

Retrievers of the Past...

By Joule Charney

FC-AFC Volwood's Mollie

“Words cannot express what a wonderful dog she was – IN SO MANY WAYS”

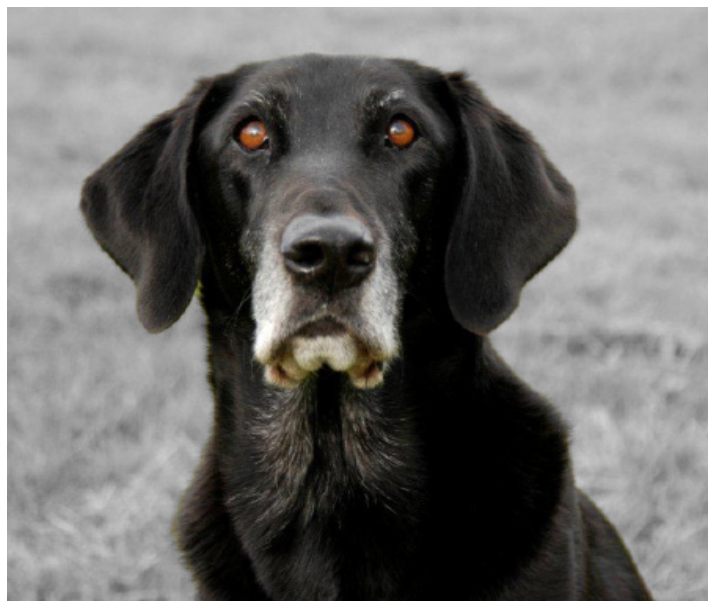
“I’m tearing up,” said the lady while trying to talk recently about her ‘first born.’ At the time, her husband was away at a field trial, his first in quite some time.

It has been three years since Jack and Florence Vollstedt’s ‘Mollie’ died, at age 13. Since then, Jack was out of the field trial game for about a year, in part, to undergo cancer treatment. His recent return to competition this spring was a triumph in more ways than one.

It was a conquest of man over disease. It was a victory of dog and handler over an entire field of competitors. Surprising to some, yet not to others, his dog Rex won the Amateur. The feat was a human as well as a canine success. Jack was back...

The Vollstedts have been blessed with multiple top dogs; but, “Mollie was their ‘first born,’” as Florence puts it. The couple has no human children. “We just have dog children,” Jack says.

“Words cannot express what a wonderful dog she was – in so many ways,” wrote Jack and Florence, in Mollie’s Retriever News obituary. Never-the-less, we always do our best, in our Retrievers of the Past features, to describe the essence of the phenomenal creatures who the fortunate few have experienced in a sacred, invisible saddle by their side, and as a dot in the distance.



In The Beginning

At first, Jack wasn’t even sure that Mollie was going to be a keeper; then, she quickly established herself as a puppy prodigy. By the end of her career, Mollie was a 5-time National Finalist and had amassed 261 All-Age points, placing her #21 on the Top 30 High-Scoring Dogs of All Time List. She was inducted to the Field Trial Hall of Fame in 2010.

Born in 1996, Mollie was whelped and raised by Betsy Potter in Montana, an old friend who was part of Jack’s first pre-National



training group, which was with FC-AFC Volwood's Abby. The pup was out of NAFC-FC Ebonstar Lean Mac and FC-AFC Carrolls Black Velvet. Jack had second pick male of the litter; but Betsy told him she had two females she thought he would like. "She didn't think any of the males would be good enough for me," Jack says. So, he let Betsy pick one of the girls.

"Mollie was a skinny little thing that didn't look like much of anything," in Jack's initial assessment. "I might get rid of her," he remembers thinking; however, his first impression didn't last long. "The minute I started doing something with her, I knew she was something." This was when Mollie was around ten to eleven weeks old. Still, Jack had reservations about her suitability. "I like to start early. She was skittish, too soft for basic training."

Surprisingly, when Jack began force fetch when Mollie was around five months, he found it to be "easy... I expected her to be down in the mouth," although her skittishness remained a concern. For instance, Mollie had a problem when she saw a shadow as the judge called for the birds.

Jack was not "definitely sure" Mollie was worth keeping until she was six months old. "That skittishness all changed. She got real intense. She loved retrieving. So, none of those things bothered her after a while. Her willingness to please and to learn were phenomenal." All Mollie's basics were done by six-and-a-half months. "At nine months, she was so advanced, I didn't know whether I was going to run her in the Open, the Amateur,

the Qualifying or the Derby," Jack recalls bemusedly. "I've had more talented dogs; but, none that were more trainable."

At ten months, the first of two medical setbacks occurred. Mollie had to have an operation for osteochondritis dessicans, commonly known as OCD, in one of her shoulders. Although there is no definitive information the condition is inheritable, Mollie never was bred. "I didn't think genetically I should do that. OCD can be genetically passed on," Jack believes.

Mollie had to be crated for a month, then began light training the next. It was close to twelve months before she was able to resume training "in earnest," according to Jack. It didn't take long for Mollie to make progress. She began running Derbies and Qualifyings at the same time and took a 2nd in the Qualifying at thirteen months. At fifteen months, she began running Opens. People didn't think this was odd, Jack feels, because he had been successful with other dogs. Volwood's Ruff And Reddy had his FC and AFC by age two-and-a-half. Volwood's Abby had one of her titles by age two and the other by age two or three, Jack points out.

At sixteen months, Mollie jammed in the Open. At seventeen months, she won the Open and the Derby in the same weekend, an accomplishment Jack refers to as one of Mollie's Double-Headers. She ended her Derby career with 72 points and had fifty-five All-Age points as a three-year-old. Fifty of those points were American. The other five were from her one and only weekend Open in Canada, which she won.

Mollie ran in the Canadian National Open at age three, going out in the 7th or 8th Series. "People were looking at me because they thought I should be irritated," reflects Jack, "because she hadn't handled. I thought it was warranted. I'm just very objective, that's all." In her "worst year" as an adult, Mollie earned 'only' 25 All-Age points, says Jack, emphasizing that she was High Point Amateur Dog of the Year in 1999.

Mollie's second medical setback occurred in pre-National training before the Open around age 6 when she stepped into a hole, causing soft tissue damage to her front ankle or pastern. "She got hurt severely. She might have done something to the joint as well. Her body kept moving forward and her foot was in the hole," Jack elaborates. "I watched it." Although he didn't have to carry her out of the field, "it was all she could do to get out. She was near the car; that's the beauty of it."

"I tried to doctor her; it was just too big of an injury. I brought her home, and I did not

train her for a long time." Jack says there was nothing he could do other than lay Mollie off, give her medication and ice the leg. "I basically gave her rest. She wasn't very active at all." This time, her layoff lasted at least three months. And, "she always had a bit of a limp after that injury."

When Jack began running Mollie again, "I didn't train until a week before the trial. In the spring, I ran her a couple of times. The best she got was a JAM and a 2nd. It didn't take long for the two of us to get together again," Jack quickly adds. The same year, "She ran in the Amateur National. During the second half of the year, I ran seven trials with her. She won eight stakes. She won every time that she ran, except one time -- She ran both. She finished the National Open that year, too. She ran a total of nine or ten trials and she had forty points, averaging four points a trial."

"Mollie averaged around two points per trial for her lifetime. There's not many dogs that you can say that about!"

Jack taught Mollie to "hold the wind" since she was a young dog around age two. At age nine, she began slipping in this ability. "One leg was bothering her. She was going in that direction when she ran, not fighting the wind." The pre-National foreleg injury, which had resulted in a permanent limp, "got very uncomfortable for her." Jack says that shortly after he started to "retrain" Mollie, he decided it was time for her to go into retirement.

"The reason I retired her is, because of her past injuries, she was showing signs of not being able to do what she formerly was able to do. I didn't want to remember her being all crippled up and not running field trials. It was time to quit," Jack states matter-of-factly, and without a hint of sadness. "There's another side to life besides field trials. All our dogs are pets," he reiterates. "We just enjoyed their company. When Mollie was nine-and-a-half, we quit. She had a great life. I want to remember all the good times."

The Vollstedts & The Volwood Dogs

If you think you're seeing double, maybe you are. And, maybe you shouldn't be... Jack and Florence's last name is Vollstedt, with two 'lls.' The Vollstedts' kennel name is Volwood's, with just one 'l', which is derived from Jack's Volwood Corporation.

Presently, there are three dogs in the Vollstedt household. Abby recently was retired. Jack currently is running FC-AFC Volwood's Big Ol' Rex and AFC Volwood's Yellow Griz. All the Volwood dogs have been FC-AFCs, except Griz, who has a 2nd

Retrievers of the Past

in the Open. "He's the only dog I've ever had who's only had an AFC to him."

Explaining his triumphant return to field trials with Rex in late April, Jack told Retriever News, "I quit running trials for awhile. I'm very obsessive about keeping dogs at the correct weight. I exercised this dog, even running at the beach, even though he wasn't training. I began training him a couple of weeks ago in earnest and I won the Amateur."

If Jack could bring back any of his dogs back to life, he says it would be Mollie. "She was a special dog. When she was inducted into the Hall of Fame, I said, 'I've had a lot of dogs, but I've only had one Mollie.'"

"She's all over the place. Pictures on different walls. As we go along, we have less and less pictures of our dogs. Move from one place to another place. I've won a lot of ribbons and a lot of trophies in my lifetime. They aren't what's important to me anymore. It's the fun that you have with the dog that you're doing it with. I've done this for a long time and I've had some wonderful times."

"Florence loves the dogs who have special affection for her," Jack continues. "Florence calls Griz 'Lover Boy,' because he's a snuggler, she says. I used to call Peaches And Cream 'The Peach.'" The couple had no



special moniker for Mollie. "We just liked the name," choosing it for no other reason. Florence says, "She was a Mollie. And we just liked the name."

The couple lives in Eugene, OR. Jack owns a training area in Junction City and utilizes five or six other properties. One is a public park with "tremendous water" that Jack has permission to use from the city.

FC-AFC VOLWOOD'S MOLLIE

OPEN	1977	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	TOTAL:
Starts	15	14	16	15	13	14	10	14	11	122
First	1	0	1	0	2	2	3	3	0	12
Second	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	3	1	8
Third	0	0	3	2	1	1	0	0	3	10
Fourth	1	2	0	2	1	1	1	2	2	12
Places	2	2	5	4	5	4	6	8	6	42
Jam	3	1	2	5	2	3	0	3	0	19
# Finished	5	3	7	9	7	7	6	11	6	24
% Finished	33%	21%	44%	60%	54%	50%	60%	79%	55%	50%
Open Points	5.5	1.0	11.0	3.0	14.5	11.5	21.5	25.0	7.0	100.0
Cumulative Pts	5.5	6.5	17.5	20.5	35.0	46.5	68.0	93.0	100.0	100.0
AMATEUR	1977	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	TOTAL:
Starts	15	14	16	15	13	13	9	14	6	115
First	0	2	6	2	2	3	4	2	0	21
Second	0	1	3	4	3	1	0	3	1	16
Third	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	2	1	6
Fourth	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	4
Places	0	3	9	8	6	6	5	7	3	47
Jams	?	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	10
# Finished	?	4	10	9	8	7	6	9	4	57
% Finished		29%	63%	62%	62%	54%	67%	64%	67%	50%
Amateur Points	0.0	13.0	39.0	23.5	19.5	19.5	21.0	21.0	4.5	161.0
Cumulative Pts.	0.0	13.0	52.0	75.5	95.0	114.5	135.5	156.5	161.0	161.0
ALL-AGE	1977	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	TOTAL:
All Age By Year	5.5	14.0	50.0	26.5	34.0	31.0	41.5	46.0	11.5	261.0
Cumulative Total	5.5	19.5	69.5	96.0	130.0	161.0	203.5	249.5	261.0	261.0

OWNER: JACK & FLORENCE VOLLSTEDT
 BIRTHDATE: 3/7/96
 72 DERBY POINTS

Avg Open Points per year: 11
 Avg Amateur pts per year: 18
 Avg All-Age pts per year: 29

From "Retriever Field Trial Statistics 1941-1995," by Sue Reynolds.

Others are places owned by field trailers T.J. Lindbloom, Andy Kahn and Jerry Patopea. “We’re all good friends. There’s kind of a group of us who’ve been friends for a long time.” Jack’s regular training partners are Nan Ruby, Pete Goodale, David Hensteler, and Ed and Julie Zuhlke.

Good Golly, The Steps To Making Miss Mollie

Jack, who is now 72, earned his first Open win when he was 39 years old. He trained about five years prior, running “picnic trials and things like that,” with only two years of field trial exposure. He began finishing Nationals in the 1970s.

It all began with a dog trained for hunting that Jack entered into a Derby picnic trial. “I was just enamored with what the dogs could do. I failed, of course. I’ve always been a bungler at everything I start. I work very hard, and I study a lot. I liked what I saw, so I went home and started training. I was never successful with that dog; but, then I started looking for a young dog that I thought would have enough ability to be good.”

“Maybe I’m a slow learner. It takes some of us longer to learn some things. It doesn’t mean we can’t, in the end, be successful.” Jack’s next dog was among five who eventually achieved Hall-of-Fame, All-Time Points, and/or Double-Header status. Mollie was born twenty years later and is the third among them.

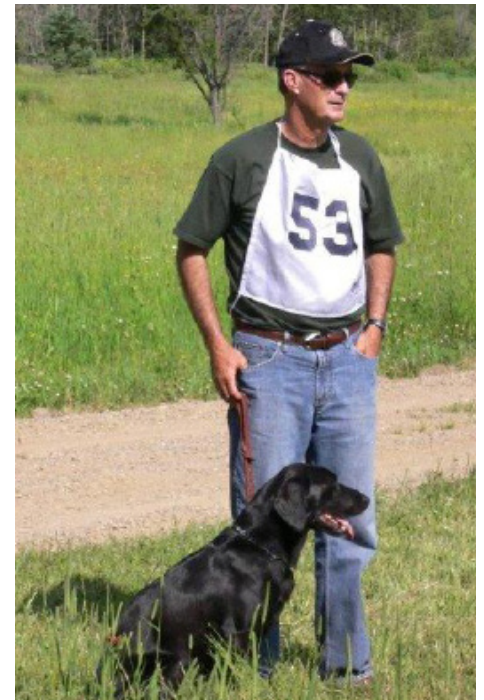
Jack’s learning curve included connecting with people he credits as instrumental to his success. Judy (Weikel) Aycock referred him to Dana (Brown) and Grady Istre who became his training mentors. Learning how to use

the e-collar, and later, the development of different intensities, were pivotal. “Originally, if dogs couldn’t stand the heat, they were done.”

Along the way, Jack says he realized that, “with more experience, you don’t necessarily have to do real tough training. I was too tough when I was younger and when I didn’t know as much. You have a tendency to work off your anger. Very little work comes from anger. Before you can correct a dog, you have to teach them. You become more aware of the dog and the training of the dog and you don’t react so much from anger as you react from knowledge. And, in doing so, you think the dog is being willful from something you’re asking the dog to do, and a lot of times the dog is reacting from fear,” referring to fear of being corrected. “When you have too much fear in a dog, it’s very difficult for them to learn anything. When you can get a dog to react favorably to you without fear, then you can really get a lot accomplished.”

“I learned by trial and error. I tried things that most people wouldn’t. The proof of the pudding is how well your dogs respond to what you’re doing and the way you’re doing it, to see them respond to what you’re doing that’s different than everyone else. I train them a lot different now than I used to. I’m a lot softer and kinder than I used to be. Instead of climbing on top of a dog, I crawl inside the dog and start to think like them.”

Dogs that have issues, like Mollie’s initial skittishness, should be trained accordingly and can be trained successfully, Jack believes. “There’s an awful lot of dogs that could have been very nice field trial dogs if they had the



right person training them. You have to pay attention to the dog that you have at the time. I just do different things with different dogs.” Summing up his training philosophy, Jack says, “I adjust to the dogs.”

Jack has used video-taping as a tool during quite a lot of his training, enabling him to review what he has done, and even what he was thinking at the time. This process has allowed him to notice progress he might otherwise have missed, and to capitalize upon it. Jack cites a session in which he was teaching a recalcitrant dog to hold. “On that day, she held for maybe a second. It was a major breakthrough. The average person wouldn’t necessarily pick up on it. The dog didn’t necessarily feel it; but, I felt it. It’s a wonderful feeling. It’s a small thing; but, it’s a wonderful accomplishment, even though it’s small. ‘Baby steps’ is the name of the game in training and you build on baby steps.”

Jack credits a large part of his success to his focus on individual dogs. For a significant portion of his time with Mollie, she was his single or primary trainee. “We didn’t have other dogs to dilute our time away from her. We trained a lot and had the opportunity to run quite a few trials.” Jack separated Mollie and his next dog, by about two years, concurrently running Mollie in the Open and the Amateur and the new dog in the Qualifying and the Derby. “Always have one or two dogs coming up that are doing well. A good Amateur has one or two dogs. If one got hurt, the other was a serious bullet.” Nowadays, Jack admits, “I don’t train as much. I don’t have the drive. I don’t have the

FC-AFC VOLWOOD’S MOLLIE Career Highlights Chart -

From the Inductions to the Field Trial Halls of Fame program

- High Point Amateur Dog in 2000
- 72 Derby Points, 2nd on National Derby List, won Derby & Open the same weekend
- 100 Open Points
- 12 Open Wins
- 161 Amateur Points
- 26 Amateur Wins
- 5 National Opens Qualified, finalist in 2
- 8 National Amateurs Qualified, Finalist in 3
- 2 Double Header Wins

Retrievers of the Past

desire I used to. When that started changing for me was when I had too many dogs. I got new ones before the older ones were finished. Three is instrumentally too many. It's way over the top. I had five dogs for a while – all good. I just got burnt out doing that. That's too much to do for a guy who isn't a professional trainer."

In The End

"Retire when there are physical difficulties that won't go away," Jack advises, about dogs. The man, who has had two heart attacks in addition to his recent bout with cancer, doesn't let medical issues hold him down for long. "There's always ups and downs in life. That's what brings you back tomorrow. I've had health problems and still trained my dogs, even ten days after open-heart surgery. I'm an obsessive-compulsive person when I'm into it. If you have x amount of time, you can do a great job."

Jack attributes his recent hiatus from field trials as much to being "busy" as to his health. He is a real estate developer and is very involved in the care and breeding of registered cattle.

Adjusting to retired life was not difficult for Mollie, mentions Jack. She was content staying at home. "Once in a while," he adds, "I'd throw a bumper for her, just on the lawn." On the opposite end of the spectrum, Jack clearly is not the type to be lounging around in a lawn chair nor rocking away the time on a porch. Retirement? According to Jack, "That's for other people." ■

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