

## **Me and My Dogs in Africa**

Unlike most Rhodesian Ridgeback owners in Sweden, I bought my hounds in Africa and lived with them, in Africa, for several years before eventually returning to my native Europe. After 20 years in the sun, I sold my house, packed my bags, and flew, with the dogs, to the UK, where the dogs were subjected to six months of quarantine, while I rented a furnished cottage near the quarantine kennels, visited the dogs for two hours a day, six days a week, and did odd jobs to keep my car in petrol. Six months later (and at times it felt like eternity), I packed most of my worldly goods, plus Churchill and Clementine, into my rather tiny little Fiat, and drove back to Sweden via France, Belgium, Holland, Germany and Denmark. An adventure? Probably, but in view of what we had already done and experienced in Africa ... well, it was all part and parcel of a day's work!

And, unlike many Rhodesian Ridgeback owners I did not dream of owning a Ridgeback before actually acquiring one. I used to live in a very small house on a large property just north of Johannesburg, and I already had two dogs (one Cocker Spaniel and one mutt), when I met David, a divorced man whom I thought was rather nice. This was in the early 80s, and he was a duck farmer who after his divorce lived alone on a farm not too far from iGoli (the South African name for Johannesburg). As he also had 97 black farm labourers his ex-wife had presented him with a Rhodesian Ridgeback puppy called Winston, a puppy that was supposed to grow into his master's body guard. However, his master was far keener on smaller dogs and had his heart set on a Jack Russel; he made several serious attempts to get me to buy the dog, but my finances did not permit this transaction. And then, one day, I was invited to dinner. Thinking that the gentleman in question had finally woken up to my not inconsiderable charms, I accepted with alacrity, but ... all was not what it seemed, and after a very delicious dinner, with many glasses of excellent wine, I was sent home, minus one cheque and plus one large and rather unruly puppy!

The following morning I did have a headache, but however much I cursed my own stupidity (after all, I had walked straight into this trap, and I really should have known better!) ... Winston stayed with me till the day he died, and apart from the two dogs I already had at the time ... since then there's been nothing but Ridgebacks in the family.

Winston died in December '95, and for some reason good Rhodesian Ridgeback puppies were scarce just then. But, in March '96 I had a phone call from a friend of mine; a message from Laurie Venter at Glenaholm. There was a litter in Weltevreden Park, about a 45-minute drive from my home; Laurie had just bought their best bitch puppy, but according to her there was a really nice little boy there as well; why didn't I grab my cheque book and go there? The breeder was keen to sell; they and their dogs were from Zimbabwe, and as they didn't like it in South Africa they were eager to find good homes for the puppies and then head north again.

So, handbag, cheque book, car keys and ... off I went! I was back three hours later ... with Orangelad. And as his much beloved predecessor had been Winston; well, Churchill was the obvious choice, wasn't it!

And Churchill and I were destined to have a lot of fun together. I was completely unaware of (and at the time uninterested in) his pedigree, but I had had the privilege of meeting both his parents, and they had come across as calm and harmonious dogs that were very confident and self assured. And nice to look at! And as Laurie Venter had recommended Churchill ... well, I was not going to argue with that kind of knowledge and experience. And, he was a good-looking dog. And, he proved to be an exceptionally good dog; calm, harmonious and self assured. Good with people, both adults and children, and good with other dogs. And good with horses too. Once sufficiently mature his only exercise was to come along when I exercised my hunters. And then he came along when I went shooting and fishing, and when he got fed up with the lack of action he jumped up on the back of my bakkie (South African for a pick-up), lay down and admired the view from there. Occasionally we travelled together; I drove and he was on the back, as we experienced Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia ... there were many and long hours on dry and dusty roads, and long queues at the border posts, but patience is not a virtue in Africa; it is a necessity. That and a healthy supply of Coca-Cola and small denomination bills for the uniformed staff.

It was during this period that I also acquired Clementine.

I booked her, sight unseen, before she was born, but not because of her pedigree but because I liked both her parents. At the time I didn't even know that her sire, Rekaylahn Jabulisa of Clachan, was very successful, both in the show ring and at stud. And Clementine too turned out to be a real star! Once old enough she too got on the back of the bakkie and went along with Churchill and myself, running with the horses as soon as her age permitted. And so we travelled, all three of us.

In the last few years I spent in South Africa I was lucky enough to make friends with a cattle farmer in the Orange Free State; 12000 acres of land, where we worked in the gardens, rode horses, cooked good meals and relaxed in the shade when it got too hot.