

Joanne sent this lovely and entertaining story of how a Britney Spaniel named Shivas Irons became part of her family and led her on a search for "Shivas Irons" and to the Shivas Irons Society.

The Tail of Shivas Irons

Back in the early 90's, once our two children were in grade school, we decided the family was ready for a puppy. I was thinking Yorkie but my husband, a surgeon, wanted a dog that could "do something". A surgeon would have performance objectives for a dog.

Bob said that when he was about 10 years old, his father took him bird hunting for the first time & ever since then he wanted a "bird dog". Bob went on to explain to me how a bird dog "works": it smells the bird, locates the bush where it's hiding, draws up a paw, locks up its entire body in a frozen stance which we recognize as a "point", holds that position until the hunter kicks the bush to make the bird take flight, stays completely still until the gun is shot, then bolts into the field to find, pick up & deliver said bird to the hunter's hand. OK, that series of activities sounded as if it could make a life long impression on a young lad but a hunting dog as a pet? I wasn't convinced. Bob hadn't been hunting since he was 10. Maybe the dog could do all of this because of genetics but us humans need a fair amount of training. This was during the Princess Diana Hay Day. I teased him that he was a British Royal wanna-be. He already fly fished now he wanted to bird hunt.

So we went hunting for a hunting dog. Bob said I could have the final say as to the breed. So I said NO to German Shorthairs-too intense, NO to English Pointers-too wound up, but YES to Brittany Spaniels. The Brittany is no bigger than 40 lbs, gentle, devoted to its family and still an excellent hunting partner. A Brittany can be brown & white or orange & white. We found a 6 week old brown / white puppy with an unusual feature where her whole head was brown. Usually they have a white stripe between their eyes and down their snout. Her pedigree was full of funny names and the promise of excellent results in the field. We called her Francie. She was everything a family wanted in a puppy, just plain adorable and she gave us

the typical headaches of dog ownership regarding house breaking and chewing.

When she was a year old, the bird hunting training began for Bob and Francie. She loved us nearly as much as she loved hunting. Bob was proud that he and Francie could provide us with Christmas Eve dinner that included quail and pheasant for six years.

One Saturday morning in May, Francie must have been lured out of the yard by a baby bunny. Two days later, our neighbor found her dead in his back yard, most likely hit by a car. Our family was inconsolable. Our grief was profound. Bob didn't want to get another dog for a long, long time, he said because he couldn't face feeling like this again.

On Tuesday, three days after Francie went missing, I found myself looking at the classified section of the newspaper. I spotted an ad for a 1 year old brown/ white Brittany. Even though we agreed not to get a dog I called the number and made an appointment to see the dog that afternoon. The dog lived in a gorgeous neighborhood in Cincinnati and since it was 50 miles away from our small, rural Indiana town, I had plenty of time to chew myself out for even looking. But that was it, I was just going to "look at her".

I arrived at the home and LOOKED at the dog in disbelief because she LOOKED just like Francie, and shared the same unusual marking of having a whole brown head, just like Francie. She was the first Brittany I had ever seen, besides our dog, to have such a marking. I only got to look for a split second because I watched her slide out the front door and take off down the well manicured street. "Shivas, come back here." (it sounded like Chivas of Chivas Regal at first) The owner, an attractive young mother of three small children, called out but looked exasperated at the prospect of chasing the wayward pup. Since I was only going to look and the dog bolted while they were letting me in, I thought it would be polite of me to at least help the woman try and recapture the beast. Also, the anguish caused by a dog slipping out of the yard was too fresh in my mind. I knew it was a matter of life and death to get the dog safely back home.

After 15 minutes, the dog was back, safely secured on a long leash. The owner asked me in and offered me a drink while we caught our breath. She explained that the exuberant dog was more than she could handle with her 3 children. Her oldest was just in 1st grade. I asked the woman about the dog's name-Chivas, was she named after the booze, Chivas Regal? No, the woman's husband was crazy about golf and named the pup after an Irish mystic golfer named Shivas Irons. That was the first I had ever heard the name.

I asked her if she and her husband hunted thinking that was really the only reason to buy a Brittany and she was surprised by my question. No they didn't hunt. I asked if the dog pointed. The woman replied, "What would she point at?"

OK, then, the dog was not introduced to any of the hunting culture. This was no dog for us. The frazzled lady went on to say that they got a Brittany because their daughter's name was Brittany. Hmmm, I thought to myself that would certainly set one up for a surprise or possibly a disappointment. I told the lady that I wished I could help her out but I wouldn't be able to take their dog because it was the spittin' image of my Francie. It would be too cruel to the family. Starting to make my exit, I placed my empty water glass on the table and my eyes caught the pedigree laying there. I glimpsed a name that seemed familiar to me on the sheet. "That's odd." I thought. I hadn't seen Francie's pedigree since the day we bought her 8 years before. My only impression then was that there were some weird names on it. Now on this strange dog's pedigree I think I recognize one. How could that be? I asked the lady if I could have a copy of it and I gave her \$100 check to hold the dog. She said not to worry because she started running the ad Saturday, the day Francie disappeared, and I was the only caller.

I took the pedigree home and compared it to Francie's. I was stunned at what I saw. I called our breed and explained the situation. He called the breeder of Shivas Irons and called me back with the weird and wonderful news. Shivas Irons is the full blooded niece of our dead dog. Shivas Irons is Francie's sister's child who needed a home the day after Aunt Francie was buried. Just about then Bob came home from work and I had to tell him what I had done that day. Once he heard the story he agreed we had to get Shivas Irons. So the next day I went back and brought her home.

It turns out that Shivas hunts as well as her aunt and blended into our family seamlessly.

So there you have it. There is something mystical and wonderful about that story that transcends even golf. It fully describes how a family's grief was soothed by taking in a pup who was part of the dog they lost. In a series of moves that go beyond coincidence we found Shivas Irons or she found us.

And regarding the name of this little story-*The Tail of Shivas Irons*, it's a short stubby thing, perhaps docked as a pup but it gives a might waggle like her name sake.