacts to the aphrodisiac smell of a live quail (probably late this winter). The stuffed animal he hauls around is as big as he is. He chases balls, growls ferociously at toys and even snores like old Murphy. I remember one time years ago when Phyllis’ mother stayed with us. She said that she had walked past our door during the night and could hear three distinct snores.

In a time when change is so prevalent and often disturbing, it is an important anchor for me to know that the love of a dog goes on.....

Well, this getting long-winded. Other installments will probably follow.



CHAPTER 2

“The Yard”

Day 3 – It is hard to believe that we brought him home two days ago. This is his second full day here and the transformation is phenomenal. For the first day, he shadowed our every step, fearful of letting us out of his sight. He has now found a favorite spot at the foot of my chair and has developed the confidence to rest there watching our comings and goings.

I am not sure that he knows his name yet, but he has definitely learned the word “outside.” “Gabe, do you want to go outside?” He heaves his chubby body up and toddles at his best speed for the back door.

The fenced back yard is well-suited to a puppy. The lower yard is a large manicured lawn that must appear as a huge pasture. The upper end is a small woodlot with the ground covered in pine straw and leaves. The yard is home to squirrels, chipmunks, and various birds that come to the feeders. Periodically, a small squadron of doves takes over the ground below one particular feeder.

I think that I have an idea of what he must feel as he roams around the yard hearing, smelling, seeing, touching

(... continued on page 5)