

# SHOOTING SPORTSMAN

*The Magazine of Wingshooting & Fine Guns*

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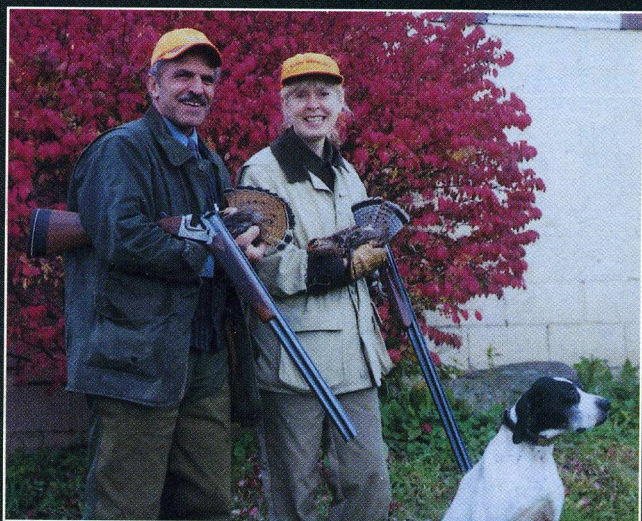


# And The

# TWAIN

# Did Meet

TRED SLOUGH



Vince and Kristin Guglielmo.

**T**he sound of the dog's bell was familiar enough. As was the sudden silence when the handsome pointer stopped and the rush of wings that followed a moment later.

A glimpse of feathers breaking for the tangled limbs of a ragged apple tree brought a scarred gunstock to my shoulder and sent the gun's barrels swinging just as that sight had done thousands of times before. And yet, even with an action that long ago became instinctive, and with the compression of all senses into a single focal point that was the bird's flight, the accent of my companion's voice calling, "Bird!" from deep in the thicket was jolting to my Southern ear.

It may have been a jolt I needed, for just as the grouse seemed destined to reach cover, the gun barrels caught up with its trajectory and kept moving as my finger tripped the front trigger's sear.

The report of the 16-gauge L.C. Smith produced the sight of cut feathers and then the exhilaration and touch of sadness that always accompanies the capture of wild flight.

The echo of the gunshot rolled away. Feathers the color of chestnut and of graying silver drifted and settled among leaves of maple, birch and apple and on the mossy rocks of a stonewall that had known autumns by the hundreds. The fine tones of the brass bell tolled once more, and as the dog

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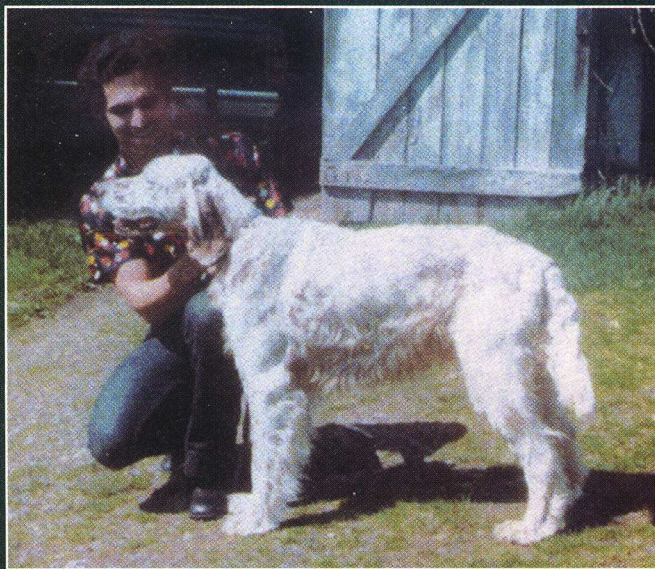
moved again through the barberry and viburnum, the voice of my host, a man who grew up in an Italian neighborhood in New York City, called out to me.

"Did you get him, Bob?"

I had to smile, not only at a Yankee accent so strong it was almost a dialect of its own, but also because I was able to answer affirmatively for a third time in a row. That didn't happen often back home. But because I was in the farm country of central New York and 600 miles from the Blue Ridge Mountains of Carolina where my mediocre shooting skills are better known, I did my best to say, "Yes, Sir," as if that was my usual answer.

I think that pleased Vince Guglielmo, the man with whom I was hunting. In the days I already had spent visiting his grouse coverts and his Chenango Valley Kennels, it had be-





A young Vinny Guglielmo with Old Hemlock Briar, the dog featured on the cover of George Bird Evans's *Upland Shooting Life*.



Guglielmo with a young prospect.

come obvious that Guglielmo expects such things to work out well. His dogs are beautifully trained and revel in their work, as does the man himself. Their coverts are classic, tight corners of old land with lots of birds, and Guglielmo, despite his misfortune of having been raised without the benefit of exposure to either drawl or twang, is one of "de shootinest gent'men" it's been my pleasure to meet.

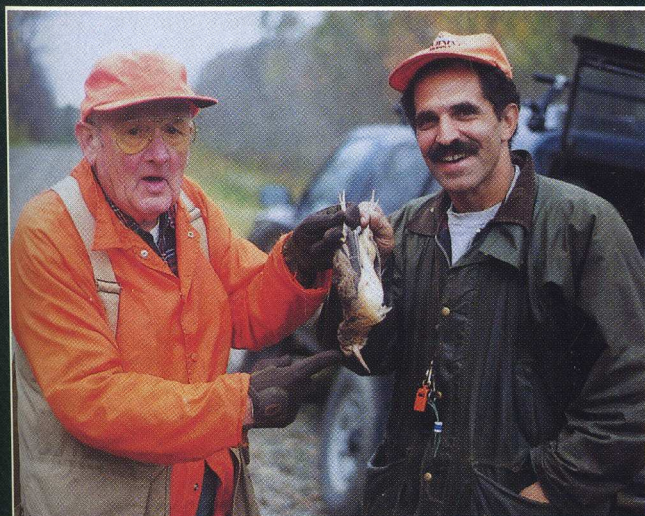
Vince Guglielmo and I are an unlikely pair in many ways. More than once during my visit with him and his lovely wife, Kristin, I found myself remembering the opening line from one of Rudyard Kipling's famous poems—the one that begins: "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet . . ."

Although Kipling's poem tells a tale of a British Cavalry officer and an Afghan bandit, it wasn't long ago that similar cultural differences existed in this country between the North and the South. And to an extent, they still do.

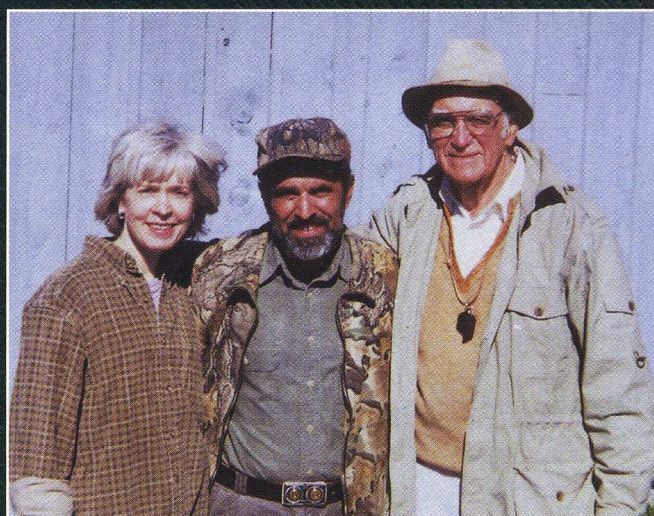
In the time I spent with Guglielmo in New York, about the only things more apparent than our differences were our similarities. If I love to fool with shotguns and dogs and to chase birds, Guglielmo is downright passionate about such things. Spoken in any accent, his love of sport leaps out in word and deed.

The Guglielmo house is a small museum with an amazing collection of books and paintings along with blown-glass targets and records and accounts of shooting matches from a time when challenges were published in newspapers and honor was the largest of the considerable wagers made. Perhaps even more remarkable than the objects, the things, are the stories that Guglielmo has to go with them. The emotion he has invested is even more impressive than the collection itself. Or, as we might say back home, "The man's plumb eat up with shootin' and bird huntin'."

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Legendary trainer Richard Johns at age 81, with the last woodcock he ever shot on a hunt with Guglielmo.

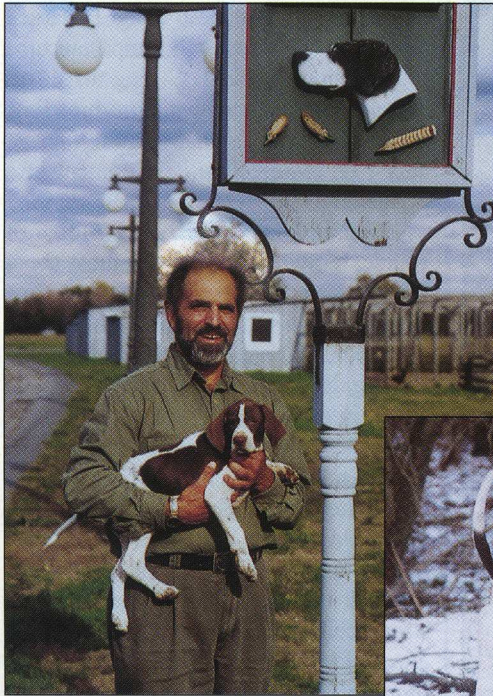


Kristin and Vinny Guglielmo with Bob Wehle at Elhew Kennels in October 2001.

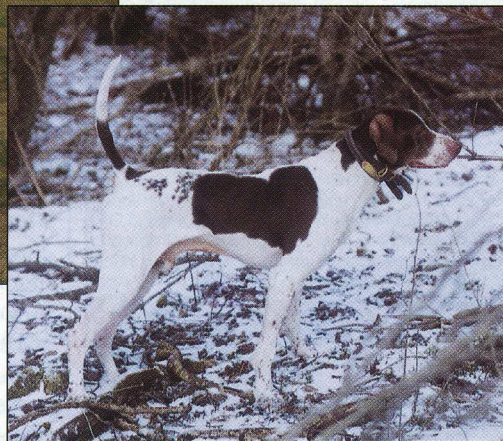


## AND THE TWAIN DID MEET

*Continued from page 71*



Elhew High Noon (Cooper) on the day he was picked up at Elhew Kennels and as an adult.



Vinny Guglielmo is a dog trainer and, occasionally, a very selective dog breeder. His immaculate kennel is home to wonderful pointers and setters with joyful, achingly deep eyes. Together the man and the animals hunt lovely grouse country. They hunt it hard and often. The dogs are happy in their work, and the man wears a necktie in his woods, not as an affectation for a client or visitor but as a symbol of respect for the

ruffed grouse he considers the finest gamebird of all, and for the hunt itself.

Excellence is never easy and rarely accidental. When Guglielmo, fresh out of college and just beginning a career in law enforcement, decided to build on his interest in shooting and hunting by becoming involved with pointing dogs, he set his sights high. After reading George Bird Evans's *The Upland Shooting Life*, Guglielmo sought out the venerable one and went to see him on several occasions. That association brought more contacts, and a friendship with Richard Johns, of German shorthair fame, followed.

Guglielmo was learning from top-drawer talent, and when his focus fell on English pointers, he initiated a visit to none other than Bob Wehle—and another friendship developed. Today Elhew dogs make up the largest part of the population in Guglielmo's kennel, and one, a sparkling personality named Cooper that was a gift to Vince and Kristin from Wehle, occupies the coveted spot of house dog and is an excellent hunter.

When I asked Guglielmo about some of the things he learned from his blue-

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ribbon mentors, men who were legends even before they left us, he didn't respond with tips or techniques but with something better. "The best thing I learned from Bob Wehle was the importance of socialization," he said. "A dog that loves to hunt, you can get that from breeding, but teaching that animal to hunt *for you*, *with you*, requires the development of a partnership.

"Richard understood that too, of course, but what I remember most about Richard—and I probably spent more time with him—was the care and kindness he gave to his animals. He was wonderful at reading dogs, and he put a lot of emphasis on intelligence. His goal was always an intelligent dog that wanted to hunt and wanted to please his handler."

In listening to Guglielmo talk about those old friends and others like Mike Seminatore and Earl Crangle, I also discovered that although Guglielmo is a strong believer in the benefits of field trialing—in terms of both breeding and training—he and his dogs don't compete on the field-trial circuit.

That revelation surprised me a bit at first. Given his skills, I would have guessed Guglielmo to be a natural for the field-trial business, especially since his competitive nature was easily evidenced by the trap-shooting trophies scattered about his house and his vivid recollections of shooting matches dating back to his high school days on Long Island.

The more time I spent with Guglielmo, however, the more I understood his reticence regarding public trials. He is a hunter and a bit of a loner. The idea of traveling the country to show off his dogs didn't seem to appeal to him. Guglielmo already has found what he set out searching for years ago. He has a beautiful wife and three fine children. He has excellent dogs, the skill and knowledge to train them, and wonderful coverts in which to hunt. He knows he is a fortunate man.

One of the best things I've learned in my not inconsiderable wanderings is the value of a sense of place. I also have found that many hunters seem to have a keener appreciation of this than those who tread only tamed ground.

A tangle of prickly, wild plums near a boot-sucking cattail slough is a warm sight to a man with pheasants on his mind. Slopes of scree or tangles of thorn are as gentle to the thoughts of the chukar chaser or quail hunter as a quiet pool is to the poet or the young angler wielding a long rod.

The New York countryside where

Guglielmo hunts grouse and woodcock suits the man well. The terrain is not steep, but there are hills that provide a view one moment and hide a fine, secret fold in the land the next.

Guglielmo likes to project a bit of a tough-guy image—and I have no doubt he can be just that when necessary. He was, after all, a police officer in New York City for years before he came to his senses and followed his heart to the country. But like the land he hunts, there is more to be seen than first meets the eye.

On the afternoon of the day I arrived, we climbed in Guglielmo's truck to hunt a nearby covert despite a steady rain and clouds that showed no signs of lifting. On the seat between us was a CD case so stereotypical I had to laugh when I said, "Vince, this is too much. I'm a Southern boy in New York getting ready to go hunting with an Italian guy who used to be a cop, and now we're going to listen to Frank Sinatra on the way?"

Guglielmo just smiled and pushed in the waiting cassette rather than the CD, showing that he was more than ready for a smart-aleck redneck. Not only did the sound of country singer Mel Tillis wailing honky-tonk tunes accompany us to our covert, but when we arrived, Guglielmo opened his dog box and spoke in a jestingly formal tone to a beautiful pointer as he helped her out. Or was he talking to me?

"Come on *Dixie*," he said. "Let's find us some birds."

Birds we certainly found that rainy afternoon, and again the next day as a stiff wind cleared the mists and most of the clouds so that a pattern of sunlight and shadow showed on the ground we walked.

It was good ground for grouse—old ground that was pushing back against the edges of fields and farms and yards. And if that old ground was losing some battles, it was winning others, as creepers of vines and thorns of wild rose that never give up clambered over the once-proud stone walls of settlement days now centuries past.

At the end of our second day of hunting, Guglielmo drove home by a route that followed a ridge, and at one point he stopped to let us look down into the valleys where we had been. With mists forming once more and the setting sun sending shafts of light through purpling evening clouds, the patchwork of farms and forests might have been set in the Blue Ridge Mountains, or the Cumberland, or the Shenandoah Valley. Or, given a hunter's sense of reverie at the



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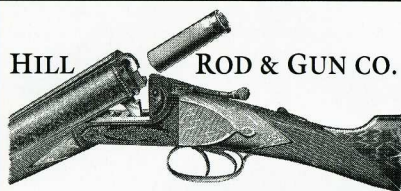
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Guglielmo and Dick Baldwin with the bag from 11 1/2 days of hunting.

end of a good day, any place where memories settle soft and warm.

That last stop, that chance to look back, was a wonderful touch to the hunt. Guglielmo might have done that for me, his guest, but I believe he did it for himself as well.

Sometime later, and it might have been after a drink, Guglielmo told me that by training dogs professionally and hunting as often as he can, he is living out a dream. I believe him, but even so there was a trace of another sentiment in his voice, one I certainly understood. There was a bit of sadness, I think, that a culture he reveres is losing ground to one in which a great many people, even some bird hunters, expect big returns on small investments.

I believe it bothers Guglielmo that too few appreciate the dedication required to create a happy, competent gundog. I think he senses that the time in which every true gentleman is expected to know something of dogs and of the hunt soon will be only a memory kept by men like him, and like me, and like you.

"I can train dogs," he said. "I can train English pointers to hunt grouse, to hunt grouse cover the way it needs to be hunted. And a dog that can handle grouse can handle anything. But I can't make people take that dog and give it the work it needs to be all it can be."

It occurs to me that it is the investment of time they are willing to make that bonds hunters. Be they East or West or North or South, time afield has long brought different sorts of folks together—sharecroppers and plantation owners, preachers and sinners, even fast-talking

Yankees and drawling hillbillies. If all love the chase, they are—for a time—the same, as the dogs they handle and the game they pursue know not the difference between them.

Vince Guglielmo is not only an excellent dog trainer and a wonderful wing-shot, he is also a gentleman of some refinement, an excellent cook and a man who knows how to savor a good Scotch. I come from a background of pinto beans, cornbread and cheap beer. I don't wear a necktie when I hunt grouse or at any other time if I can help it. My dogs may hunt hard and often, but their abilities, their training and my skill with a shotgun won't win many prizes at the county fair. In fact, I'm a good bit shabbier and coarser than Vince Guglielmo all the way around. But we got along just fine, and when I got back to Carolina, I looked up Kipling's poem again. I'd forgotten most of it, but when I got to the last verse, I realized that, with the change of a word or two, it described my venture to Yankee-land even better than the first: "But there is neither East nor West, border, nor breed, nor birth, when two hunters stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth."



**Author's Note:** For more information on dog training and/or grouse dogs, contact Chenango Valley Kennels, 607-656-7257; [www.cvkenels.com](http://www.cvkenels.com).

*Tred Slough (aka Robert Holthouser) is a carpenter and freelance writer in Surry County, North Carolina. He is the author of the book A High, Lonesome Call, published by Countrysport Press.*