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The Dog Trainer's News



Border Collie: OTCH HC Ricochet Rayna UDX3 OM4 RM RAE SWM

Owned by Gerianne Darnell

photo by Pug Mug

The Story of an Unlikely OTCH

By Gerianne Darnell

On March 31, 2024, I finished a most unlikely OTCH on my Border Collie “Rayna Jane”, formally known as OTCH HC VCH NWGC URO1 UCD Ricochet Rayna UDX3 OM4 PCDX BN GN GO RAE RM HXAsM HXAdM HIBd HSBs HSD SWM SWNE SWAE SWEE SCME SEME SBME CGCA CGCU FDC TKN, CCSS-LCH, NW2, RL1-AOE RLI-AOE, HTAD I-s.

Rayna was born on February 1, 2016. She was the long-awaited daughter of my much-loved Raymond, whose fancy name was DC V UCDX UROC URX ARCHX Ettrick On Edge UDT BN RAE VCD1 HXAsd HXBd HIBs NA NAP NJP, TN-O, RL1X RL2X RLVX RL3 RLV-AOE RL2-AOE RL1-AOE Raymond was a goofy, loving, mischievous, beautiful, over-the-top boy. He was supremely talented in herding and I was, well, not. Raymond’s idea of heel position was to be about two feet in front of me while looking back laughing as if to say “Hurry up, mom,

you’re lagging!” Suffice it to say, Raymond was not a serious obedience dog!

Raymond had an injury as a puppy that involved surgery and rehab, and it was fortuitous for that reason that I got insurance on his daughter, Rayna. But I’m getting ahead of the story!

I did put a UD on Raymond at the age of eight, and he very much enjoyed doing AKC, WCRL, and UKC rally after his UD. Raymond made many people laugh over the years with his antics in the obedience and rally rings. It’s too bad the RACH wasn’t around back then, although Raymond was also a vocal boy when he was having a good time, which was most of the time! But I think he could have earned a RACH. Raymond also finally agreed to become a Tracking Dog at age twelve, although he always thought tracking was kind of silly.



"Rayna's Sire Raymond"
Photo by: Nora Boyd

Raymond was collected and neutered after his son, Rick, came home as a pup, as Raymond wasn't a fan of puppy Rick. Rick was a dog of a lifetime, and to cut down on the alphabet soup in Rayna's story, I'll just say that Rick was a Quintuple Champion, with AKC Championships in conformation, obedience, herding, agility, and tracking. Rick also had many high level nosework titles, a retirement sport he began at the age of twelve. I mention Rick in this story because Rayna was supposed to be a female Rick! That did not happen on many levels lol.

Rayna's dam Daliah was from the same herding lines as Raymond, and my plan was to "do it right" this time around, as far as herding went. Although Raymond was an AKC Herding Champion, I intended to go further with Rayna.



"Raymond & Daliah"

Photo by: Jamie Evans

When Rayna's litter of three was born by C-section, there was a beautiful black and white boy, a pretty black and white girl, and a very dark tri-colored girl. I kept being drawn to that dark little tri girl. I visited the puppies every other day, and at four weeks of age Rayna started to lay under my chair. My friend Erin Embrey and I would walk in to visit the pups, and I would go straight to Rayna while she would pick up that pretty boy. I kept telling Erin to not get attached to the boy, as I might end up keeping him. But, I knew my fate was already sealed...



**“Rayna at
Two Weeks”**

Photo by: Erin Embrey

As the puppies grew and their personalities started to emerge, it was clear that Rayna was the smallest and quietest pup in the litter. That was the first time she lied to me! When the puppies were seven weeks old I told Erin that she could have the beautiful boy, as I was going to keep the tri girl. The big, flashy, boisterous girl went to an obedience home in Indiana. Erin and I then had a ball shopping for puppy stuff at the 2016 NOC/RNC in Tulsa.

Rayna, along with Erin’s puppy, Reign, came home at eight weeks of age. At eight weeks and two days, Rayna turned in to Rayna: busy, weird, opinionated, and pushy. She also grew up to be bigger than her littermate sister, Tessa, who turned out to be very sweet. It just goes to show that you can’t really tell what is there at eight weeks!



"Rayna at Ten Weeks"
Photo by: Gerianne Darnell

Rayna started her tracking training the weekend she came home; in fact, her brother Rick was entered in a TDX test that weekend, and Rayna rode along to be admired by all that were present. Although Rayna was a typical sorta-weird Border Collie puppy, we continued to progress through her early months with tracking and obedience. She first saw sheep when she was about four months old, which elicited furious barking. This response was not what I was looking for! I had purchased ten lambs for Rayna, and my husband was HORRIFIED at her response lol. Rayna was around six months old when she participated in her first herding clinic. When she first went in to the round pen, she was perfectly happy to just hold the sheep up to the fence. When encouraged to go around the sheep, she got a little, ahem, wild. The next few months I put her on sheep when I could, and I tried to put her in situations where she would be successful. Rayna was extremely enthusiastic; ok, she was a

bit over the top! When she was ten months old, Rayna participated in her second herding clinic. In the round pen, on some large, somewhat wild sheep, Rayna got knocked down, and she got up **mad**. There might have been a nip or two to punish that sheep! When Rayna came out of the round pen, a veterinarian friend went over her and said her “knee was angry.” Rayna wasn’t participating in the clinic the next day, so we loaded up on anti-inflammatories and ice, and two days later she was back in the round pen, seeming no worse for wear.



“Rayna Loved Her Sheep”
Photo by:
XP Ranch Photography

Over the next couple of weeks I noticed that Rayna had a slight lameness coming out of her crate in the morning, but she always walked it off and then was fine the rest of the day. We continued on with our training, and she was doing well. In mid-December Erin and I were entered with our older dogs in an NACSW nosework trial about five hours away, and Rayna was going to ride along for a herding lesson on the way home. While we were loading the van, Rick and Rayna went around the corner of the building, and when they came back, Rayna was on three legs. She did not

walk out of her lameness, and I reluctantly cancelled her herding lesson and left her home for the weekend.

When we got back on Sunday, Rayna was no better, consistently holding up her back right leg. I immediately suspected a cruciate injury, and the next day I took her to the vet we were seeing at the time. She said that Rayna had a ruptured toe ligament, but her cruciate was fine. I was told to crate rest her, along with ice and anti-inflammatories. After ten days, Rayna was no better and still non-weight bearing, although her toe seemed totally fine. I was able to get her in to K-State a week later where the orthopedic surgeon put his hands on her and immediately said, "Oh my, her cruciate is completely torn!" My worst fears were confirmed.

Rayna had TPLO surgery on December 30, 2016. I was surprised that Rayna seemed resigned to her new life spent mostly in a crate with absolutely no freedom other than leash walking. And then two days after her surgery, Rayna came in to season! Lucky me!

I did find lots of rehab ideas on line; it was our new training, and it kept us both occupied. As Rayna's recovery continued, I noticed that her surgically repaired leg often had "tremors." At twelve weeks post surgery, she just wasn't doing as well as she should have been. I consulted with a new orthopedic surgeon in Omaha who told me that even though Rayna's x-rays showed that the surgery was a complete success, she still had instability in her knee. And, when he pressed on the top of her TPLO plate, she reacted very strongly. He said he had done 5000 TPLO surgeries and had seen this situation about ten times. It was just like Rayna to be an exception to just about every rule.

A few weeks later, Rayna's TPLO plate was removed, and a traditional suture surgery was then performed. Rayna and I started our rehab all over again with walking, exercises, laser, and the underwater treadmill. The surgeon told me that we were still six months out from doing herding

again, but as time went on we could start up our obedience training, along with non-impact sports like tracking and nosework. Rayna and I had a fun summer in 2017 getting back to work, and she was now 18 months old. However, we struggled with her sit at heel. TPLO surgery changes the angle of the knee, and her two sides didn't match. We also did a lot of exercises to strengthen her right hock which was very stiff, contributing to the problem. I found it interesting that Rayna had no trouble sitting straight in the front position; it was the mechanics of going in to the sit at heel that was the problem.



“Rayna Had a Lot of Laser Therapy Over the Years”
Photo by: Gerianne Darnell

In the fall of 2017, I was hoping to soon get back to herding training, as Rayna was doing **so** well. One day in October I looked out the kitchen window to see Rick and Rayna lightly playing. They came in, and then both of them slept behind me in my office while I worked at my desk. Rayna got up and left at one point, which I thought nothing of. Later I went in to the kitchen, and Rayna was lying on the floor.

And then, she got up on three legs. I instantly knew that it was her other knee, as it is very common that if one knee goes, eventually the other knee follows. I was surprisingly able to get in to the surgeon that afternoon, and my diagnosis was confirmed: the ACL in her other knee was partially torn. The surgeon said it wasn't a matter of "if" it would tear all the way, but "when."

Rayna had her third knee surgery two weeks later. The surgeon and I discussed before the surgery that since her two knees didn't match as far as her sit being symmetrical, he would do *both* TPLO and the traditional suture surgery. We also made plans for Rayna to be spayed at the same time. But in typical Rayna fashion, she came in to season two days before the surgery, so her spay surgery didn't happen at the same time as her knee surgery.

At this point, Rayna and I were old hands at crate rest, leash walking, and rehab. We went right back to our rehab protocol after her third surgery, and she progressed well. But it was almost a miracle that as we began to work on sits again, that her sit was now symmetrical! Although sitting was never her favorite thing to do, now Rayna could physically sit straight. Her knees now matched! I began to hope that perhaps Rayna could still have a competitive obedience career. At that time I began seeing Dr Nancy Peterson in Des Moines once a month for shockwave, exercise therapy, and chiropractic. Nancy is a well-known top OTCH competitor, so she knew what I was trying to do with Rayna. Rayna and I also worked extensively with Dr Diane Simmons in Omaha. Both of these ladies have had their hands on Rayna for several years!

As the winter of 2018 progressed, Rayna was now two years old, and we had spent the vast majority of her life crate resting, leash walking, and rehabbing. I asked the surgeon in March what he thought about Rayna going back to herding, and I got his blessing. She went in to the round pen again for her first herding in fifteen months. The sheep that she had barked

at as a puppy were now her best friends, and her herding training began in earnest. Rayna and I started attending the herding seminars again, and she earned her AKC Pre-trial tested title in September, along with an AHBA JHD title in October, which are the very beginning levels. Even though I had had three previous AKC Herding Champions, I was very rusty! But Rayna really did quite well, and I was encouraged.



**“Rayna’s Herding Training Progressed
After Her Third Surgery”**

Photo by: XP Ranch Photography

Throughout Rayna’s rehab, heeling was always a big part of her work, so I thought I’d try a WCRL rally run in June of 2018. It was her very first time in a competition ring. She earned a perfect score of 210, and in October she earned her first AKC RN leg. Her first AKC rally competition was in a noisy, crowded venue with lots of cheering and clapping. Although I could tell she didn’t like the noise, she hung in there with me, and we finished her RN later that month. Rayna also started trialing in AKC Scent Work and UKC

Nosework, as that was another activity she enjoyed during her convalescence and rehab. She also was certified in tracking during that time.



**"Nosework Was a Wonderful Sport
for Rayna During Her Rehab"**
Photos by: Doug Neal



Since Rayna had qualified for the AKC Rally Nationals and Tulsa was only 8 hours away, we entered the Novice division at the 2019 Rally Nationals. There were 110 dogs in Novice, and I had *no* expectation of placing. Rayna hadn't even been in an obedience ring yet, and there were several OTCH dogs entered in Novice; we didn't have a snowball's chance. I am still amazed that Rayna earned two 100 scores and placed Tenth! It was such an exciting day! The Rally Nationals was when it really started to sink in to me how sound sensitive Rayna actually was. During the Awards Ceremony when the audience was clapping and cheering, Rayna lost her mind while we were getting our picture taken with the AKC dignitaries. If you want a good laugh, go to AKC TV and click on the Awards for the 2019 Rally Nationals; she was the first dog to get an award. Her collar came flying off at one point!

When we got home from the Rally Nationals, Rayna's obedience training ramped up while we continued working on her herding, nosework, and tracking. I thought it was time to see what she could do in an actual obedience competition, so we tried one Beginner Novice run at the local trials. I was delighted with her 198 ½ score. The hardest part was getting her out of the ring under control, especially with the clapping. I still didn't grasp what a lifelong problem this was going to be...



"Rayna's version of heel position"
Photo By: Aaron Gold Photo

Rayna saw ducks for the first time in the summer of 2019, and I discovered she was a natural duck herding dog. Her sire Raymond and brother Rick also *loved* to work ducks, so I shouldn't have been surprised. Her first AKC Herding Trial that September featured three runs in Started B Ducks and three High in Trials. She then finished her BN with high scores in October of 2019, and I felt the future was bright. Little did I know that the world was about to blow up!



"Rayna's First AKC Herding High in Trials"
Photo by: Gerianne Darnell

In late February of 2020 I showed Rayna in Novice at a couple fun matches, and I had plans to start her Novice career that spring. She was pushy and forgy, but she was also flashy and fun. When COVID-19 hit, we were very lucky here in Iowa, as we only missed a few events that spring. Dog events in our area started back up that summer with participants fully masked, which people were grateful to do in order to compete in local nosework, obedience, and herding trials; I never heard of anyone in our doggy area getting sick from attending a dog event. I know that dog people in other areas of the country were not so lucky, and many folks missed out on a

year of showing. I often wondered what happened to older dogs in more restricted areas that only needed a few OTCH points or a leg to finish a long-sought-after title, and I'm sure there are dogs who never finished what they were working on because of the COVID restrictions.

Erin and I did a lot of herding with a local instructor that scary spring. I would lay a track for my Papillon Robert, then we would take Rayna and Reign for herding lessons, and then run Robert's track on the way home. There was also ice cream involved! The ice cream store owner used to tell us we were supposed to sit six feet apart in the van while we ate our ice cream, and we always chuckled over that. We got a lot of training in on all of our dog sports that spring.

At the beginning of the summer of 2020, Rayna was just "off." Her main symptom was she seemed like a normal dog: she was quiet, napped during the day, and she was well-behaved. For a dog like Rayna, that was concerning! Then I noticed loose stools and finishing her meals became hit and miss; she was just not herself. I had the vet who worked at the underwater treadmill facility do some blood work while we were there one day, and I was completely blindsided by a phone call from her saying that Rayna was in Stage 2 Kidney Disease of "unknown origin." I asked what unknown origin meant, and she said, oh, it is common, kidney disease can come out of nowhere, and most dogs can be managed and lead full, happy lives. WHAT?! She emailed me the blood work, I showed the results to my veterinarian husband George, and he was in the van on the way to the Iowa State Small Animal Hospital fifteen minutes later. Iowa State immediately started treating Rayna for leptospirosis, even though it can take days to get a definitive diagnosis. We had a lot of raccoons around that summer. I saw Rayna drink out of the fountain in the garden one day, and I am convinced that is how she contracted the lepto. We ended up trapping fifteen

raccoons! It was touch and go for the first few days, and it was definitely one of the most miserable birthdays of my life, as that was Rayna's worst day in intensive care.

Rayna came home after five days in the hospital, did fine for a few days, and then she crashed. Back to Iowa State she went! The attending resident said something kind of weird on the phone the next day about a "possible clot in her abdomen" and he said, well, I guess we could do another CT to be sure, and I said DO IT, as her insurance will pay for it. Rayna was then diagnosed with an abdominal thrombosis! Good Grief, Rayna! She was then transferred to the VCA Specialty Clinic in Omaha, where she was put on a very expensive blood thinner; another CT a month later showed the clot had dissolved. I shudder to think what might have happened if I didn't insist on that CT!

At that point, Rayna had had no training of any kind for six weeks. I had entered her in Preferred Novice at obedience trials to be held at my training building before her leptospirosis diagnosis, and I had every intention of pulling her. I was standing over in the obedience building the first day of the trial weekend as I was the co-chair, and I looked around at the three other people in the building because of the COVID restrictions, and I thought, how much more perfect could these conditions be for sight and sound sensitive Rayna?! About ten minutes later I walked in the ring with her, and I was so very pleased with her 196 ½ score! She went on to finish her PCD that weekend with three Preferred High in Trials. My girl was on the way back!





**"Rayna's First AKC
Preferred High in Trial"**
Photo by: Gerianne Darnell

Rayna had to skip the late summer nosework and herding trials because of her illness, but I was excited to go for her CD later that fall. The next local trials were at a building she was very familiar with, and I entered three trials in two days to get her CD. This was the weekend where I found out how truly serious Rayna's sound sensitivity was, most especially a total aversion to clapping. She started out beautifully in her first run with the on leash heeling, and then the clapping started. During the Figure 8, there was loud cheering in addition to the clapping, along with a door banging open and closed multiple times. As the door went boom, boom, boom, it even startled me! Rayna got ahold of the leash, wouldn't let go, and literally drug me around the Figure 8 post. The judge took pity on me and let us repeat the

Figure 8; we received a whopping 191 ½ for this stellar performance. During her next run later that day there wasn't any clapping, and Rayna earned a 197. She finished her CD the next day with a 194 ½. Unbelievably she won First Place at all three trials; let's just say it wasn't an overly competitive class.

I now knew that I had a serious, serious problem, one that could be career-ending. People tend to clap and cheer at dog shows!

Around this time I had read about something called "The Obedience Road", an online training academy run by Connie Cleveland-Nolan. I had known Connie from a distance for 40 years, and always admired her accomplishments. I contacted Connie, sent her the video of the Figure 8, and she said OH MY! I signed up for the Obedience Road, and thus began a series of video "lessons" from Connie over the next three years. I would send her a video, she would critique it, and then give me some ideas to try. I used to think I was special because Connie did that for me, until I realized she does it for anybody on the Obedience Road that asks for help ;-). How Connie does what she does is absolutely astounding.

Connie told me that Rayna needed to worry more about doing her job than everything that was going on around her. I started to teach Rayna to find heel position on her own, with no movement or help from me, as the sit at heel is the beginning of every exercise. Connie's premise is that if a dog loves to get in to heel position, that joy will bleed in to every exercise. Connie and I also discussed forging ad nauseum. Forging and sits at heel have always been Rayna's issues, along with her tendency to explode when there is any kind of clapping or cheering.



In the spring of 2021, Rayna earned her GN, PCDX, and CDX. Some of her runs were beautiful; some of them were abysmal. Her scores ranged from a lovely 198 ½ in Graduate Novice in a quiet COVID atmosphere at a one-ring obedience trial to a whopping 179 ½ in Open B at a busy conformation show. Really, Rayna received a well-deserved 179 1/2, that wasn't a misprint! It's kind of funny, Connie and I were already talking at that time that I could possibly put an OTCH on Rayna. That said, most people that watched Rayna that spring would not have guessed that was even a remote possibility. I was beginning to hear of some unkind things that a few people were saying about Rayna as in, why would anybody want to show a dog like her, especially somebody who had been successful with many other dogs in the past? One person even sneered to my face about her. I used all of the comments as motivation. The words "Watch me" come to mind!



"Reign CDX and Rayna PCDX"
Photo by: Melia Photography

Rayna had been learning utility right along with open, and as we continued slogging along working in different places, trying various ways to get through to her where heel position was, and asking people to clap and make noise while we trained, we began to make progress. When she earned her GO in one weekend, I was so very pleased

In August of 2021, I ventured up to Lake Elmo, Minnesota, for a seminar and private lesson with Connie. That weekend was a great learning experience for both Rayna and me. There were many auditors in attendance, so there were tremendous opportunities for clapping! We got some really good work in that weekend with Connie, and I was more determined than ever to make Rayna competitive, despite her mental and physical issues.

Rayna seemed to be ready for Utility that fall, and in October of 2021, just one year removed from that first disastrous Novice B run at the same facility, Rayna had a respectable utility debut. She came within one missed article of qualifying, and she actually looked quite trained all weekend lol. She did pick up her first utility leg a couple weekends later, and to be honest, we never looked back from there.



"Rayna Never Had an Issue with Jumping"
Photo by: Aaron Gold Photo

Rayna earned her second UD leg in February of 2022 with a Second Place in a large Utility B class, and at her very next trial weekend Rayna treated me to a tremendous surprise. She finished her UD with a Second Place score of 197 ½, along with her first three OTCH points. I was completely over the moon at the mere thought of the words “Rayna” and “OTCH points” in the same sentence. I would have been completely happy with just that outcome for the weekend, and then the very next day she won both Open B and Utility B for 14 more points, High Combined, and her first UDX leg! My hard luck girl started the weekend as a CDX dog, and she finished it with a UD and 17 OTCH points!

Rayna’s OTCH campaign then began in earnest. In 2022, Rayna had three weekends where she earned 17, 17, and 15 points, all at one-ring quiet shows. She usually picked up OTCH points most weekends, but it might only be 1, 2 or 3 points. Her lower-point weekends were usually at multi-ring, busy shows, where it was much harder for her to concentrate. We still had some embarrassing runs, and I finally conceded that some venues were just too difficult for her. Rayna ended 2022 with her UDX, OM1, 59 OTCH points, and all of her First Places. I was confident she would finish her OTCH in the spring of 2023. Rayna did finish her Herding Championship in the fall of 2022, and let’s just say that the HC was a whole lot easier than the OTCH, as it took her just three weekends to earn all of her HC points.

In January of 2023, Erin and I ventured the furthest we had traveled yet to show Rayna and Reign, a six-hour drive to cold, snowy, and beautiful Decorah, Iowa. Decorah is in northeast Iowa, and there isn’t a good way to get there from where I live in southwest Iowa! The trials featured a two-day, double-trial weekend. Eight times in the ring can be daunting for even a

higher-drive dog, but Rayna had a fantastic weekend, earning three firsts and three seconds for sixteen more OTCH points. Rayna was now up to 75 points! I just knew that she would shortly finish her OTCH.



"Rayna Had a Fantastic Weekend in Decorah"
Photo by: Gerianne Darnell

Five days after returning home from Decorah, disaster struck. Again. I was out all day, and I came home to find Rayna on three legs. Again. My best guess is she slipped on the ice going out the dog door. Of course it was a Friday and the ortho people wouldn't even consider me bringing her in that afternoon, although I talked them in to a tentative appointment for three weeks later. Rayna saw Dr Simmons that weekend, and the following week she was also seen by Dr Peterson in Des Moines. They both diagnosed the same problem, a pulled or partially torn gastrocnemius muscle which attaches to the knee. Both vets thought we should keep our appointment with the orthopedic surgeon, just to rule out any bony issues, which we did.

A few weeks later Rayna had a diagnostic ultrasound which included Platelet Rich Plasma injections in not only her gastroc muscle, but in both of her surgically-repaired knees as well.

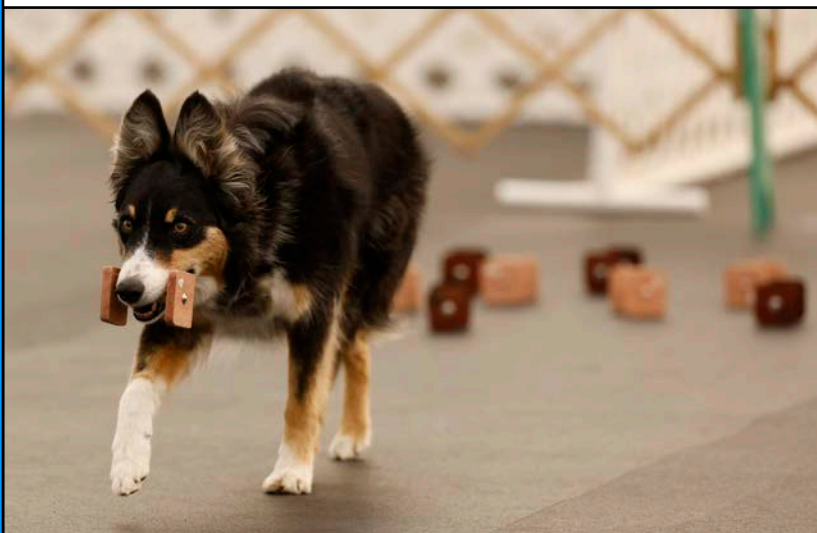
I asked all of the vets if they thought Rayna's current injury could be career ending, and they all said "I hope not", which was not particularly encouraging. Rayna and I then made twice-weekly, six-hour round trips to Des Moines for therapeutic ultrasound for a month. It would take us 2 ½ hours to drive to Des Moines for a twenty minute treatment and then 2 ½ hours to drive back home. But I was committed to doing whatever I could to get Rayna back on her feet again.

As Rayna recovered from her PRP procedure, her rehab again began in earnest. We started some very low jumps and began to point her back towards the ring. In April we showed for the first time in three months, and she picked up a couple points. Rayna won another High in Trial and High Combined in May, and by mid-June we were up to 89 points.

Needing just 11 points, I decided to make a big push in July and entered four weekends of obedience trials in a row. I was just sure that would do it! But alas, we either ran in to higher scoring teams or judges who weren't fans of Rayna, along with some bad luck, and we picked up just four of the eleven points we needed. On the last weekend of shows, Dr Peterson was in attendance showing her dogs, and she had some real concerns about Rayna's sits. On our next trip to Des Moines the following week, she diagnosed Rayna's latest problem as a pulled muscle on the opposite side from her January injury. Rayna had yet another PRP procedure, and we made many more trips to Des Moines for therapeutic ultrasound and

shockwave, and of course we did more rehab! We were seriously running out of time.

Rayna returned to the ring three months later, picking up four points. We had one more trial weekend at the end of the year, and all Rayna had to do was place second in any of the classes to finish. I must admit, I was beginning to despise getting 196 ½ scores! We did not pick up any points that weekend, and we ended 2023 with 97 OTCH points.



"Rayna was Solid on Articles Throughout Her Career"

Photo by: Aaron Gold Photo

At that point, I began to contemplate that Rayna's OTCH was just as likely not to happen as happen. I continued to tell myself that my quest wasn't World Peace. But darn it, it was still important to me. I always knew this dog came to me for a reason, and the reason could be, as the Rolling Stones song goes, "You can't always get what you want...But if you try sometime, you'll find you get what you need."

Our first shows of 2024 were scheduled to be back at the scene of Rayna's big weekend in Decorah, Iowa. On the Tuesday before the shows, our local forecast for the following weekend was dire: heavy snow and extremely cold temps, with wind chills in the twenties and thirties below zero.

However, it didn't seem like the forecast for Decorah was quite as bad as our local forecast. I contacted the trial secretary to see if there was any chance the trials would be cancelled. She told me they had never cancelled for weather before, and she didn't foresee that happening. Erin and I were planning on staying at the same airbnb that we had the year before, as we were trying to duplicate everything about the weekend from the year prior as we had both been so successful; heck, it was even the same judges!

We decided to leave a day early, even though it wasn't great for Erin from a work standpoint, but if we waited to leave on Friday as planned, there is no way we were going to make it out of Council Bluffs. We didn't get to Decorah until after 11 PM on Thursday night, but the trip was smooth sailing for us weather-wise. We were looking forward to a relaxing day with the dogs on Friday until it was time to go to the match in the afternoon.

We had an e-mail message from the trial secretary on Thursday night saying that the trial would have a late start on Saturday due to the weather. That was fine for us; we were staying only seven minutes from the trial site. On Friday morning we woke up to the news that the trial had been cancelled. We had no chance of making it back home due to the weather, and we then spent three days snowed in. Luckily we had a comfortable place to stay, plenty of food, and a big screen TV to watch sports and movies. We enjoyed several walks in the snow with the dogs, including to the local Casey's for snacks and alcoholic beverages. We actually had a great time, but it wasn't what we had in mind and it SURE wasn't going to get Rayna the last three points that she needed. I truly thought the obedience gods were conspiring against us one last time.



**"Let it Snow, Let it Snow,
Let it Snow!"**

Photo by: Pug Mug

Our next trials in February were in a venue where she had done well when it was a one-ring trial, but this was a big two-ring trial with a lot of competition. Let's just say it didn't go well, and leave it at that...

We didn't show again until the last weekend in March, Easter weekend, which was the beginning of a series of local shows. The first day Rayna worked quite well, but other dogs worked better. On Saturday I thought we had an excellent shot at winning Open B, but we didn't place. She did finish her OM4 that day. And then on Sunday, Rayna had a lovely Utility run. I waited nervously through the entire class wondering, could this be it? Even Second Place would get us within one point of our goal. And then I heard "In First Place with a 197..." and our number was called! Our long-worked-for goal was finally ours, under judge Lora Seale. Rayna was also High in Trial and High Combined, what a way to finish!



"OTCH Rayna!"
Photo by: Erin Embrey

Rayna's OTCH point total included 13 Firsts, 12 Seconds, six Thirds, one Fourth, and three Q's of 197 or better that earned points. The weekend after her OTCH, Rayna finished her UDX3 and was retired on the spot from jumping 18 inches. We had an OTCH party for Rayna on June 1st, with 30 of our friends in attendance!



"Rayna's OTCH Cake"
Photo by: Gerianne Darnell

I often told Rayna, "If you finish your OTCH, you can do whatever you want for the rest of your life!" She has taken me quite literally, and I believe she is worse-behaved in the house now than she has ever been. Dare I say she is a spoiled girl? As I write this, Rayna is already halfway to her RACH, and when she finishes that title, she never has to sit or heel ever again. That said, Rayna seems to be enjoying rally, and I'm enjoying not having to win anything to be successful. Rayna is a very accomplished nosework dog in several venues, and we will continue pursuing her Detective title; she is also a fabulous tracker. I do have the CT as a goal with her, and we are already hard at work and having a ball getting ready for her tracking titles.



"Rayna Loves to Track"

Photo by: Joe Bradley

There are so many people to thank, I hardly know where to start. Well, that's not true, I would start with my close friend, Erin Embrey, who has been there every step of the way, always with a word of encouragement or advice. I will also always be grateful to Rayna's co-breeder, Jamie Evans, who likes the same kind of Border Collie I do. Because I co-bred Rayna, it was always fun to joke that I couldn't return her to the breeder, because that person was me. That said, I was always glad somebody else didn't end up with Rayna. She was meant to go on her journey with me, nobody else. Thanks to my friends Pam Bruns, Sharon Brewer, Linda Puckett, Norine Nieman, Lisa Daughtrey, Jean Moline, and Janice Lee, along with our dear departed friend, Alberta Gray. These ladies always believed in us, and they were always positive about my crazy journey with Rayna. Many thanks to my Des Moines friends, especially my dear friend Shirlee Jacobson; I have said for 40 years that I want to be just like Shirlee when I grow up! Thanks to my long-suffering husband George, who always listened to me,

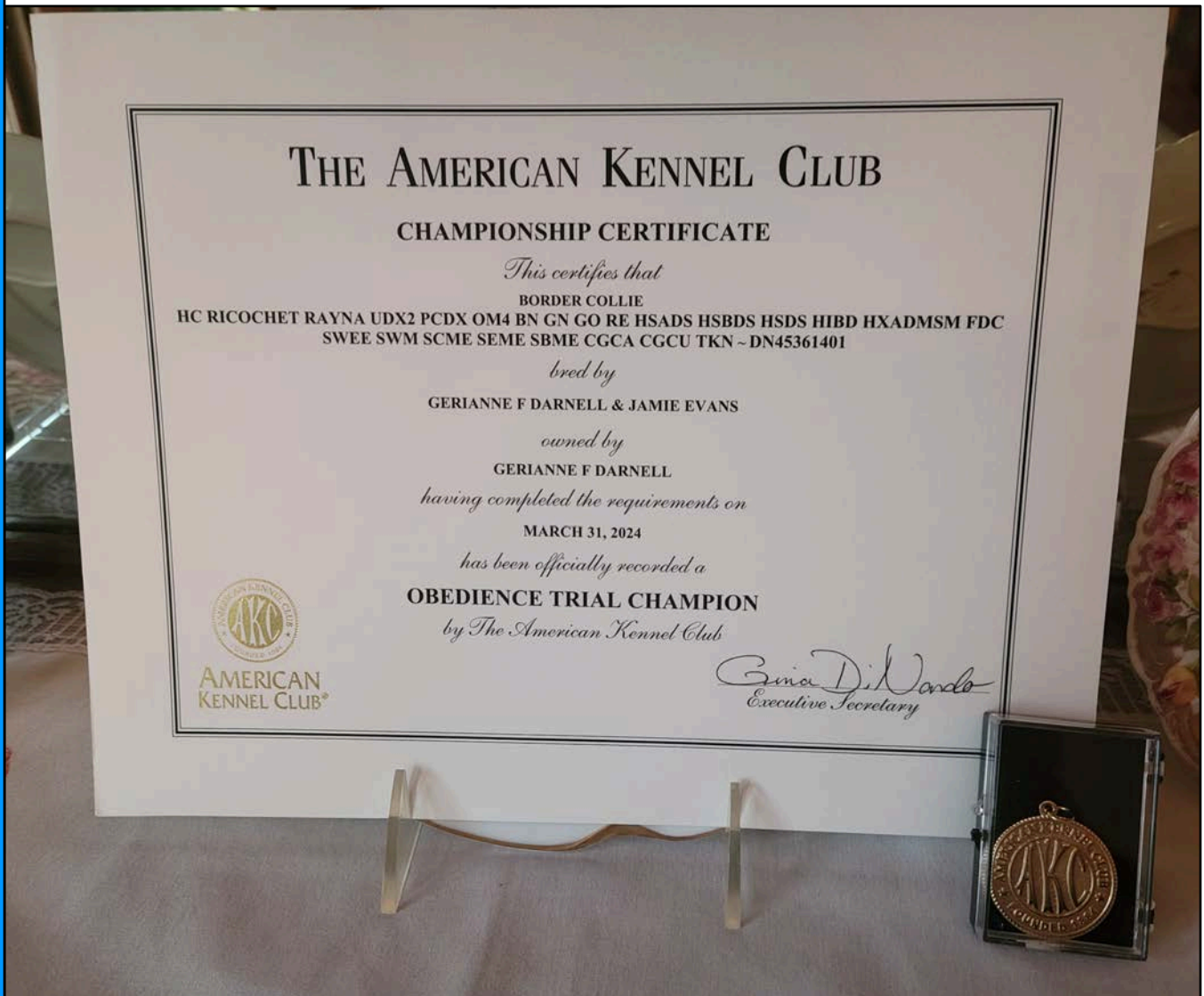
whether he wanted to or not. Thanks to Rayna's wonderful vets Dr Diane Simmons and Dr Nancy Peterson, who also never gave up on Rayna, and to her skilled surgeon, Dr Chris Horstman. Thanks to Healthy Paws Insurance; I can not recommend them more highly. I could not have afforded to do all that Rayna has required from a health standpoint without insurance, and I'll never have another dog who doesn't have it. And of course a huge thanks goes to Connie Cleveland-Nolan for all of the advice and yes, the occasional therapy session. She is truly an amazing person and a good friend.

But the biggest thanks goes to my wonderful girl, Rayna. She is my ninth OTCH and along with my first, the hardest one to fight for. Rayna is a total HOOT to live with, and she gets naughtier every day. We kept working together through all of her physical and mental issues because we loved to train obedience together. It's too bad everyone couldn't have seen what a big winner she was when she and I were training at home alone, lol.

Although Rayna always enjoyed training, she didn't care much for dog shows. But, she did it for me, because I think she kind of likes me! I have a sign in my kitchen that I found a couple years ago that says "Today I will do what others won't, so tomorrow I can do what others can't." I read that sign every single day. I did not put an OTCH on Rayna in order to impress anyone, as people would often watch what she did in the ring in horror, lol. I did it for me and for Rayna, as a testament to our relationship.

Sometimes when you reach a big goal, there is a letdown that the journey is over. I never felt that way with Rayna. Although I certainly feel relieved, I mostly feel giddy that my girl and I accomplished this goal together. I have

a young Border Collie now, a Rick daughter, and so the journey begins again, with all its twists and turns. But I will always be grateful to my wonderful Rayna for taking me along with her on what turned out to be quite the wild ride! Rayna, you are my best girlfriend, and I look forward to more adventures with you at my side.



"Rayna's OTCH Certificate"

Photo By: Gerianne Darnell

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