

The Story of
JULES VERNE



A Watch Pocket Dog
WAYNE CALDWELL SIMMONS

The Story of Jules Verne.





"Quitting Time Covey" 28x48

The Story of
JULES VERNE
A Watch Pocket Dog



"In the vernacular of the Southern Sportsman, the term "Bird Hunting" can refer to only one thing: the Quest, preferably with the use of a fine double-barreled shotgun and a brace of well-trained pointing dogs, of that elusive and noble Southern Gentleman himself, Mister Bob White Quail."

Story and Art by
WAYNE CALDWELL SIMMONS
Highlander Farm Press





"The Shaded Lane" 8x10

Prologue

When I was a boy we had a saying and because of our youthful ignorance we had occasion to use it a lot. It was an expression of such magnitude to us then that it stayed with me and to this day when invoked, continues to confuse and annoy people, particularly my wife. The expression or curious retort, to be more accurate, was coined by my old childhood friend, Paul Thornton, and it was called upon whenever anyone had the audacity to ask us a question that we didn't have a ready answer for — "How should I know; I'm not Jules Verne"! Hey, we were kids and those were powerful-sounding words to be sure, especially if you didn't know exactly what they meant. But smart-talking kids, short on information, occasionally need a device that baffles and bewilders — and stops the youthful inquisitor in his tracks (lest they find out the depth of your stupidity). Invariably, these surly interlopers had the strangest expressions on their faces. When we were very young they seemed to be thinking, "Who is Jules Verne, anyway?" And later on as we got older, "What in the hell does Jules Verne have to do with anything; I just want to know what such and such four-letter word means!" Whatever; however, the device seemed to work. We thought ourselves cool and our fragile little egos remained intact. Best of all, we had a hero in Jules Verne, the man with the plan, *The Man with All the Answers*.



To Gay, Marnie & Emily



"At the Barn" 16x20

Chapter 1

Jules

As natural as that first quivering puppy point, my early interest in the out of doors, and particularly the sport of bird hunting was instinctive. And like any kid who ultimately grows up to become a bird hunter, I wanted above all else to have my very own bird dog. From early on I looked forward to it. First I dreamed of owning a Setter; then a Pointer. Ultimately I got a Brittany spaniel. But that was 25 years later and, as I look back, he was a Brittany, I am sure, but at the time, he seemed one of questionable pedigree. At least, I questioned it then and to this day still experience twinges of guilt for those early feelings of doubt. How could a friend's bloodline affect the way you feel about him? And if it did, were you even worthy of that special friendship to begin with?

He entered our lives that day, a skinny foundling no one seemed to want. I can't even take credit for the find. My wife, Gay, rescued the one to two-year-old dog on her own after quietly watching him for weeks. The pitiful pup had been hanging out at the stable where she kept her horses, apparently living off cat food and the occasional luckless mouse. Extensive efforts had been made around the stable to locate the stray's owner, but to no avail. Finally, after overhearing the old codger who owned the place brag that he was going to shoot "the egg suckin' cur", she made up her mind. After all, hadn't her husband been obsessing about owning a bird dog for years?

While preparing to go home that late summer afternoon, Gay looked over at the scrawny little red and white dog sitting there all by himself in the doorway of the old barn.

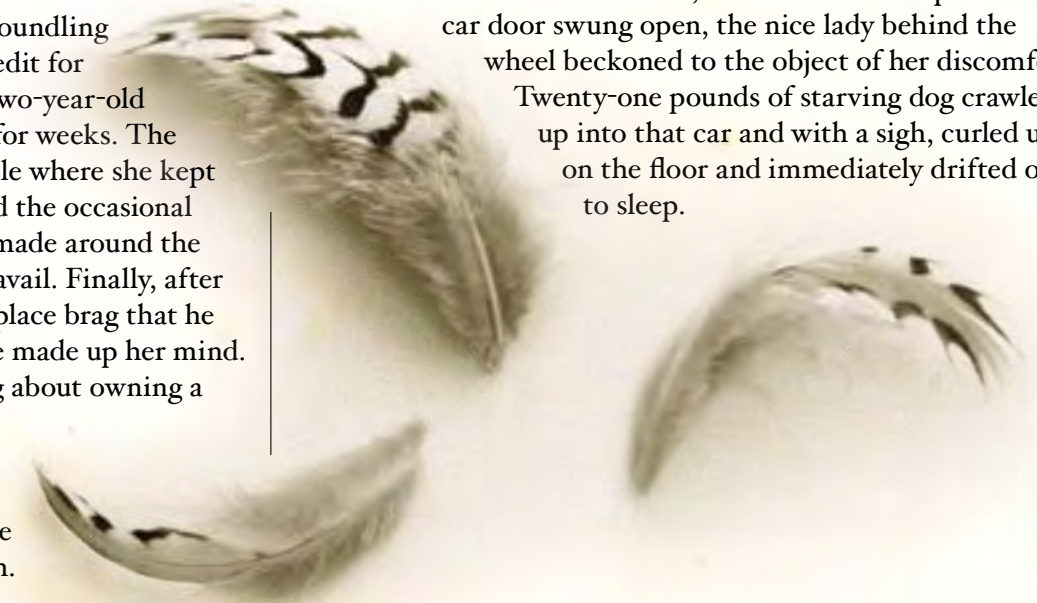


He in turn watched her as he had done so many times before. Painstakingly, she packed up her tack that evening, her mind seemingly lost somewhere else — but not really. Occasionally throughout the ritual she'd look up and, with some difficulty, gaze down the long row of horse stalls toward the stable opening. The same incredibly depressing sight always met her eyes.

Grace (Gay's given name) Y. Simmons was not a casual thinker. Nor was she a casual doer. To her, motherhood and marriage, career and household responsibilities were all matters of extraordinary weight. Every move she made required deadly serious deliberation, usually followed by a good dose of self-doubt and further deliberation. A last minute inspection of the horses' water buckets that evening found them brimming. Good. She was a stickler for that one. Finally, confident that all was in order, she got into her car, started the engine and slowly began to drive away. Only this time the old Volvo wagon faltered a little at the turn, then came to a stop. As the

car door swung open, the nice lady behind the wheel beckoned to the object of her discomfort.

Twenty-one pounds of starving dog crawled up into that car and with a sigh, curled up on the floor and immediately drifted off to sleep.





Meanwhile, back at the agency, yours truly, probably fatigued from fending off yet another impatient media bill collector was carefully scanning the want ads in search of the ultimate bird-finding, canine treasure. For me, non-work related activities such as this often punctuated the normal workday and usually centered on some sort of hunting or fishing endeavor. These escape maneuvers were carried out periodically throughout the day — sometimes in epic proportions. No, they didn't call me "Mr. Duck" for nothin'! I'd earned that nickname fair and square. Normal people may rely on the occasional coffee break to ease the stress and monotony of the workday. But for me, no coffee was ever strong enough or its aroma fresh enough. My adrenaline rush came from a daily infusion of the Great Outdoors. And if I couldn't be there in person to enjoy it, then I'd be there in some other form. At this juncture in my life, bird dog shopping was my drug of choice. It had always been this way. For me, there was no escape like the great escape found only in the trusty woods.

Ah yes, the advertisement read, "For Sale: meticulously trained, impeccably bred Brittany spaniel male" *Perfect, no doubt, out of some elusive French lineage! ... "\$1000.00, firm."* *Oops, next ad, please!* About that time there was a faint knock at the door. Opening it, I was surprised to see Gay standing there.

"I've got someone out in the car I want you to meet," she said with a sweet smile spreading across her face. "Oh, and who would that be?" I replied. "Why, Jules Verne," she taunted. "Who else could he possibly be?"

Jules didn't come with papers. He came with heartworms and an unappealing appreciation for garbage that was born of living on the street and in the woods. It was an odd predilection that followed him throughout his life. When I first laid eyes upon him I was shocked. I had never seen a hunting dog so small or pitiful, even a Brittany!

"What do ya think? You did say you wanted a Brittany

spaniel!" she ventured.

"Gay, I want a quality dog, not some kind of scab dog!" *Oh, the Guilt!*

"Just look at those eyes. They bulge! A hunting dog's eyes do not protrude. They are deep-set in order to protect the animal in heavy cover. This dog is obviously no Brittany. In fact, I think he may instead be a rather large Pomeranian." *The Shame!*

It was then that I looked into those shiny monkey eyes of his and saw for the first time, just a glimpse of Jules Verne's inner soul. A kind of quiet dignity resided deep within those rheumy brown orbs and somehow, even under the direst of circumstances, he maintained a calm, trusting demeanor. I suspected then that for some lucky family at least, a very special relationship awaited.

"Maybe we'll give him a try after all," I conceded.



"Jules" 20x28



"Grace" 16x20

Chapter 4

Trial by Feathers

I'd like to be able to say that there was no real trial phase for Jules — that from the beginning he was my dog and our relationship was so immediately unique and spontaneous that the very idea of a "try out" would have been, to this day, absolutely ludicrous. That would sound good; a noble sentiment I would be proud to espouse, but unfortunately that was not the elevated position I adopted. And because there are those about who know the truth, we'll have to go with the truth, no matter how distasteful it may sound. Fact is, *I was going to have a bird dog*, one way or another. And not just some generic mutt willing to follow me around in the woods, mind you, but one that exhibited real talent and matched my predatory zeal step for step. Jules Verne, *the Mystery Dog*, was going to have to possess significant pointing and retrieving instincts at the very least, if he wanted to stick around my house. As I look back though, even at this early stage in our relationship, I was keenly interested in his success.

So with the weekend coming up, Gay and I carefully planned Jules' "Trial by Feathers". First, I read a little book; I think it was entitled, "How to Train Your Bird Dog". That done, I dug around in my closet until I found an old training dummy I'd used with a previous hunting companion, a Labrador /Poodle cross we had been given by Gay's grandfather. The bright orange training apparatus I had used with "Grace" several years before seemed huge at the time considering Jules' tiny stature, but that's what I had. I even packed my camera. Finally I went out and bought a box of lively pen-raised quail. Every detail in place, I could hardly sleep the night before the big event. It was just like being a kid



again. You may remember the feeling, the night before opening day?

There were three of them waiting for us at the diner the next morning, two of my old hunting buddies, the Rock and Jon Q=Petersen; the other's name and face I just can't recall. Rocky is a dentist and the only guy I ever knew who had cleanly dropped five birds on a covey rise (on two separate occasions, yet — and no, we don't ordinarily shoot doubles). Jon is just as competent with a shotgun, having once as a kid been offered a slot on the U.S. Junior Olympic Skeet Team.

They had heard about Jules and, true to form, were there for the show. Now if you knew these guys, you'd know right away that cutting me a little slack along the way wasn't an option. The insults began immediately. First came those from Rocky concerning the *suspicious* way I came by the dog. He stood there under the street light watching me, arms folded, his eyes narrowed down, that sly, sideways glance I had come to know, the eyebrow lifted for effect, assessing, reassessing. "Were there warrants for my arrest? Was this the way I intended to conduct my business in the future? Hmmm..." he wondered. "I read somewhere just the other day that your first name, 'Wayne', or was it 'Dwayne'; no matter... anyway, it is shared by almost 30% of the Nation's prison population. Now isn't that ironic?" Then came the inevitable questions concerning Jules' heritage, his stunted size, his poor coat and oozing sores. Finally, hearing enough, I feigned an exaggerated yawn and opened the car door. It was quite a drive up to our hunting lease in southwestern Arkansas, so Jules would probably welcome some exercise.

Immediately upon hitting the ground Jules began stalking a rather large dumpster. It was then I heard that strange snorkeling sound. It was the sound I'd become all too familiar with over the years: the sound of Jules making game. Slowly he circled the immense waste container, apparently intent on an



early morning snack. Frankly, that was behavior I was hoping no one would notice, but Petersen, observant as always, espied the action immediately and gleefully remarked, “We’ve got our first point over there, Simmons. Your little ‘watch pocket dog’ (an obvious reference to Jules’ pint-sized proportions) has that garbage can cold. Hurry, where’s that camera? We’ll preserve the moment with a snap shot!”

We arrived at the lease a little before daylight and, because it was teal season, the boys decided to give them a whirl before the “real entertainment” started. Now, I like duck hunting a lot; in fact, at the time of this story I had spent far more hours in a duck blind than I had walking behind a bird dog so, what the heck, I decided to join in. After making sure that Jules was safely squared away in the car, we headed for the duck blinds that were situated in adjacent rice fields. The hunting was only so-so that day but we did manage to down a few birds. Later we met up at the car and immediately got down to the real business at hand.

Jules’ first assessment centered on his retrieving skills, which seemed perfectly logical at the time. Since I had no idea as to any of his abilities, I was somewhat at a loss as to what to do and when. For instance, how much training had he had, *if any*? Could he have possibly been someone’s fully trained hunting dog? Or, more likely, was he a dog with no formal training whatsoever, but perhaps one with some good breeding to draw from? If so, I reasoned, he could still make a bird dog. And why not! As I recollect, Jules was rather casual about all this; he just sat there. When I first threw out the orange training dummy, Jules simply walked over to it, sniffed it, and walked off. I remember the gallery immediately went silent. Up until that moment, I was receiving all manner of helpful hints on what to do and in what order. Now their faces registered real concern. Embarrassment! After being sent out a half a dozen more times it was evident that Jules’ strong suit was not going to be retrieving.

“Heck, I don’t shoot all that well, anyway, heh, heh, heh... He won’t need to retrieve!” I nervously quipped.

Looking around for a good place to wretch, I suddenly remembered the pile of blue-winged teal in the truck. Perhaps Jules was trained with a dead quail or some other animate object? Maybe he would respond more favorably to a small, tender teal? I threw the teal a few dozen times with essentially the same results. Once, on the very first toss he did walk over to the duck to sniff it before ambling over to a nearby tree to heist his leg. I was numb.

There wasn’t a whole lot of conversation as we all loaded into the Rock’s hunting van. No good humored jostling. No slicing repartee. And certainly no more enthusiastic dreams of what could be. How stupid! It was just beginning to sink in: Jules didn’t have it. We drove down the dusty farm road in silence. Suddenly a small cloud of mourning doves exploded up ahead, then another, and another. We immediately piled out. Guns were quickly uncased and loaded. For my buddies, at least, the depressing past few minutes were momentarily forgotten. Doves were everywhere, and in the South they are considered game birds — not song birds. I struggled out of the vehicle and mumbled something about walking up ahead to check out the next milo field. What I really wanted to do was to get some fresh air and try to figure out what I was going to do about Jules. As disappointing as it had been to see Jules refuse to retrieve the hard plastic training dummy, the absolute indifference he showed to that fresh, still warm teal was what really concerned me. I didn’t know much about training dogs but I did know this: desire is something you can’t put into a hunting dog. All this, compounded by the realization that I had somehow already formed a bond with the dog had my head spinning.

After walking up the road a half a mile or so, I turned around and started back, still with no real sense of what I was



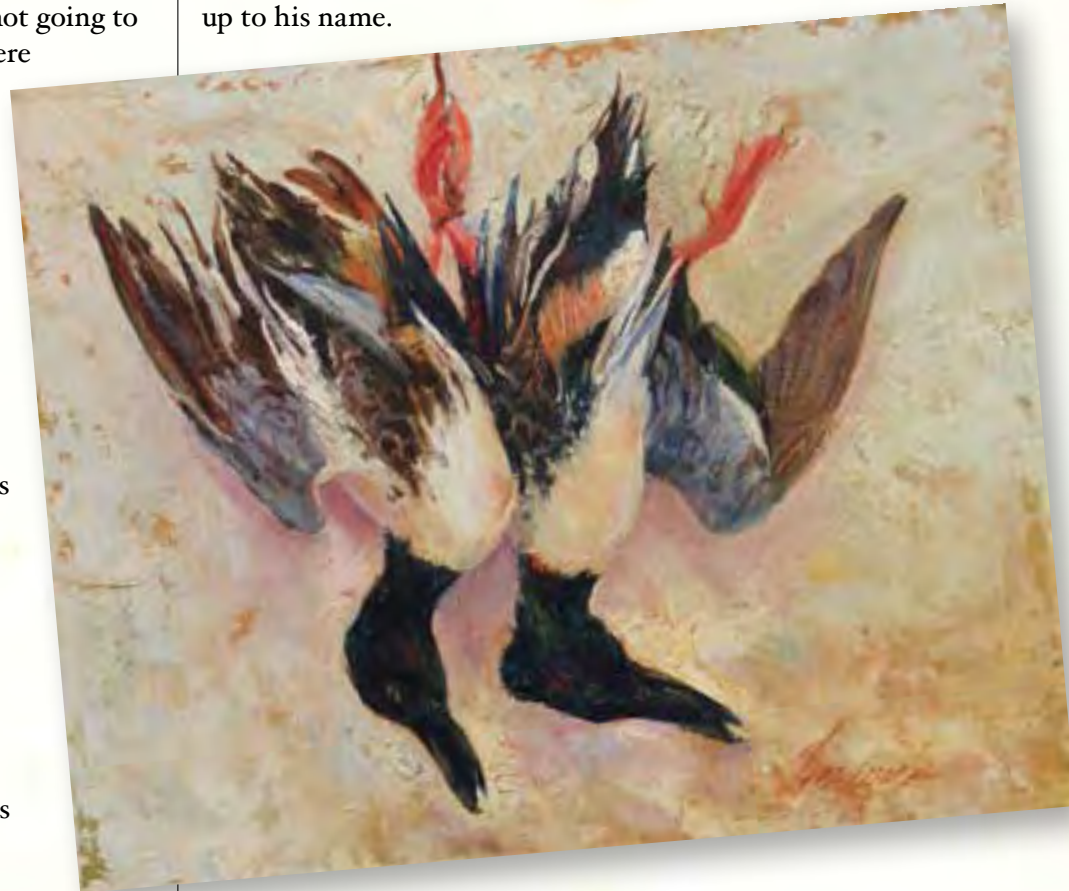
“Afternoon Pintails” 16x20

going to do. As I approached the boys, one thing was certain at least: they were having one whale of a shoot. "Petey", as I sometimes called Jon, was the first to notice me, but just barely; a dove was hurtling his way and, according to him, "If it flies it dies, hops it drops!" After taking the shot he turned and said with absolute disbelief, "Simmons, you're not going to believe this, but we've shot at least a dozen doves here and your dog, Jules, has retrieved every single one of 'em! It's the damndest thing I've ever seen." About that time I saw Jules race across the field after a low flying bird Rocky had winged. Moments later he came out of the standing milo with the dove in his mouth and to my amazement, delivered it directly to Rocky's hand.

I learned a few things about Jules Verne that day: first, he did not retrieve dummies. Dummies were for dummies! What else could Jules have thought, watching grown men tossing about strange, garishly colored tumbling objects? Was this something humans did for their own amusement, some sort of Frisbee for the demented? Second, he didn't care to retrieve anything that you cast off. Apparently, if it wasn't good enough for you, then he didn't want any part of it. Makes sense! Not so curiously, he retrieved what you shot. Later on, I found that he also retrieved anything he managed to catch himself. He was very generous that way. And third, he did eventually do what any bird dog is ultimately expected to do; later that morning, Jules stylishly pointed each of the six pen raised birds we released, delivering for the most part all of them to hand after the shot (of course, with this glowing fool cheering him on all the way!).

Whether or not Jules had ever received formal training,

I'll never know. He may have been a natural bird dog. I guess that's possible. The big question for me, of course, will never be answered: would I have kept the little dog no one seemed to want, even if he had never pointed or retrieved a single bird? I hope so. At any rate, Jules Verne was definitely living up to his name.



Wayne Simmons leads a charmed life.

Still he maintains a relentless, unfulfilled dream: that of owning a truly exceptional hunting dog. At last, the bird dog of his dreams arrives— but instead of greatness and majesty, the man discovers a skinny foundling of questionable pedigree to agonize over.

The Story of Jules Verne is a story for dog lovers. It is a true story: the experiences, the characters, even the rocky start of a very special relationship. The story, with paintings and illustrations by the author, recounts a young man's journey with his hunting dog over a ten year span.

In many ways, the book is a compilation of closely related short stories, written in sequence, about an ordinary guy and his "once in a lifetime" hunting dog— the dog being the thread that binds throughout. 🐾

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