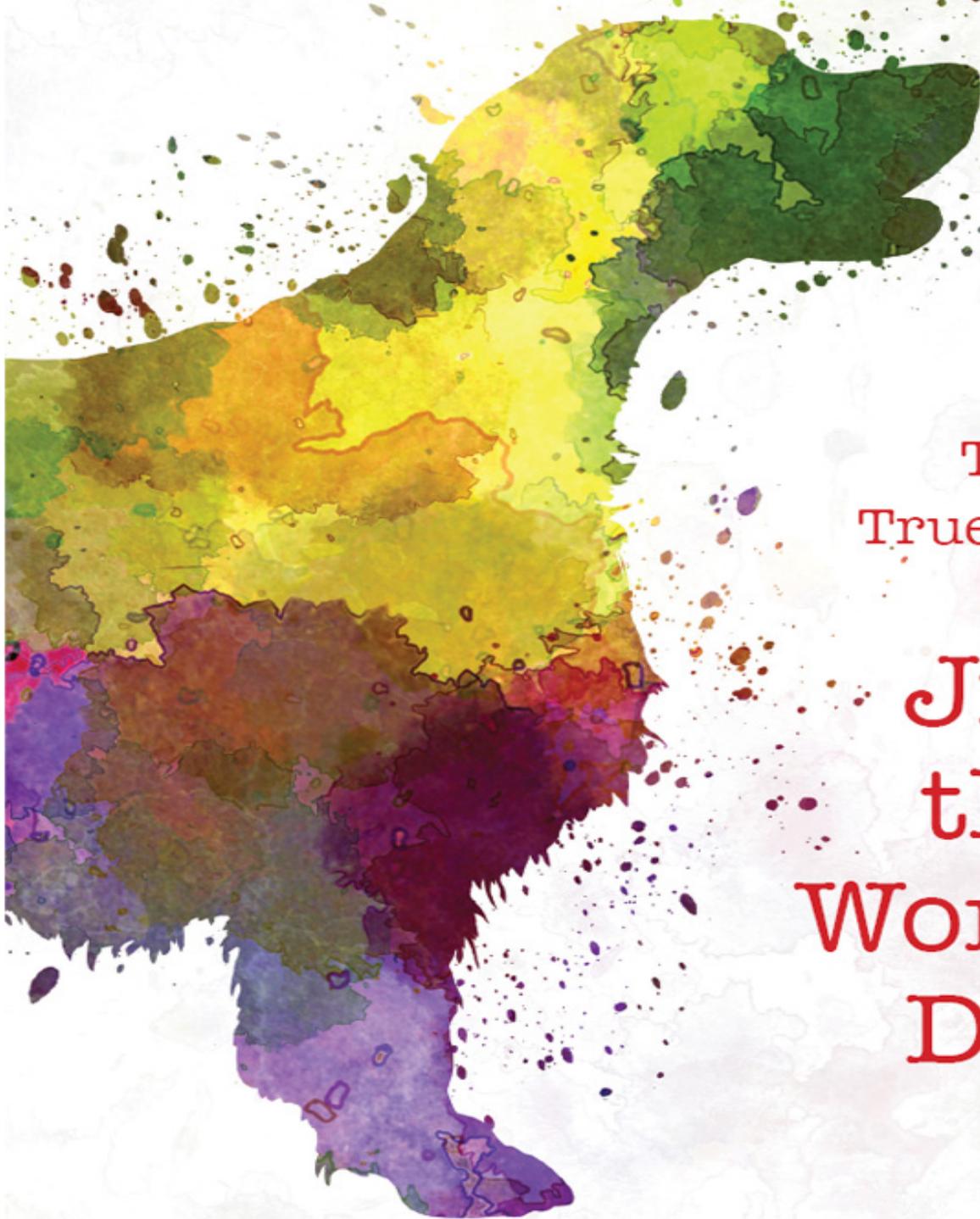


Long before canine YouTube stars,
Missouri laid claim to the
Smartest Dog in the World
(it still does).



The
True Story
of
**Jim
the
Wonder
Dog**

Marty Rhodes Figley

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Chapter 1

JIM MEETS MR. SAM

West Plains, Missouri
Spring 1925

The pup did not look like much, if you ignored his eyes. The small black-and-white canine traveler had ridden a bumpy train all the way from Louisiana to Missouri—some five hundred miles in all.

And he was exhausted.

The weary puppy was on his way to hotel manager Sam VanArsdale—a surprise gift from a clever traveling salesman.

A few days earlier, the two men had enjoyed a friendly argument at the Arcade Hotel in West Plains, Missouri, about bird dogs, and Mr. Sam had confided that he was looking for a good pup to train for hunting.

The salesman had told him about his new litter of Llewellyn English setters. He had gone on and on about what fine dogs and hunters the Llewellyn setters were. Mr. Sam had accused him of bragging and passed on the opportunity to buy one. But if Mr. Sam thought he had gotten the last word, he was wrong.

The surprise was the floppy, big-footed, six-week-old pup of the salesman's litter—the one he had not been able to sell. Never mind that the puppy's grandpa was hunting bird-dog champion Candy Kid.

What would that uppity hotel man do with such an ungainly pup? The salesman had likely wondered, thinking the last laugh would indeed be on Mr. Sam.

Back at the hotel, the crate with the little setter arrived, addressed to Mr. Sam. The puzzled hotelier took one peek inside and had the crate taken to the backyard and opened.

The pup bounded out of his wooden container and onto Missouri soil. He was tail-wagging excited as he greeted his new master.

Mr. Sam took one long, slow look at the dog and decided that his new black-and-white “surprise” was just plain ugly. Fittingly, he gave his plain puppy a plain name—Jim.

He had no idea what to do with Jim.

Not long after Jim’s arrival, Mr. Sam went away on a monthlong fishing trip.

He left his eight-year-old niece Dorothy in charge of Jim. Dorothy cuddled her new friend and fed him warm milk and scraps from the table. She taught Jim manners as well. Soon the wiggly pup was managing to stay put until Dorothy called—just like a big dog.

The little girl and the little dog played lots of hide-and-seek over the next few weeks while Mr. Sam was away. And no matter where Dorothy hid, Jim always found her.

Sometimes Dorothy made Jim lie quietly under a cardboard box while she hid her doll. Then she would tell him to go find Dolly! Jim always did, with no fooling around.

When the month was up, Dorothy could not wait to tell her uncle about how smart Jim was. She told him the puppy had “sense” and seemed to understand everything she said to him.

Mr. Sam thanked his niece for taking care of Jim, but he still wasn’t convinced that Jim was anything special. The pup was just fetching the doll the same way a hunting dog would fetch a bird.

Nothing special about that.

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