

Sursum Corda – Urget Wm. (Liam) Gaynor (1930-)

Just how often can the human heart be raised after being strained on the rack of experience so frequently? Maureen Clark (Cuddy) had witnessed the Irish Red and White Setter renaissance and denouement in her mentor Rev. Noble Huston's lifeline. She had witnessed the seminal labour and promise of her husband William's founding and direction of the Irish Red and White Setter Society in September '44.

25/09/44 William Cuddy to the Huston Family

"This Irish Red and White Setter Society at its inaugural meeting wishes to place on record its recognition and appreciation of the magnificent work done by the late Rev. Noble Huston, the Manse, Ballynahinch, Co. Down in reviving the breed and that this resolution be conveyed by the secretary to the esteemed Mrs. Huston. It was further proposed that a vote of sympathy be passed to you and to Winnie, Tom and Joyce on your great loss and this was done in silence all members standing."

Likewise she had seen the snuffing out of hope in the hands of Mesdames James, Phillips and Nagle across the brine in the food ravaged war era, a deeply felt trauma which perhaps explains her later reluctance to have animals exported.

11/01/43 Noble Huston to Maureen Cuddy

"The trouble here is feeding. I can hardly get enough for my fowl otherwise I'd have bespoke one of Judy's pups."

26/12/09 Peter Wolfe – 'Irish Farmers Journal' (Joyce Huston's son Noble Huston's nephew)

"Near by is the town of Ballynahinch where pre Paisley Rev. Noble Huston preached a gentler Presbyterian gospel (for thirty-seven years). A countryman at heart he introduced the R&W to the country North and South. He lived across the road from the Catholic priest who kept cows; he kept bees... So they had Catholic milk and Protestant honey... 'A land of milk and honey.' He being dead yet speaketh – Hebrews 1V 4, reads his grave marker August 1944. (Very apt!!!)"

15/06/46 Joe Braddon to William Cuddy

"I had the unique experience of judging, for perhaps the first time in England, an Irish Red and White Setter which was awarded a first prize in A.V. competition at Peterborough. After the show I visited Mrs. James' kennels. I congratulated the owner on her courage in introducing this fascinating breed to England. The puppies were out of Wendy out of Jenefer, Green Star winner in Eire."

20/10/47 Elsie James to Maureen Cuddy

"The feeding situation is so bad that I have had to give the puppies away on breeding terms. I have advertised them in several newspapers – a single reply."

From the Irish Kennel Club Mrs. Cuddy had received scant encouragement as she pursued exact pedigrees in an era not always as meticulous as she in their transcription. Under the 'auspices' of the IKC she toiled and foiled with intransigent secretaries who seemed nigh hell-bound to confine her beloved Irish Breed to legend and / or oblivion. She had to toil within the vagaries, inconsistencies and animosities of the Red Branch where she should have expected aid considering its provenance. She had, at that Branches behest, tolerated the whimsical giving and taking of Green Stars (a breed lifeline) contemporary to the personal shock and pain at the polio tragedy presenting in her close family. Running the gauntlet had been no sinecure for her.

08/0584 John Nash to Maureen Cuddy

"When I think of the time, energy and money invested keeping this breed extant when no one, least of all that old dog at the bone D.J.S. wanted to know."

20/12/82 Ann Gormley to Maureen Cuddy

"I can now have the pleasure of telling you that the IKC has returned Green Stars to our breed for the St. Patrick's Day show 1983... We need your support now or our adversaries will win and we will lose our Green Stars again."

There had been impressive registrations of R&Ws between April '51 and December '68 but then a noted hiatus occurred. Mrs. Cuddy, crushed under family pressures and political polemics of the dog world, became somewhat despondent and had an encouraging and sursum corda voice not emerged the Red and White swan song may well have been intoned – this time without echo. (The Irish term is macalla – mac is son – alla is sound i.e. the son of a sound is an echo.)

30/06/69 John Nash to Maureen Cuddy

"I have been told that the IKC is going to dissolve the Irish Red and White Setter classification off the register and I have instructed people to fight this tooth and nail."

The voice which emerged and in which Maureen Cuddy took great comfort, was that of Liam Mag Fhionmhairr of Monadreen in the Galtee Mountains of Tipperary. Wm. Gaynor, as he is usually known, was a young artist engaged in instructing his Spiritan protégées in the classic forms of Sculpture and Painting and at the same time no doubt instilling in them some of his own enthusiasm for native fauna, especially of the canis and equus species. Married to Kathleen and with children of his own he harkened to the angst of the Cuddy family and the plight of Maureen and William as they strove to remain true to the legacy of Noble Huston. In chapter eleven of his work on Irish Breeds, Ernie Steele writes "Willie Gaynor, the owner of Duchess and the breeder of Gaye of Knockalla was a great friend to Mrs. Cuddy. He helped her, in every possible way, keep the breed alive during the time when few others cared. Gaynor generously gave Gaye of Knockalla to Mrs. Cuddy. Cf. Gaye – Gaynor. Gaye of Knockalla was a beautifully even marked, strong headed bitch, an outstanding specimen. In every way she was fitted to become the foundation upon which the modern breed is built."

Although born in 1970 Gaye was not registered until 1976. Many sheets of agonizing lore, tantalizing possibilities and down right nasties fill the interim period. One John McManamon of Mayo's daughter, Mrs. Ruane – McManamon had facilitated the breeding of her father's line (essentially through Knockalla's Jeremy and Felicity). Ruane's Rusty and Gaynor's Duchess produced a litter which included Gaye and nine other puppies. Try as they would, Mrs. Cuddy, Mr. Gaynor, Mr. Mooney and IKC administrators all failed to elicit from McManamon, now ensconced in Illinois in the USA, the exact pedigree. He literally turned hyper obdurate, even refusing his own daughter Mrs. Ruane access to that document. Both Mooney and Gaynor have written that he seemed determined to let the R&W end with him.

20/07/73 Wm. Gaynor to Maureen Cuddy

"I am afraid that Irish Breeds are not fashionable in some places and the R&W is the first to become extinct – at least both of us have done our best."

05/02/05 Wm. Gaynor to Albrecht Ua Siaghail

"I wrote to McManamon in Illinois and asked him to register my litter but he never replied to my letter. I came to the conclusion that he wanted the breed to become extinct when he himself died."

19/12/73 John Kerr to Maureen Cuddy

"It is a great pity that the bitch Felicity was allowed to leave Ireland and that McM. was not more helpful. Surely he could have issued pedigrees for those dogs still in Ireland which are obviously the progeny of Felicity. McM. is an old man now and will eventually die so what good will he have done for the breed by adopting this dog in the manger attitude."

The McManamon affair with the pedigree was not unique. Mr. and Mrs. Cuddy had suffered through a parallel incident with Cleland the international judge in '42. Queenie McElroy's bitch, Judith of Knockalla, had reached Maureen and William through Cleland in poor shape needing serious nursing. For some two years the judge played the Knockalla pair always with an 'if' attached to obtaining Judith's pedigree. Is it not ironic that this is the same judge who in 1980 put up Harlequin (Blaze) with Alan Gormley at National Gun Dog?

24/02/43 William Cuddy to Robert Cleland

"I have been in touch with the Kennel Club and Rev. Huston regarding the pedigree that you finally sent me. There are several errors in it and the Kennel Club has refused to register it. Though I now have the correct one may I remind you that as a breeder, any other pedigree would be useless."

24/02/43 William Cuddy to Quirke at IKC

"I sent you the pedigree which I received, together with the amendments noted by Rev. Huston and Mr. Lennox. I have letters from Cleland referring to my bitch received after two arduous years of supplication."

It is interesting that Cleland, Gillespie and the triumvirate which tried to form a new club in the late seventies had a preference for the title white and red setter rather than the normative red and white. A jocund Afro-American judge lately said that she understood the Irish colour problem because she had been a victim of colour her entire life.

20/01/80 Gormley and O'Leary to M.C. Cuddy

"It is our intention that at the IKC show of March 17th, 1980 a club should be formed to represent the Irish White with Red Setter. The Irish Red Setter Club has represented our breed at the IKC for a number of years. However, we feel that it is now opportune for our breed to be represented by a breed club."

11/01/43 Noble Huston to William Cuddy

"Mr. Gillespie, I think it is, who it is suggests that the breed should be called white and red, emphasizing white over red. Two hundred years ago they were RED and WHITE no matter which colour predominated. They are a continued breed and not a revived breed."

Late 1977 Ernie Steele to Mrs. Cuddy

"Their club referred to the Irish White and Red Setter. The IKC had no record of such a name and quite rightly in my view would have none of this so it was not until late '79 that the club now incorporating the words Red and White entered the official register as The Irish Red and White Setter Field and Show Society."

Willie Gaynor's enterprising spirit was vindicated for in 1977 his Simon and Gypsy of Knockella won the first Green Stars in a three-decade drought. The judge Tommy Agnew of Tacavonoff, has written at large in 'The Field' and maybe perused with profit. Willie Gaynor never really distanced himself from his dog pursuits although his horse interests came to the fore. They say that every Irishman, (I do not exclude myself) is inoculated at birth with canis and equus caecum. In 1988 a two year old he bred and ran on the lime rich plains of Munster earned him a plaque at the RDS – the Royal Dublin at Ballsbridge where his name and the Latin inscription NOSTRI PLENA LABOR is etched for posterity.

Liam Gaynor has long been intrigued by The Shower of Hail Setter (Shara Hail). This it seems may be a sub set within the Red Branch. This interest has perhaps earned for him the title of spotty Gaynor – a dubbing of mirth and affection. Mrs. Cuddy and Miss Walsh also report sightings of this very rare colouration.

20/12/03 Wm. Gaynor to Albrecht Ua Siaghail

"I think I told you that I saw a Shower of Hail in Galway. The parents were red dogs descended from Nash - Kerr lines. I am told that they were splendid working setters and that all eight puppies of the litter were so spotted."

It seems that Liam Gaynor lived life in the large sphere, though were you to converse with him he presents as gentle and affable even though his verve and articulated passion is precise. His, was a world replete with renowned field men like John Nash of Moanruad (international fame and an ego to match) who though he never owned a R&W himself was (in his perception) the embracing authority. Diarmuid Mooney friend of a lifetime, now in Australia, had a breeding pattern very similar to Wm's. and no doubt also locked horns with kennel club mandarins protective of their own turf. John Kerr in Scotland, an Ulster man, was a determined character in the scenario who sought ends not necessarily convergent. He was probably right but a 'Pass of Thermopylae' attitude was irksome to some.

Wm. Gaynor has worked closely with Mrs. Cuddy, Trudy Walsh, Canon Doherty and O'Leary on his depictions of Irish Red and White Setters in painting and sculpture. His Gaye (of Knockalla) and the Canon's Heidi (of Meudon) and descendants of of Ann and Alan's fabulous Meudons out of Blaze (Harlequin) and Heidi are fully recognizable therein.

Go maire tu i bhfad a Liam. May you live long Wm. Every R&W supporter thanks you for your dedication. Those who have a Red and White at their foot thank you from their raised hearts, as you urged your friends the Cuddy's some four decades ago.

Albrecht Ua Siaghail @ Aislingcudo ~ Punky Doodles Corner ~ N3A 2W2