

While cleaning the bookcases today, I came across a packet of snapshots from 2003. It was a welcome distraction from the job of fall cleaning. I know that a lot of people have abandoned the old-school notion of a thorough spring and fall housecleaning, but in this cabin it is much needed. In fact, it probably should be done every month.

When I looked at the pictures from the days when we sent a roll of film away, waited a week or so, and then pulled from the mailbox a flat envelope of snapshots, I noticed that there were both summer and winter pictures in the batch. I didn't take a lot of pictures, and one roll of film often lasted for months.

There were two pictures that I looked at for a long time and then saved. For now, at least, they are stuck into the corners of a big photo of Fly, our old border collie that died this spring. One picture shows Fly sitting out in the middle of a field in the snow. She was a pretty dog, and in this photo was only seven or eight months old. The other picture shows her and our older border collie, Nellie, sitting by me at the edge of a flower bed. Fly was a year old in this photo, and Nellie was eight.

As Fly grew older, we decided to wait until she was gone before buying a new border collie. She would not have tolerated a puppy well, and I am inclined to put off getting a puppy as long as possible. Cute as they are, puppies are a lot of work, and I am always happy when a pup becomes a responsible dog.

Looking at this picture brought thoughts of the other border collies we have had over the years. Some were better workers than others, some had nicer dispositions than others, but all of them helped us enough to justify their herding dog credentials.

The first border collie/blue heeler pup we had was Tutsy. Before that time, and during all of my growing up years—and long before that—there was always a “farmyard shepherd” on the farm. Everybody had these dogs. Most of them were brown and white, and they probably were mostly collie with a little other blood mixed in. So, a black and white border collie was a novelty.

Tutsy was a wonderful dog. She was smart, and she needed very little guidance from her trainers. The best that one could say about us in that capacity was that we were doing a “so-so” job.

But, Tutsy knew what to do. We had succeeded well in obedience training, and she came when called, did not run away chasing deer, and was a good dog both outside and in the house. As far as the sheepdog training, we did what we could, and she did not need more.

At that time, we did not have the pastures divided up into as many fenced paddocks as we do today, and Tutsy would bring the sheep up to the barn from far across the farm, with no more direction than a wave of the hand and a “bring.”

We were also milking a few cows at that time, and Tutsy's job was to fetch the cows morning and evening. She needed no help from us. In the fall of the year, when the mornings are dark, she was sometimes gone for some time before we heard the cows coming. On one particular morning, it was very

foggy, and we wondered if she would find the cattle. But we soon hear the tramping of feet, and Roanie, Jessie, Beulah and the others emerged from the swirling mists. Tutsy was behind the cows, and they filed into the barn and went to their own places. Tutsy went in, too, looked around, and noticed that Molly was not there. Without a word from us, she headed back into the fog and a quarter of an hour later came back to the barn, driving the red cow ahead of her.

Tutsy had just one problem, though it was not really a problem for her, as she also had the solution. She did not like thunderstorms. So, on those stormy mornings and afternoons, it did no good to call on Tutsy to help with chores. She went into her dog house and refused to come out until the weather had cleared. We had to go after the cows ourselves.

After Tutsy came another Tutsy. Then Pepper, Nellie, Fly, and now, still in their toddlerhoods, Kate and Blue. Each dog has been unique, and we have enjoyed the companionship of every one of them. Some of them have been more effective sheep dogs than others, but every one of them has saved us steps when we are handling the flock.

Kate and Blue are pretty little puppies, and they seem to have good dispositions. But, there is a lot of time to pass and obedience training to carry out before we find out how good they are at herding sheep and whether we have improved any as trainers. But, as always, we know they will be helpful to us, regardless of their final ranking among the dogs we have raised.