

Bar Oikawa, partner to Kristi Oikawa, Vancouver, BC, Canada

I got started in sheepdogs pretty much when I was born, in Sidney, Ohio, in 2013. My mother, Jill, is a very accomplished sheepdog, and she told me when I was really little that I would grow up to be a working dog. I went to live with a family in Leeton, Missouri, when I was old enough to leave the nest (ok, the whelping box). There, I learned about sheep and if I do say so myself, I was a quick learner. I qualified for the 2014 Nursery finals but I didn't go because I was still kind of green. I learned more about my craft, got qualified for the 2015 nurseries, and then something crazy happened – I moved to Canada!

In addition to continuing my training, I learned about living in a house, about not peeing on the walls, and that chasing tennis balls is pretty fun. I trialed with my new person, and we had a really good year. We ran in the Alturas Nursery finals in 2015, and while we didn't set the world on fire, we had a lot of fun, and I vowed that we would come back here one day for another shot at those beautiful sheep.

To prepare for the finals, I have been spending a lot of time chewing my knee caps to make sure they are sleek and shiny. I go for hikes with the dog walker a couple of times a week to keep me in shape, and we try to get out to sheep on the weekends, when the person isn't working. We have sheep at a farm an hour away from us, and they are named after me – they're called Bar(badoes). We do lots of drills to ensure that my flanks are small and clean, and we work on pace and not staring too much. We also are lucky enough to be able to go over the border to another farm, where my friend, Jim, holds the sheep for me so I can set speed records on my outruns.

My person's best trait is her timing – I can expect my breakfast without fail between 7 and 8 am on weekdays. Her second best trait is her ball throwing. We've worked hard over the years to get the trajectory just right. Her car singing isn't very good, but it's improving. I am glad that, after two years, we've moved on from the Hamilton soundtrack. My shot was thrown away ages ago.

To young dogs just starting out, I would tell you to believe in yourself. The journey, while beautiful, can be frustrating, so if you feel your tail tucking between your legs, pull it back out (but not too high – tails still matter), take a deep breath and remember – you are enough.

And finally, my person and I would like to thank Robin Queen and Susan Garret for sponsoring us this year. They sponsored us in 2015 too, and we are very grateful for their support!