

Geri Byrne, Tulelake, CA – Finals Host, Trial Committee Co-chair

How did I get started in sheepdogs? My professor at Cal Poly, Lyle McNeal, mentioned in class one day that he had a litter of Border Collie puppies. I couldn't resist and the journey began. Megan became my parent's dog as I really couldn't keep her in an apartment in San Luis Obispo. I gave one of her pups, Lad, as an early wedding gift to my late husband, Dan. As I was still in college, he called me up and asked how do you train these? (He was used to Blue Heelers) Not knowing much, I said well I think you put them on a long line, never envisioning that he would try that method while on horseback. He and Lad managed to survive that and Lad went on to work for many years on the ranch.

How did I get started in sheepdog trialing? I can blame my good friends Mike and Liz Hubbard for that. Back in the late 80's, early 90's, Mike and Liz came out on the range and helped us move cows. I quickly noticed how much better trained their dogs were and how much more help they were and so I figured I had better start trialing. I traveled to many trials with Liz Hubbard and Eileen McKay and became hooked.

An interesting side note is that when I along with Mike and Liz Hubbard and Eileen McKay put on our first National Finals in 1997, I had never put on a trial before and had never competed in Open. I thought, how hard could it be? I am still saying that 21 years later!

What I do to prepare for the Finals is completely different than most. Between hip revision surgery and my political world, I did not go to many trials this past year and do not even have a dog qualified. (Maybe next year!) Preparing for the Finals for me means spreadsheets, timelines, and juggling a multitude of moving parts. Thousands of hours and hundreds of volunteers go into this endeavor and I thank everyone who steps up and helps. I have always said that it doesn't pay to know me. (Ask Gloria and Billy about a little 3 mile sheep walk they took for me in May)

My main dog now, Li, gives me great joy to work. She has great feel and pace and was very easy to train. My biggest issue is that I don't work her enough and she has a bit of a temper that I need to learn how to handle. She has had some very nice pups, two of which are running in the Nursery class at this year's Finals. Rita Morneault's Ace and Hans Gode's Kate.

Advice for anyone starting out in trialing would be to enjoy the journey. It is not an easy sport but success feels so good when attained. Learn to read stock and learn from some of the great mentors out there. In addition to the Hubbards who got me started and helped me so much, I have learned from some great clinicians I have had here at my place including Patrick Shannahan, Derek Scrimgeour, Jack Knox, Scott Glen, Derek Fisher, Serge van der Zweep and Alasdair MacRae.