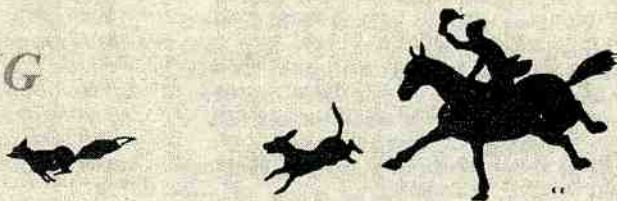


## HUNTING



### PATRICK MURPHY BLOWS FOR HOME

*Iroquois huntsman, whose family has been associated with the hunt since 1948, retired at the end of the season.*

Glenye L. Cain

The breeze picked up and blew into the barn aisle where Patrick Murphy stood, looking out across his daughter Cathy's pastureland. He had been cleaning tack but he put the sponge aside to talk about his hounds and his final hunt of the season, the final hunt of his career.

When Murphy talks about hunting, he talks fast, often sweeping the flat tweed cap off his head and running his fingers through his white shock of hair, curiously boyish for a 70-year-old man. And on the eve of his last hunt as huntsman for the Iroquois, near Lexington, Ky., Pat Murphy still was concerned about the weather, the March wind, the scenting.

But his mind, very definitely, was made up about retiring. "It's getting harder to get out of bed in the morning after a hard day's riding," he said, shaking his head. And the riding has gotten especially hard, he added since fast, straight-running coyotes have overtaken the country.

The son of Irish-born huntsman Dennis Murphy, Pat Murphy grew up among foxhounds from Chicago to Milwaukee to Lexington, and the milestones of his boyhood are carved with hunt clubs from those three cities. His earliest memories, he said, are of standing up in the back seat of a car to watch his father hunt the Longmeadow Hunt in Chicago in the late '20s. After the stock market crashed, his father took the huntsman's job with the

Milwaukee Hunt Club. Pat was old enough to walk puppies.

"We were around horses and hounds constantly," he said. "In Wisconsin during the war, we always kept three or four hounds, and in the winter we'd take them out and track them in the snow. My dad used to take the hounds out in his car, and one day the car got stuck across some railroad tracks. He had four or five hounds in the trunk. I guess. He got them out okay and ran up the tracks trying to flag down the train. So the hounds were all fine, but we lost the car."

The Murphys first arrived in Iroquois country in 1948, when Dennis was offered the huntsman's job for what then was a very small hunt club with 40 to 50 couple of Walker hounds, the area's native breed. He brought 24-year-old Pat with him to survey the country, which alternates between pleasant, rolling hills and rugged limestone cliffs and gorges.

"We came out with the hound truck when they let all the hounds out, we checked out the stables, and we drove all around the country," he said. "When we finally got back home to Wisconsin, Mother asked us what the huntsman's house looked like. I looked at Dad, and Dad looked at me—we had never even looked at the house. We'd been looking so hard at the land.

"My father fell in love with this country. It reminded him of Ireland. Just the

other day I was thinking about it while I was driving through. There's nothing prettier than one of these country roads."

The land may have been rich in its way, but the hunt club was not. Eventually Dennis Murphy turned to training steeplechasers for a living while the younger Murphy took to riding them. He became a successful steeplechase jockey for his father and other trainers and was New York's leading jump jockey in 1954.

In 1958, Murphy returned permanently to Lexington when his brother Bud, who had taken their father's place as huntsman, decided to leave the Iroquois. For the next 10 years, Murphy served variously as kennel-huntsman and professional whipper-in. Finally, Murphy accepted MFH Fauntleroy Pursley's offer to take up the horn for good in 1969 and stepped into his father's old boots.

In 1948, when the Murphy era began at Iroquois, native Walker blood dominated the Iroquois pack. Known for an independence that makes them difficult to train, Walkers traditionally were hunted in a way that suited their willful style: Hunters stayed around a campfire or on a cliff to listen as the hounds hunted the area on their own.

"Back then," Murphy said, "the hounds weren't pack broke. You'd just take them all out in a truck and turn them loose, and off they'd go. They'd be scattered all over the country. We had a tough couple of summers out there trying to pack break those hounds. There were 6 and 7-year-old hounds that had never been handled. But we got it done."

Over the years, Murphy has seen the pack—and, more recently, the quarry—change. Through judicious breeding, he aimed to keep just one-quarter Walker blood in the hounds as he tried to instill more discipline. More change may be necessary now, Murphy indicated, if the pack is to adapt successfully to the influx of coyotes and a shortage of fox in the Iroquois country.

"We've got so many coyotes now, we don't hunt fox," he said. "And there's no sport hunting coyotes. They run so fast through the country you can't keep up with your hounds, and you've got your field scattered all over the country.

"We've got 10 times more coyotes than



Patrick Murphy blows in the Iroquois pack after a day's hunting.

Jim Meads Photo



(Jim Meads Photo)

**"It's getting harder to get out of bed in the morning after a hard day's riding," admits Patrick Murphy.**

foxes now, because the coyotes eat the foxes. That's the biggest threat to hunting here: coyotes. And when these hounds chase a coyote, the highways are tough. You've got to have perfect control over your hounds or they can get killed out there."

Dominant Walker blood, Murphy said, makes the job tough when a fast-running coyote can carry the pack as far as 25 miles. One way to fight the problem, Murphy said, is to "breed a slower hound, like the English hounds, which are slower. People are thinking that if we breed a slower hound and don't push the coyote so fast, maybe he won't leave the country. It sounds logical.

"Walkers are hard to handle, but they're aggressive, they're fast, and they won't quit. But the English hounds are 100 percent easier to discipline. We're about the only pack around that doesn't have much English blood. We had started planning a while back to bring in more English blood and cross it to create a slower, more biddable hound," Murphy said.

It was the coyotes—not the heart surgery, not the hard Kentucky winters, not even so much the age—that finally convinced Pat Murphy to put his horn away. "When you've run a couple of coyotes, when you cast your hounds again they don't even want to put their noses down. They'll hunt, but coyote, not fox. It ruins your hounds. It teaches them to stop hunting foxes, really," he said.

Despite the coyote frustrations, Murphy leaves the hunting field with a wealth of happy memories and associations—and a final salute to the old days, when his father was huntsman. "It would be hard to explain to him about the coyote situation," he said of his father. "But he'd

be real proud of how we look now, and of how the field built up. We like to think the Murphys built it up and showed good sport for a good number of years.

"When we used to hunt with him, we'd kind of take care of him. Now my kids take care of me," he said, nodding toward Cathy. She is one of his three children, and has ridden as a whip to her father during the last 10 years.

Even though he's now retired, Murphy still has a commanding view of the hunting country as he helps out in Cathy's barn. He and wife Velda live up one hill and around a few corners from the hunt club. He will be followed in retirement by Luke, a favorite hound who is now 8 years old.

Murphy intends to devote the coming years to teaching a few riding lessons, instructing hopeful foxhunters, helping Cathy with her steeplechasers, visiting hound shows he's never had time to attend before. And he's enthusiastic about his "new" life, he said, smiling and slapping the cap back on his head. □