

Reflections

Nancy Burleson

By Karen Campbell

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"She gave so much of herself to the things she loved to do."
(Noel C. Hinton)

Seventy-some years ago, the residents of a small town in Eastern North Carolina were not surprised to see the little Darden girl wheeling her Scottie dressed in baby clothes, up and down the street in a wicker baby carriage. Everyone knew that she preferred her Scottie to dolls. And so began Nancy Darden Burleson's lifelong love affair with Scotties.

She always said that she learned her best lessons from her Scotties – once she got a hold of something she never let go and those who know her or worked with her knew how true that was. She never had a personal agenda except the welfare of dogs and children. Nancy was a true example of personal integrity.

Nancy was the consummate storyteller and could entertain for hours with the tales of her life in North Carolina, as a young mother in Okinawa, her grandchildren, her teaching career and most of all her Scotties.

Nancy joined the STCA in 1983, just as she was getting ready to retire as an elementary school principal in Fairfax County. Anyone meeting her knew she was a schoolteacher within five minutes and couldn't miss her love for Scotties as she had an extensive Scottie wardrobe of jewelry, sweaters, purses and hats.

She had wonderful rapport with children and teenagers and would converse with them concerning exactly how school was, relationships with teachers, boyfriends, girlfriends and problems, always getting the answers she wanted and dispensing asked-for non-judgmental advice. They considered her one "cool" lady, particularly the teenage boys.



Nancy championed children. When she moved to Annandale in 1962, she began teaching in a poorer section of Fairfax County and was appalled at the children's lack of clothing. She had just joined St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Annandale and she organized a clothing drive for the school and made lasting friends from this introduction. When she became a principal she was at a school where there were many children from foreign families. Nancy always said, "The women were treated as less than camels." She delighted in making the men deal with a woman if they wanted to register their children for school. Her favorite principal story was in the days before computers when she suspected a student was being abused and called Child Protective Services. The family became aware of this and moved. Nancy knew the child must be enrolled at another school and spent hours calling schools until she found the child. Always the advocate, she helped found Bethany House for abused women and their children.

Her "other" life included being Regent of her DAR Chapter and working tirelessly for her church and the diocese. Nancy's catering expertise was legendary. She said she spent more time in the kitchen than anywhere else. At the funeral, her priest mentioned that the cholesterol level of the entire congregation would drop without Nancy. Everyone chuckled in agreement. Her ham and biscuits were a specialty as was "Nancy's Cole Slaw", her brownies she called "Texas Sheet Cake" and Chocolate Silk Pie. For several years she was in charge of the lunch for the STCGW Specialty and wowed the exhibitors with sub sandwiches (the secret was the pesto sauce) and her famous cole slaw. The best compliment she could receive was when someone would ask for her recipe, which she gladly shared. Norma Mitchell says she treasures her recipe in Nancy's distinctive handwriting.

Nancy had two children, Carl and Edie. She had three grandchildren who called her "Nana Huff". Her eldest grandson thought the Scotties said "huff" hence the name. She was so proud to be the Scottie Grandma.

For many years, Nancy was in charge of the rescue program for the STCGW. She also served as show chairman, trophy

chairman and President, but was most devoted to Rescue. She had a knack for discovering the true reason someone was giving up a Scottie. She never accepted a Scottie for adoption until the owner was completely honest with her. She would regale the club with exciting rescue stories – of she and Letty Passig snatching a Scottie about to be euthanized out of the DC Shelter and running as fast as they could; of being told if they weren't at the owner's house by a certain time, the Scottie would be shot and having the Scottie know they were his instant friends. She and Letty were also afraid that they would be shot and she always said, "The dog never looked back!" She had touching stories – a rescue Scottie sitting in the backseat of the white Cadillac, as he drove off with his new chauffeur, a retired Army General. Strangers would call her at all hours asking for Scottie advice and she was always willing to help them in the no nonsense style for which she was famous.

She had three champions – Kirsten, shown by Mark and Sally George, Rob, shown by Bonnie Casely and Tobey. She initially showed Tobey for points from American Bred class and they won the Anstruther Award in 1995. It was her proudest Scottie moment – the photo of her is just after she received the award. She turned Tobey over to Tom Natalini to finish and was thrilled when he got 2 majors in one weekend. The day he finished, the show was in new Jersey and Nancy's son and grandson were arriving from London at 4 p.m. No one drove quite like Nancy (not a timid driver). We sped up I-95 as fast as her old white Subaru station wagon would go, arriving just in time to see Tobey shown and finish. Then we hopped back in the car to drive even faster back home. She was a calm and collected Nana Huff at the airport when her family arrived and never told them of the exciting day she had already experienced. (I was just happy to get home safely and anyone who ever drove with Nancy will know exactly what I mean.) Nancy was convinced that no policeman would ever stop a sweet white haired old lady.

Nancy was honored by the STCGW with the Gaines Good Sportsmanship Award and by the STCA with the Silver Service Medallion for all her many years working on the annual banquet arrangements. She was running for the third term

on the STCA Board of Directors this fall and was so happy to again be in charge of the Annual Awards.

In 1985 at Montgomery County, after standing next to an observer who had never been to a dog show and listening to the comments about the exhibitors and the dogs, Nancy dreamed up a dog show skit using the stereotypes that the lady had mentioned. She always said she wished she'd had a tape recorder that day. The skit was performed for the first time at our club meeting in 1986 and once more after that – always to howls of laughter. Nancy was the bag lady, hauling her dog around the ring in a grocery cart (not far from her days with the baby buggy in North Carolina she would say). Exhibitors who stayed for the dinner at Lulu Temple in 1999 saw the skit with Nancy as the bag lady. She was not as spry as she had been in the previous two performances, but she was still as terrific as ever.

She was an actress. She could play what she called "my sweet innocent old lady act" and no one suspected. She was brilliant. She was best when she wanted a true answer or wanted the person to repeat the last foolish statement made. It worked great on teenagers, but was most effective at club or board meetings. Anyone who has ever been at a meeting with her has seen the act and never knew she was playing the part. She loved the responses she received – it was a "gotcha" moment for her.

She was a true friend and you always knew where you stood with Nancy. If she liked you, she liked you. If she didn't, she probably had a wonderful nickname for you, and you probably knew where you stood with her too.

She prided herself on promptness and could not abide people who were late.

No memorial to Nancy would be complete without mention of her love of football and the Washington Redskins. She had season tickets for many years and attended two of their winning Super Bowl games. On game day, she always wore plastic Redskins helmet earrings – the only time she was without Scottie earrings. The helmets never quite fit the image of the classy Southern lady she was.

Nancy, you are greatly missed.