



Ol' Jones and I had just returned from a day in a duck blind, wet and cold as usual, hungry as usual, tired and frustrated as usual. "You know, training you guys requires a great deal of determination. I can see we need to work on your being more steady to shot," he said, somewhat critically. "Did I ever tell you the story of working with my friend, Tom Diggs, and trying to teach my first Lab and Tom's Lab to not break at the sound of a shot?" he asked.

"Many times," I think to myself, but say nothing. I didn't have the heart to tell him that if he would shoot better, I wouldn't need a head start going after some crippled duck.

"Tom and I took our two Labs over to a secluded spot on the Swift Creek Reservoir. He also brought along his young son, Scott. I am guessing Scott was between 6 and 8 years old and full of enthusiasm about being with his dad and the dogs and taking a walk in the woods. Scott was having a high adventure and even brought his little bow and rubber-tipped arrow set along. He was great fun and full of ideas. While walking along an old logging road to the reservoir, Scott discovered a tortoise in the middle of the road. He ran over and picked it up and ran to his dad to show him his find and asked if he could play with it. Tom said 'sure' and asked what Scott would call it.

Without hesitation, Scott yelled, '**THUNDER!**'

"I thought, 'What a great name! What tortoise would not be proud of the name THUNDER!'"

Ol' Jones continued, "When we got to the reservoir we started working on keeping *my* dog steady by throwing bumpers into the water for Tom's Lab to retrieve. I would hold the leash on my Lab and yank him back and yell STAY! to try to teach him that *he* did not go for a retrieve when another dog was sent—or unless I gave him the command to do so.

Tom and I were so focused on our Labs that we sort of left Scott to his own devices and imagination. Meanwhile, young Scott had somehow lost all his arrows and, in the process, THUNDER had made an escape. Now out of ammunition and somewhat disappointed that THUNDER had departed without so much as a farewell, Scott was bored and wanted something to do. His father solved this problem by telling Scott that he would be a big help if he would hold his dog while we threw bumpers to *my* Lab."

"At the time, Scott was built a lot like me, when I was his age," Ol' Jones remarked. "He was thin, all legs and arms, and not an ounce of fat. A strong wind could have blown him away!"

It was at this moment in the story I looked at Ol' Jones's extra poundage around his waistline and extra chin barely hidden by a gray beard, and thought to myself that butterflies aren't the only things that go through one heck of a metamorphosis! Again, I said nothing.

"Tom felt very comfortable giving Scott this role because his Lab was better trained and more than likely would not break when we sent my dog. We stationed Scott about 30 yards behind us, hooked twenty feet of rope to Tom's Lab and gave Scott the other end of the rope. Our only flaw in this plan was that I should have been the one to throw the bumper.

"When Tom threw the bumper and yelled 'BACK', everything happened really fast and yet it seemed to play out in slow motion. Tom's dog broke! I saw Tom's dog fly by me, and I had just enough time to see Scott dig in his heels and anxiously waited at the end of his rope. The dog wanted the bumper—and Scott wanted the dog to stay put. The dog won. In what seemed a millisecond, Scott was launched into the air like a kite, hovered there for a moment, and then came sliding by me like a human sled in an Iditarod race—still holding tight to the rope—and being dragged to the lake! His father scooped him up just as he reached the water's edge."

Ol' Jones looked me in the eye and questioned, "So you see why it is so important to work on a young retriever's breaking?"

Perhaps, I mused. But I couldn't help but think that it was the young *human* who needed better brakes.

Keep a leg up,
Luke

Luke is a black Labrador retriever who spends his spare time hunting up good stories with best friend Clarke C. Jones. You can contact Luke and Clarke at www.clarkecjones.com.



Download the **FREE** DGIF Hunt Fish VA iPhone® App
Available on the App StoreSM Visit HuntFishVA.com/app