



Life with Clare

by Tony Lee

It all started for Clare in the early 40's when her father, 'Nap' Cairns, having lost his Airedale in a road accident, did his research, as one should, and found a smooth coated, low maintenance breed in the Staffordshire Bull Terrier, and acquired a juvenile from a soldier off to war, registered as Chainmakers Fiery Kate, a red pied grand-daughter of Vindictive Monty. Thus as a young girl, Clare was thrust into a relatively small band of enthusiasts of the breed. Polly as she was known, stood about 15 ½" tall, broad in body and a bundle of activity. Neither she nor her offspring were particularly aggressive with other dogs but cats, chickens and rabbits seemed to throw themselves into their jaws. There was even one time when some itinerant's goat, grazing in the middle of a roundabout, met an untimely end. I think the compensation paid was 5 guineas – about the same as a stud fee at the time. Living with the family cat, a plain black one, whose name I can't repeat being non-PC these days, was no problem, but a neighbour's was chased through the front and out the back of the latter's house, but managed to escape up a tree.

Seemingly Polly was a wonderful brood bitch, and her first mating to Bill Boylan's Boy Dan produced Emphor Monty, who was their first prize winning dog, albeit a VHC, but as one did at the time, was celebrated as though it had won the CC. Although both parents were under 16", she was tall enough for Clare to ride as a child! Also in the litter was Merfor Moira, so phonetic learning was high on the agenda for the young Clare – her mother being a teacher. All the Constones family can be traced back to Polly.

Clare was allowed to handle the dogs, but father took over when the going got serious. The local rag once published a photo of her at a show, but she was supposed to be at school! She was duly reprimanded by the Mother Superior in no uncertain terms. She did however handle a bitch (C Concordia) to 2 CCs, who, being a poor whelp, was sold, much to Clare's annoyance. As a result she acquired a Yorkshire Terrier but never lost her love for the Stafford.

At school, St Anne's in Croydon, she developed qualities, probably from her parents, which lasted all her life, namely to sincerely and passionately defend what she believed in. She sometimes challenged the nuns' tenets, who described her as 'a bold, bad gal'. She also valued social justice and was an advocate of women's rights – she would probably have been a suffragette in earlier times. In her last year she had almost as many absences as attendances, but nevertheless matriculated with honours and went to study Textile Design at Leeds University.

There we met. I can still remember Clare's first day at Uni, at a 'Freshers Hop', seeing this red headed girl in a green/red tweedy sack dress - the first I had ever seen in reality - and saying to myself 'that's the girl for me'.

It wasn't always plain sailing - we dated and un-dated several times



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over some 4 years - but it all came together in the end, thankfully. As a non-doggy person, part of the deal was 'love me, love my dog'.

This was really brought home to me in my often recalled first Sunday lunch with the Cairns family. Half way through Clare suddenly screamed "get that bitch out of here!". Seemingly the bitch in question – Constones Commette – had decided to give birth under the dining room table. She was quickly ushered to her whelping quarters (the garden shed), where I proceeded to witness one of the miracles of nature whilst still enjoying my roast beef with all the trimmings. The litter of 5 all had crank tails, which Clare later tried unsuccessfully to straighten with clothes pegs. From that moment I was hooked on the breed.

On graduation, Clare, with her BA, worked for a short time for a textile company in the West End, but by the time we married in 1961, she had abandoned this career and took a fast-track primary school teacher training course, and I engaged on supply teaching for a term, both in the London area. Industry called me, however, and we moved to the Doncaster area later that year.

We bought an acre of building land in a village – Westwoodside – and had a three bedroom bungalow built. Clare continued supply teaching in the area, and then applied for a permanent position. On the very day that the appointment was confirmed, she also confirmed that she was pregnant, and had to turn it down. She never did become a full time school ma'am!

On the same day that we took occupation of our new residence, Clare was giving birth to Tim in Scunthorpe, and her parents arrived with their belated wedding present, a bitch puppy – Constones Compact. What an eventful day it was leading to many further adventures.

I was elected to have the difficult task of handling Compact to her title. She was never at ease in the ring, and being very family orientated, she wanted us all together. As a result Clare saw very little of the judging having to spend most of the time out of sight amongst the trade stands with baby Tim. Compact would whinge and fidget on the back seat of the car – no cages then – all the way to the shows, but slept like a log on the way back, until we turned in our own road. Thereafter, much to my relief, Clare did the lions' share of handling.

It seems ridiculous, but I started judging before Clare. At her first appointment in '69 for the Northern Counties, in the very first class she was presented with the classic dilemma – an outstanding undershot dog versus a set of relatively mediocre specimens.



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Grasping the bull by the horns (pardon the pun), she gave it to the undershot one. That set the standard for her opinion – always looking for the virtues.

We moved to the North-East and while our two boys were very young we had little time for dog shows but bred the occasional litter. For one of these we called upon Malcolm Boam to use Ch Freden Dominate. Bill Alexander came to look at the litter armed with a check list provided by Malcolm's father, Jim. We didn't read it, but it must have been good, as he picked himself a Champion in Constones Grim Girl - his choice of name, not ours.

Some time later, we heard from our good friend Betty Smith about a 'bomb-proof' son of Ch Topcroft Toreador. We had previously wanted to use the latter, but although having a very short but highly successful stud career, had been wisely withdrawn due to his identification as a carrier of Juvenile Hereditary Cataracts, for which there was no DNA test at the time. We thus used Ch Westpoint Warrior, with great success in producing C O'Connor, C Overlord and C Owz'at, all winners in the ring. O'Connor – Rory to his friends – was all that you could wish for in a Stafford. Kind and gentle to all, active and agile – he playfully chased a Borzoi on one of his walks which had to give up with exhaustion – an excellent foot warmer in bed, and would mate visiting in-season bitches before they could even cross the threshold. He was a delight to live with. By this time, my work had taken me to Harrogate, to live in a 5 bedroom Victorian house. The boys loved it, chasing round the house playing at 'railway stations' etc., and we were more central to entertain visitors particularly for the Northern Counties Shows At its first Championship Show I counted some 14 people and 10 dogs in residence. At this stage Clare became more involved with the N.C



Club. Over some 40 years on Committee she occupied, at one time or another, every official position apart from Treasurer – arithmetic was never her strong suit.

In the late '70s, after secondment to Lancashire and then Spain, I was retrenched – a euphemism for redundancy – and we decided to become self employed doing something we would enjoy and, after a long



search, persuaded the boarding kennels which we used to sell the business to us. What a change of life style this proved to be! Anyone who has had anything to do with kennels will tell you what a



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hard life it can be. At the beck and call of people expecting you to work 25 hours a day, 8 days a week and 53 weeks a year, hail, rain or shine, with the responsibility of their dearest 'pooches', is extremely demanding. No wonder there is a saying that 'you don't retire TO boarding kennels, you retire FROM them'. Nevertheless, the good times were very good, we certainly learned a lot about dogs and cats, and had some really good laughs along the way. Stories to tell about kennel life are legion, and could probably fill a book. At least we could take the whole month of November off to tour around Spain and stay at a succession of Paradores, the Government run hotels, usually based in historic monuments – an ideal time to go, away from the tourist seasons. In the mid '80s, having bred the occasional litter along the way, we bought a bitch from our friend John Turner, which had Constones breeding close up. Doris, as she was known, was a big, jolly, clumsy type of bitch – what one would call 'roomy' – but capable of giving substance to the puppies. She obviously needed tidying up, so we called on our old friend Malcolm Boam to do the deed with his Ch Black Tusker. This was the last recorded litter from Tusker, and he certainly produced the goods in our Ch C Yer Man (Manny). Winner of 20 CCs, he eclipsed the long standing record of Ch Benext Beau, and sired 11 UK Champions from only 68 litters. In 1991 he became the only Constones to win BOB at Crufts and we decided to retire him on a high. We never thought that he had quite the ideal head for us, but by golly, he had terrific body and construction and his movement was considered by many to be without equal. As a puppy Gerry Holmes handled him, but Clare used to take him to local Exemption Shows to try to build up a partnership between her and the dog. At one such show, the judge opined that she had a half decent dog who could do a bit of winning, but they would benefit from some handling classes! Clare handled Manny from Junior level thereafter, but as I was running the boarding kennels, I think I only witnessed 4 of his wins.





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We wanted to have a daughter of Manny's and our chance came when Bill McKnight offered us one out of Belnite Niagra, the full litter sister to Ch Belnite Dark Huntsman. From her we produced, using Ch Boldmore Finbar Fury – himself a grandson of Yer Man – Constones Electra, known as Kitty, named after one of our customers who had a hard exterior with a heart of gold. Kitty had everything going for her apart from terrible ears, but she produced us two champions from two different dogs – the only Constones bitch to have done achieved this. The first was Ch C High Five, out of Manassa Jack who carried Black Tusker blood, and the second was Ch C Jump for Joy, out of Ch Sparstaff Dodgy Docker. She was the last born and the only bitch in the litter of six – with what joy she was greeted!

Kitty must rank among our favourites as being a delight to live with. She was affable to humans and dogs alike and was always the chosen one to cuddle up to. She was a fantastic whelp, barely standing up to deliver her puppies, and a supreme caring mother. Unfortunately she tried to befriend a feral cat on one of her walks and, as a result of a scratch, lost an eye, but this proved no handicap to her.

The burden of Health and Safety Regulations, often imposed by people with little concept of animal husbandry, became so great that we decided to retire from the business in '02. We could then enjoy the 'dog scene' together.

Clare was always in great demand as a judge, having first given out tickets in '73. She tried to restrict her appointments in the U K to every 2 years or so. She judged Crufts in the breed's Jubilee year of '85 and was so looking forward to

judging it again in '16 as being to only person in modern times to have officiated there for a second time. This new freedom allowed us to accept appointments abroad. We were privileged to go to places around the world and see things that we had only dreamt of, meet some wonderful people many of whom have become life-long friends and admire their stock. We can't thank the dogs enough for that!

Of the many dogs seen through the years, Clare, if asked to choose any favourites, would immediately select Ch Rellim Aboy, Aust Ch Highbourne Luskin Star and S A Ch Rikarrystock Demolition Man. Her bitch selection would include Ch Belnite Marbillus and Ch Belglen Braw's Best. One of her biggest disappointments was that C Tuscaloosa Sam never achieved his title.





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He had to be found a new home where he must have thought he was in heaven, but his new owners didn't quite grasp the idea of keeping him in 'show condition'. She claimed that one of her best achievements was to get a Good Citizen's Bronze Award latterly with one of our bitches, because our boys were always critical of our animal's behaviour over the years. She said the feeling was as good as winning a CC!

Clare also developed a reputation for leading seminars on the breed which have become popular of late. I think their success was due to her passion for the breed, her sincerity and her depth of knowledge and memories dating back to her childhood when the breed was just finding its feet. She could recall many of the respected 'old-timers' on a personal level, and sometimes scotch some of their apocryphal stories. She was considered by many to be an authority and wrote 3 books on the breed whilst contributed to others, and also wrote the weekly Breed Notes for Dog World for some years.

Her overall passion was breeding and, in reality, would love to have bred race horses, where the results are objective – she loved an occasional flutter on the gee-gees. We didn't believe in mating two bits of papers together, nor dashing off to use the latest 'flavour of the month'. We tried to use the '2 in-line and then an outcross' principle, and spent many hours and went hundreds of miles researching and seeing litters, siblings, aunts, uncles,

grandparents etc of potential mates. As a result, we were very proud to claim to have had a Constones bred champion in each of the last seven decades. Besides being a Trustee of the Gallimore Trust which acts as a back-stop for recognised rescue organisations, Clare had many interests outside of dogs. She was Secretary of a W I Branch at one time, a keen campaigner for women's cancer control, a great believer in social justice and women's equality (but refrained from burning her bra!), an avid reader being a member of a book circle, erstwhile Secretary of a Fine Arts Society, ballet & theatre goer and loved to have music playing through the house, sometimes to my annoyance. She was a wonderful home-maker/ hostess and always loved bringing the whole family together at times such as Christmas.





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From the many messages of condolence received on her death it was obvious that she had touched many peoples lives, some of whom I had no knowledge. It was her passion, sincerity, plain-speaking, easy listening, sense of humour and fun, wisdom and gregariousness that endeared her to so many. It was said that she could light up a room with her presence. Never averse to a glass of wine, a G & T or maybe a glass of port, she always seemed to be the last person to leave any gathering.

She was many things to many people. To me, she was just Clare.

