

Centerfold

Can Ch UGRCH AC NI NE UROG URX2 SHR Kelrobin Black Minx WCX RE CGCA BN CD JH RATI RATN Can RA CGN PCD WC CD (Raven)

Ch Buttonwood Stone Cliff True Grit x UGRCH Kelrobin Duessa JH RN WD CGC TDI (Matilda)

BY LAURA MICHAELS, KELROBIN LABRADORS, REG

Raven was born July 17, 2010. She almost wasn't born at all. I co-owned her mother with Rebecca Elowski, and our agreement was that Matilda would live with Rebecca and I could breed her once at a later date when all of Matilda's clearances had been done.

I bred Matilda in 2008 to Ch Buttonwood Stone Cliff True Grit (Stetson), owned by Traci Stinzcum, and picked my puppy who I called Quinn. I really liked the litter and began to plead with Rebecca to let me breed Matilda one more time. She was reluctant because she missed her while she was with me. Lucky for me, Rebecca found out she was pregnant and was so busy with her new baby that she didn't have time to miss Matilda. So I bred her back to Stetson.

Matilda didn't have any issues whelping her second litter until the third



Raven and Laura

puppy. She pushed and pushed, but that puppy just wouldn't come out. I tried to help Matilda, but the puppy stayed just out of reach.

Finally, I loaded Matilda into the car and went to the emergency vet's clinic. Poor Matilda grunted the whole way, trying to get that stubborn puppy out. When we arrived, as I walked her through the door that

puppy plopped out onto the floor. It was a little black female. I scooped her up, laughed at the receptionist's face and headed home. When we arrived that puppy was fitted with a red string around her neck. Matilda didn't have any additional problems while whelping, easily giving birth to the additional five puppies.

Almost from the first the puppy with the red string stood out to me. When Red String was hungry she would flip over onto her back. She would nurse upside down. She also talked a lot while she nursed.

Her intelligence blew me away from the beginning. She was the first to open her eyes, walk, bark and escape from the whelping box. In fact, it became almost impossible to keep her in the box and later the puppy pen. I would hear Matilda whine in the middle of the night, so I would get up and search



Baby Raven in her favorite sleeping position



Puppy Raven showing her sass

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Raven winning Best Puppy in Group

the house for red string puppy. Most of the time she was in the living room either playing with toys or sleeping on the dog beds. Sometimes she would be rolling around on her back and yapping while talking to herself.

When it was time to wean I put a water dish in the puppy pen. Yep, you guessed it. Red String puppy would most likely be in the water dish, playing and splashing. I once found her sleeping upside down in the dish with a contented little smile on her adorable puppy face.

Trying to outsmart this puppy, I switched out the water dish for a couple of those rabbit bottles. They were recom-



Belly up and sassy

mended to me by other breeders who had dish swimmers.

One morning when I went into the dining room to feed the pups, I found Miss Red String sitting in the middle of a giant puddle. The lick-it tube was laying at her feet, allowing the water bottle to leak out all over my dining room floor. The puppy was quite proud of herself. She saw me and immediately started talking at

me. If a puppy could laugh, that one was laughing that day. I couldn't help the snort of laughter that escaped from me. What a stinker!

I loved her sass. I tend to keep the sassy, bad puppies. How could I not keep that puppy? I named her Raven.

Needless to say, Raven took to water like a fish. She swam without hesitation the first time she went to the lake with the older dogs. She was retrieving, usually to hand, by the end of that summer.

Raven's first show was at the Labrador Owner's Club in June of 2011. She won her Sweeps class under breeder-judge Roger Bannister (Greenhill) and placed in the regular classes. When she moved around the ring she glided, and I could just see her saying, "Look at me!" as she moved.

In August of that year I drove Quinn and Raven to British Columbia. We stayed with my friend Cathy Mitchell (Duckndogs). We showed at the BCLRC and I was thrilled that

Raven placed 2nd in one of her classes. That summer was one of the hottest on record in Michigan with numerous days climbing to over 90°. Raven was bald. The other dogs were still all in coat since their climate is much cooler than ours. The judge recognized Raven's quality anyway and rewarded her for it, despite the lack of coat. Quinn and Raven also won the Brace class that day as my full sisters both moved beautifully as we went around the ring. That was a proud "breeder's moment" for me.

Over Labor Day 2011 I took Quinn to Canada. She needed just one point to finish. I decided to enter Raven as well, to see what she would do. I didn't expect anything from her, she was basically along for the ride. Well, little sister Raven had something to say about that. Raven won Winner's Bitch, Best of Winners, Best of Breed and Group 3 under breeder-judge Carl Liepmann (Triple L), who had nothing but good things to say about her. Poor Quinn had to settle for Reserve Winners Bitch that day. I kept Raven home the next day and Quinn went on to finish her Championship.

Raven then went on a tear, finishing her Canadian Championship in eight shows at age sixteen months. I took her to a couple of UKC shows a few weeks later and she finished her UKC Championship in a weekend, going up over dogs who were older and already had their Championships and Grand Championships.

2012 was a slow year for us. I had a tear in my rotator cuff surgically repaired, so we only earned one title that year, her WC.

When I started doing field work with Raven she had a horrible habit of not wanting to wait until released to retrieve her bird. She would throw her head around, losing her mark. It took us quite

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Beautiful Blackbird

My plan was to breed her to MBISS GCh Can Ch Paradoc's Obsidian (Sid), owned by Karen and John Helmers. I had fallen in love with this dog the first time I saw him. Unfortunately, when Raven was ready to be bred, we had 17 inches of snow. Karen had over 22 inches of snow in Indiana, and there was no



Of course she would nurse her puppies on her back

a while to break that habit. I was proud of her when, going for her WC, she sat, watching intently as the ducks fell, without throwing her head. She raced out to her ducks and retrieved them to hand.

In 2013 we started doing some obedience and rally, after I had additional shoulder surgery to repair a torn bicep tendon. She earned ten titles that year: four rally, two obedience, her CGC and the Canadian equivalent (CGN), one field and her UKC Grand Championship.

I bred Raven in January of 2014.

way she could get semen to FedEx. Thankfully, Nicole McCarthy (Piccadilly) had a stud dog I liked, a 4 x 4 Jeep, and lived only an hour away. Nicole jumped in her Jeep with BISS Ch Banner's No Line On The Horizon (Fez) and we did a breeding to cover Raven. Karen was able to get Sid's semen out the next day and so I did a dual breeding when it arrived.



which is raven in Gaelic. She was the one Sid puppy.

After the pups were weaned and I got her back into shape, Raven went back to work. She earned eight titles in 2014 including her JH, American and Canadian CD and numerous advanced rally titles. One of these advanced rally titles was her UROC (United Rally Obedience Champion). In order to earn this she had to Double Qualify in Rally 2 (Advanced) and Rally 3 (Excellent) with scores of 91 and above (100 is a perfect score in rally). She had to earn 100 points based on a point scale with her scores. Raven never scored less than the 91 points she needed in order to earn a point towards her UROC. She had several 100s along the way, including three High In Trials.

After Raven had earned her UROC we set our sights on UKC's UROG, or



Quinn and Raven winning the Brace class at the BCLRC 8/11

Raven had nine puppies in March of that year. Through DNA testing it was determined that there were eight puppies sired by Fez and one female that belonged to Sid. Before I had the DNA results back, I was drawn to a little female with a bit of white on her chest. She reminded me a lot of baby Raven, repeatedly climbing out of the puppy pen and full of sass. I ended up keeping her, naming her Bran

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Raven, cont'd



Raven with baby Bran (sired by GCh Can Ch Paradoc's Obsidian)

United Rally Obedience Grand Championship. To achieve that, we had to have fifteen Double Qs (Double Qualifying scores) in Rally 2 and Rally 3 with a combined score of 192 or above. This title was going to take some time since I ended up injuring my knee in early 2015 and had surgery in the summer of that year.

In 2015 we were also introduced to Barn Hunt. I had wanted to give Raven a bit of diversity, so she wasn't just doing rally. She earned both her RATI (Instinct) and her RATN (Novice Barn Hunt title). She enjoyed doing Barn Hunt, but her most favorite thing about it was getting



Raven and I with her rally ribbons

to jump around on the bales of straw. She had quite a vertical jump and leaped from bale to bale, laughing and wagging her tail the whole time. Some days it was hard to get her to concentrate on finding the rats instead of jumping on all the bales.

In the spring of 2015 I bred Raven back to Sid. Unfortunately, she didn't get pregnant. I was so disappointed. I'm hopeful she will be pregnant with Sid pups in 2016.

Raven also earned several advanced rally titles in 2015, including her URX (UKC equivalent to the AKC RAE) and her AKC RE (Rally Excellent). In late 2015 we were introduced to nosework. Oh my, did Raven love that! At her very first NW trial she earned her Novice Container title. In UKC they use the scent birch in the novice division, and hide the scent in one of eight boxes put down on the ground. The same weekend, she also earned her Novice Interior title, where she had to find the birch scent where the judges had hidden it in an "interior" setting.

Her grand total of titles earned in 2015 was eight, including her Advanced Working Certificate test that we received from the Winnebago LRC. In that test she had to do a double retrieve on land and another double retrieve in the water. Teaching Raven doubles was an adventure. It had been years since I had taught a dog how to retrieve doubles. I knew the training for it had changed, so I tried to find someone to help make sure we were doing it correctly. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to find anyone to help us, so I bought a book. I laugh about it now. I have



Retrieving in the backyard

dyslexia and have never read instructions in my life. If I have a project that comes with instructions, I usually wing it. Through trial and error, I manage to get through the project. Raven and I kinda did that with learning doubles.

One of the things in the WCX or AWC, as some clubs call it, the dog must heel quietly from the last blind to the line. Then the dog must stay, as first one duck is thrown, then the second duck, marking both of them. They can only retrieve them one at a time when the judge gives you the release word. They have to remember where the ducks are as they retrieve one, then go back out and retrieve the other.

We had a hard time with that,



Raven at 4 years

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Raven, cont'd



Raven in the snow

despite all the obedience and rally we had done. Many times she focused so hard on one bird she forgot where the second was located. Or she became so excited when the birds fell she would take off, despite my telling her to stay.

We started in my backyard, then moved onto longer marks with the help of friends who threw the ducks for us. It was a long process before she nailed her first double. Several times we would have to go back to singles then try a double again. I literally jumped up and down after her first success as she returned to me with the duck in her mouth, her tail wagging the whole time.

In early 2016 I was notified by AKC

that Raven had qualified for the AKC Rally National Championships being held in Tulsa in March. She had qualified for her work in Rally Excellent with high scores. All of her scores were over 90 points, which was the minimum qualifying score to be eligible for the National. Raven's normal score is 95 and above. I also received notification that Raven was named a UKC Rally All-Star for her work in Rally 2 and Rally 3, again due to her scores.

Unfortunately, I was scheduled for a total knee replacement in February 2016, so I wasn't able to take Raven to Tulsa. The surgery ended up being cancelled and I decided to postpone the surgery until fall. Raven and I still had things to do. She is half way to her AKC RAE with five Double Qs. I hope to make it to the 2017 AKC Rally Nationals for her work towards her RAE.

In March of 2016 I took Raven to a UKC show where she picked up two nosework titles and the last leg in the grueling UROG. She earned a score of 99 in the Rally 3 class and then scored a perfect 100 in the Rally 2 class and a High In Trial. She finished her UROG in style. I was so proud of my Blackbird that I had to hold back tears. What a brave, smart, determined little dog she is.

I knew Raven was going to be something special from the moment she was born. She exceeded my every dream. Her only limitation is me as her handler. All of her titles and wins are



Raven training towards her WCX

owner/amateur handled. Whatever is asked of her, she tries her very best to do. Sometimes it's not pretty, but she presses on. At times she's too smart for her own good. As we prepare to either step into the ring or up to the line in the field, I remind her to not think too much. "Listen to me," I tell her. "Don't think for yourself." Sometimes she listens and sometimes she doesn't.

We'll continue to do things as long as she continues to enjoy what we are doing. She's really into the nosework stuff right now. I'd like to get a tracking title on her, if we can find a class to get us started. I would also like to get her CDX and possibly UD, if I can convince her I'm not mad at her when I don't talk to her during the exercises. She much prefers rally since I can talk to her while in the ring.

I think she's capable of getting a Senior Hunter. However, I've never trained for one, so I'm not sure it will be possible, since I can't find anyone again to help us. Maybe I can try and read a book.

Raven has passed on her intelligence and trainability to her puppies. Her daughter, Bran, has taken to nosework and might actually end up better at it



*Raven and her son Hank, SC AI NE PTS UCH URO1
Kelrobin Cormac CGCA RATN WC
(sired by BISS CH Banner's No Line On The Horizon),
owned by Alison and Joe Weber, earning their RATN*

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Raven, cont'd



Someone told me that Raven could never carry a goose. She's retrieving a goose Dokken to prove them wrong

than Raven. (Shhhh, don't tell Raven I said that.) Bran has her UKC Championship and went Best of Breed and Group 3 at her first Canadian show, just like her mother. Unfortunately it's hard for me to run with the knee, so finishing her up in conformation might not happen for a while, if ever. One of Raven's sons has titles in nosework, conformation, field and rally.

What's funny about Raven's son is



Watching the duck fall before retrieving a double

that he was meant to be just a pet. His owners came to watch Raven several times and were bitten by "the bug". They traded in their small car, bought a mini-van and started the journey of entering dog shows, hunt tests and obedience / rally trials. He's made us proud.



Practicing nose work



Raven likes to sit on my lap at shows. With some of her ribbons on her way to earning her CD

Raven is such a silly girl at times. When she was a puppy at her first show, I let her sit on my lap. Six years later, she still sits on my lap at shows. People laugh and point at her sitting calmly as we watch what is going on. She's been photographed many times while sitting on my lap.

She still collapses on her back when she's hungry. She starts about an hour before feeding time, coming to the room

with a great sigh and down she goes, flipping over onto her back. I jokingly tell people she has Hunger Induced Collapse or HIC. She squeezes her eyes shut and moans every so often to remind me that she hasn't eaten in months. When I glance over at her I catch her looking at me, then she shuts her eyes again quickly when caught.

There are times when Raven has something to say. She'll grab a toy, tail wagging so quickly that her butt wiggles. Sometimes it's a short conversation, other times she talks for quite a while. When she's done she'll drop the toy and go lie down. She's still full of sass.



Raven also rolls onto her back in Rally sometimes, which always gets a laugh. I can tell by the way she lays down if she'll do it: right hip, rolling over; left hip, no rolling

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Raven, cont'd



Raven with son Hank. Raven earned her WCX and Hank earned his WC at the Winnebago LRC, WC/WCX October 2015



The Rally start line, ready to go



Doing a serpentine



Bottom line, it's a partnership built on love and respect

I am so very proud of Raven. At times my eyes well up as we walk to the line. She sits at my side as I look down to check her, making sure she's in the proper position. She's looking up at me, the very tip of her tail the only thing moving as we get ready. I bend over to give her a hug and a kiss on top of her head. I take a deep breath and I swear she winks up at me. We're a team and I wouldn't want to go through this journey with anyone else.

I thank God everyday for bringing this remarkable dog into my life.

As of April 2016 Raven's official name is:
 Can Ch UGRCH AC NI NE UROG URX2
 SHR Kelrobin Black Minx WCX RE
 CGCA BN CD JH RATI RATN Can RA
 CGN PCD WC CD

We're not done yet! **LQ**

RAVEN'S TITLES:

2011:

Can Ch - Canadian Champion
 UCH - UKC Champion

2012:

WC - Working Certificate

2013:

URO1 - UKC Rally title level 1
 RN - AKC Rally Novice
 CGC - AKC Canine Good Citizen
 Can RN - CKC Rally Novice
 Can CGN - CKC Canine Good Neighbor
 Can PCD - CKC Pre-Companion Dog
 BN - AKC Beginner Novice Obedience
 SHR - UKC Started Hunting Retriever
 UGRCH - UKC Grand Champion
 URO2 - UKC Rally title level 2

2014:

Can WC - CKC Working Certificate
 CD - AKC Companion Dog
 Can CD - CKC Companion Dog
 JH - AKC Junior Hunter
 RA - AKC Rally Advanced
 CGCA - AKC CGC Advanced
 URO3 - UKC Rally title level 3
 UROC - UKC Rally Obedience Champion

2015:

Can RA - CKC Rally Advanced
 RATI - Barn Hunt Instinct
 RARN - Barn Hunt Novice
 URX - UKC Rally Excellent
 RE - AKC Rally Excellent
 WCX - Working Certificate Excellent
 NC - UKC Nosework Novice Container
 NI - UKC Nosework Novice Interior

2016:

PTA - UKC Nosework Pre-Trial Advanced
 PTS - UKC Nosework Pre-Trial Superior
 AC - UKC Nosework Advanced Container
 NE - UKC Nosework Novice Exterior
 URX2 - UKC Rally Excellent, 2nd Division
 UROG - UKC Rally Grand Champion
 (also earning a High In Trial)