



THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY

by Sue M. Copeland



**FROM A DOGLESS CHILDHOOD TO BREAKING RECORDS IN HER BREED,
VETERINARY NEUROLOGIST AND AKC CANINE HEALTH FOUNDATION BOARD MEMBER
DR. MARY O. SMITH'S LIFE HAS BEEN FUELED BY HER PASSION
FOR ANIMALS - AND A THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE.**

It was 1980. A 22-year-old veterinary student at University of Edinburgh (Scotland) sat glued to her T.V. screen. The Crufts Dog Show was being aired live. British-born Mary Smith couldn't take her eyes off the Flat-Coated Retriever, Ch. Shargleam Blackcap, as he floated around the ring on his way to Supreme Champion (Best In Show) with breeder/handler Mrs. Pat Chapman.

"I'd never seen a 'Flat-Coat' before," says Mary (now Dr. Mary Smith, BVM&S, PhD, DACVIM-Neurology). "I fell in love with the breed right then. I knew one day I'd have one."

Little could she know that her quest for advanced knowledge in the veterinary world would lead to her first Flat-Coat...in California. And that dog (her first-ever) would begin her legacy not only in the breed, but also in the world of canine health.

CALIFORNIA DREAM

"I grew up with cats and horses," recalls Mary. "Both my parents worked, and my sister and I were busy with school. My mum and



*Dr. Mary Smith's first-ever dog was a Flat-Coated Retriever puppy she bought in 1987 after watching the puppy's sire win Best of Breed at the Golden Gate Dog Show in San Francisco, California. She's shown here with her dog "Cash" (GCH CH Whitland One For The Money TD MH22 WCX**), a dog she bred and showed in both conformation and field trials.*

dad didn't think our schedules would be fair to a dog. But I always wanted one.

"In 1981, after I'd graduated veterinary school and joined a mixed practice (large- and small-animal) in England, I thought long and hard about getting a dog," she says. "But I knew I still didn't have the time."

After several years in veterinary practice, Mary decided to pursue a neurology specialty. "I'd had an interest in neurology when I was in vet school," says Mary. "When I was in the mixed practice, I found it fascinating. I finally asked myself, 'What's still going to be of interest in 35 years?' The answer was neurology."

In 1984, she had the opportunity to meet the late Dr. Terry Holliday while he was in England. Dr. Holliday, regarded as a "founding father of neurology," was head of that department at UC Davis's School of Veterinary Medicine, in Davis, California. He invited Mary to apply to the school's neurology residency program. She was accepted the following year.

At UC Davis, she met several veterinary students who showed dogs. One of them invited her to go to the Golden Gate Kennel

continued on page 230

Club Dog Show, a benched show at the Cow Palace in San Francisco.

"I had no clue what I was looking for in a dog," laughs Mary. "But we watched the Flat-Coats show, then found the benching area for the dog that won Best of Breed. I asked his owner if she had any puppies available. She said she did, but would only sell me one if I'd agree to show it. I told her I wasn't interested in showing and thanked her for her time.

"My friend and I walked around some more, but I couldn't stop thinking about the Flat-Coat," Mary recalls. "So I headed back to the benching area and told his owner, 'If you'll help me learn how to show, I'll take the puppy.' I made clear to her that I wanted to do my own handling."

The owner advised Mary to take handling classes with "Jackson" (CH Applegarth Isle of Avalon, CD) when he was old enough. Eventually, the pair headed for the conformation ring.

"Flat-Coats can be slow to mature, so I didn't start seriously showing him until he was about 18 months old. He was a nice dog," she says. "He wasn't spectacular, but he did love to show."

Mary and Jackson won their first major under the late Judge Anne Rogers Clark in Sacramento. Mary then took the dog to the Golden Gate show, which had special meaning, since that's where their journey had started.

"I showed him in Open Dogs, to the late Judge Mr. Donald Booxbaum. He had us do an L-shaped pattern," says Mary. "Fortunately, I'd had to practice those in handling class! It paid off—he gave us a five-point major."

Mary ultimately specialized Jackson, including to a Group Second. "I've finished all my dogs in the conformation ring, and specialized some of them," she says. "Even though I eventually branched out into field work, I firmly believe they're a dual-purpose breed: they should do both."



Cash is shown here at age 13 (he's now 15). When he was being shown, he was as comfortable in the conformation ring as he was in the field. "I firmly believe they're a dual-purpose breed," says Mary. "They should do both." Cash also epitomizes Mary's emphasis on longevity in her breeding program.

IT'S A SMALL WORLD

In 1992, Mary joined the faculty of Colorado State University's College of Veterinary Medicine as an assistant professor in neurology. (For more information on Mary's career in veterinary medicine and dogs, see, "**Details: Dr. Mary O. Smith**")

When she'd settled in Colorado, Mary imported a Flat-Coat puppy bitch from the United Kingdom. "Her name was Morrieland Quail; I called her 'Kerry,' she says. "She was about 10 months old when I lost Jackson to histiocytic sarcoma, which is the curse of our breed. He was only 7 years old." (See, "**What Is Histiocytic Sarcoma?**")

As Kerry grew, so did Mary's interest in field work.

"I started working with such top trainers as Sandy Whicker, Cheryl Loveland, and Kenny Trott, and running AKC hunting tests," she says. She also bred and imported more Flat-Coats, including a Flat-Coated

Retriever Society of American (FCRSA) National Specialty Field Trial winner.



Mary greets attendees at the 2019 AKC CHF National Parent Club Canine Health Conference in Saint Louis, Missouri. Says CHF CEO Dr. Diane Brown, "Mary has had a remarkable career as a clinician, teacher, and researcher, while successfully breeding and showing her dogs, and giving back so much as a CHF Board member and Scientific Review Committee Chairman."

SAVE THE DATE!

- **WHO:** AKC Canine Health Foundation, the largest funder of solely canine health research in the world (over \$52 million since 1995)
- **WHAT:** Annual gala, Canines & Cocktails
- **WHEN:** Thursday, December 12, 7:00 p.m.
- **WHERE:** Rosen Centre Hotel, Orlando, FL
- **WHY:** Canines & Cocktails is the Foundation's annual celebration of the year's accomplishments for canine health, and its largest fundraising event. It's held in conjunction with the AKC National Championship Dog Show, presented by Royal Canin. Plus, it's FUN!
- **TICKET INFO:** Go to akcchf.org

When Mary wasn't working with her dogs, she was teaching and doing clinical work and research at CSU. Says Dr. Wayne Jensen, Department Head of Clinical Sciences at CSU's veterinary school, "I've known Mary for about 22 years. She was my neighbor when she lived in Colorado. I not only knew her through her work at CSU, where she was very well-regarded, but I also have field dogs, so I shared a love of field work with her. Her passion for her dogs, and her breed, is contagious."

Mary moved to the Orlando area in Florida in 2001, to join a pri-

continued on page 232



In 2011, Cash finished his GCH title under Judge Mr. Houston Clark, at the Macon Kennel Club Dog Show in Atlanta, Georgia. Mary owner-handled Cash to all of his Grand Championship points from the Bred By Exhibitor class.

vate specialty practice. “She left behind a large hole here at CSU,” says Wayne. “It’s hard to replace top veterinary neurologists.”

The two field-work enthusiasts stayed in touch. In fact, Mary’s enthusiasm for her breed is so contagious that Wayne, who has Labrador Retrievers, now has a two-year-old Flat-Coat dog that goes back to one of Mary’s top sires. (She kept one of that dog’s female littermates.)

Wayne also serves on the Board of Directors of the AKC Canine Health Foundation (CHF) with Mary, who has been on the Board since 2013. (Wayne joined the Board in 2016.)

In another small-world twist, Dr. Diane Brown, CHF’s Chief Executive Officer since 2015, did her post-graduate work and veterinary residency at CSU while Mary was there; Mary was on her PhD advisory committee.

“Mary was a key mentor to me at CSU,” says Diane. “She’s been a mentor to veterinary residents across all specialties, and to the veterinary students with whom she interacts. She’s a great problem-solver, while also being eloquent, passionate, and empathetic. These qualities make her relatable both to her students and clients. Plus, she has a fabulous ‘British’ sense of humor!”

“Neurology is a specialty that crosses species, and Mary has had a remarkable career,” Diane continues. “To be an effective clinician, teacher, and researcher, plus successfully breed and show her dogs, while giving back so much through her work with

CHF—as Scientific Review Committee chairman and a Board member—contributes to CHF’s excellence.”

EPILEPSY INSIGHTS

Mary retired from full-time veterinary practice in July of this

WHAT IS HISTIOCYTIC SARCOMA?

Histiocytic sarcoma (HS), which killed Mary’s Flat-Coat, Jackson, is an aggressive cancer that can be found in the spleen, lymph nodes, lung, bone marrow, skin, brain, and joints of dogs. Although considered a rare cancer overall, several breeds are known to present elevated risks. These breeds include Bernese Mountain Dogs, Flat-Coated Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, and Rottweilers.

Due to HS’s aggressiveness and its often-late diagnosis (it can mimic other conditions/cancers), there’s currently no effective treatment. The AKC Canine Health Foundation (CHF), along with its donors, is funding a study to help change that. The research team at University of Rennes (France), and headed by Benoit Hedan, DVM, PhD; CNRS, has identified tumor DNA alterations specific to HS. The study’s objectives are to develop a non-invasive diagnostic blood test using these genetic biomarkers to accurately diagnose HS, and to improve treatment outcomes through targeted therapies.

For more information on this and other CHF-funded studies, go to akcCHF.org/research/.



Mary’s passion for her dogs and her breed is contagious. Dr. Wayne Jensen, Department Head of Clinical Sciences at Colorado State University, and an AKC CHF Board Member, got his first Flat-Coat, Quilquest All-Age Aspirations (“Blue”) through Mary. (Wayne is shown here with his wife, Dr. Tracey Jensen, and Blue.) Cash is Blue’s grandsire.

year, so she can devote more time to her dogs, and to CHF. (She’ll still do occasional fill-in work at the specialty practice.) She just closed on a new property near Tallahassee, Florida, to be closer to her field trainer.

She currently has five Flat-Coats, ranging in age from two to 15 years old, that keep her busy both in the conformation ring and in the field. And, of course, she continues her tireless contributions both to the breed, and to canine health, through her work with CHF.

“The foundation combines my many interests,” Mary says, “including medicine, the progression of science, and the health of dogs. Working on behalf of canine health also benefits the health of humans and other species. Plus, I learn something every time the committee and I review scientific grant proposals. There is so much great research being funded by CHF that will benefit the health of all dogs.”

As a neurologist, Mary has some insights into CHF’s Epilepsy Initiative, which has six

continued on page 234

current research grants totaling over half a million dollars. (For more information, go to akcchf.org/epilepsy.)

"Thanks to both human and canine research, we've made strides in epilepsy in that we have treatment options that have fewer side effects," she says. "Still, about 30 percent of dogs and people with idiopathic (no known cause) epilepsy don't respond well to anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs).

"It's a complex disease with lots of mechanisms that can trigger seizures. Again, thanks to research, we've found some genetic causes in certain breeds," she says. "But that doesn't apply to all breeds.

"More research is needed," continues Mary. "We're still struggling. But that is forcing lateral thinking in my field. My PhD was on the neurologic effects of AIDS. That was in 1989, at the beginning of the AIDS outbreak in humans.



At 12.5 years old, Cash won an Award of Merit under Judge Mr. Sidney L. Marx at the 2017 FCRSA National Specialty in Western, New York. "The handler is Nancy Johnson," says Mary. "That day, rather than handling Cash myself, I got to 'play' owner!"

"Drug therapies back then were not very effective. At the time, I was thinking, 'This disease will teach us a lot. It will force us to learn more about the immune system.' It did. That AIDS has gone from nearly untreatable to a chronic, manageable disease for many people in the Western world was unthinkable back then. But that's where we are now.

"Humans, when faced with tremendous challenges, can be tremendously inventive in their thinking," Mary says. "So I have faith that when it comes to epilepsy, inventive thinking, and the research it sparks, will eventually pay off."



DETAILS: DR. MARY O. SMITH, BVM&S, PHD

DIPLOMATE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF VETERINARY INTERNAL MEDICINE—NEUROLOGY

HERE ARE SOME OF MARY'S PROFESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS:

- Veterinary Medicine degree, 1980, University of Edinburgh, Scotland
- Residency, Neurology and Neurosurgery, UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, Davis, California, 1985 to 1987
- PhD, Comparative Neuropathology, UC Davis 1987 to 1992
- Assistant/Associate Professor of Neurology, Colorado State University School of Veterinary Medicine, 1992 to 2001; Chief of Neurology, 1993 to 2001
- Affiliated Veterinary Specialists, Maitland, Florida, 2001 to 2019 (retired, 2019)
- Author/contributor, multiple veterinary books and peer-reviewed publications
- Board member, AKC Canine Health Foundation, 2013 to present
- Chairman, Scientific Review Committee, AKC Canine Health Foundation, 2013 to present

DOG-WORLD HIGHLIGHTS:

- President, Davis Dog Training Club, 1989 to 1991
- Co-Chairman, FCRSA National Specialty, 2001
- Board member, Flat-Coated Retriever Society of America, Inc., 2006 to 2008
- President, Tracking Club of Central Florida, 2009 to 2010
- President, Southern Skies Flat-Coated Retriever Club, 2014 to 2018

A SAMPLING OF DOG HIGHLIGHTS:

GCH CH Whitland One For The Money TD MH22 WCX** ("Cash")

- FCRSA Hall of Fame
- Award of Merit, 2017 FCRSA National Specialty at 12.5 years old
- 4th retriever in AKC history (all retriever breeds) to gain both GCH and MH titles
- Owner-handled to both CH and GCH titles. (All CH points out of the BBE classes)
- Sire of CH, GCH, and MH titled get

GCH CH Whitland The London Trader MH QA2 WCX ("Trader")

- FCRSA Hall of Fame
- First FCR and 4th retriever in AKC history to gain both GCH and QA2 titles
- Owner-handled to CH out of the BBE classes
- Winner, AKC Qualifying stake, 2015 FCRSA field trial in 2015

CH Morrieland Spring TD MH OA NAJ WCX ("Spring")

- FCRSA Hall of Fame
- Dam of Cash, grand-dam of Trader.