

Collies Through A Lens by Lene Newman



I am honored to be asked to write this article, especially as I am not a photographer by profession and know very little about the technicalities of photography in general! My photos have just always been about trying to capture a moment...

My interest in dog photography was largely ignited when I was 13 by the breeder of my first bitch, Aud-Helen Kjeldsen (Topp-Form kennel in Norway) who was a keen amateur photographer. I was already smitten by the outstanding beauty and grace of our lovely breed, this in turn inspired me to try to capture what I saw in a photo... Furthermore, it helped a great deal that Aud-Helen encouraged me and invited me to watch her develop her own photographs in her darkroom. I would watch her 'play' with the photos she took and create some interesting effects and soon I wanted to be able to do this too.

My dad had an old Canon camera which he let me have and I dread to think how much film I wasted! Looking back, I can see some pretty unimpressive photos that I took! I eventually also acquired some darkroom equipment and found this a great way to enhance the photos I took, which were getting better with practice...

When I was first interested in Collies there were not many books around featuring the breed, in fact, I couldn't find any so I went to the library in Oslo and borrowed some all breeds dog books and in two of these I found some photos, to my great delight. One was of a sable, it was a black/white photo and the dog was standing four square which I thought looked great, he did not strike me as a particularly good collie, but his stance was impressive. In the second book I was delighted to find 3 photos of Collies which were all from England. There was one photograph that inspired me, and I will always remember it as the 'ultimate' Collie photo, it certainly had me spellbound at the time. The photo was in colour, of two Glenmist Collies (a male and a female) and they were standing on a hillside, relaxed, yet alert and this photo will always live on in my mind.

My camera went with me everywhere and I would take photos from the ringside and ask breeders if I could photograph their dogs and gradually, I ended up with some nice photos.



Another person who inspired me greatly in my early years, both with photography and also with regard to all aspects of Collies, was Mia Ejerstad. With fascination I used to watch her grooming and trimming her dogs, it was truly a work of art. Mia was very happy to teach me and I learnt a lot from her. Mia and Tomas (Rohlin) were only a couple of years older than me and we soon became friends and we had a lot of fun together - to older, more established breeders I think we were just some very annoying teenagers! Mia's photography was so impressive, and I tried to mirror what she was doing...she was very skilled (and still is!) as a dog photographer and handler and I learnt a lot from her, she was my role model!

As I have no background in photography, I cannot give any technical advice of any sense... I was lucky that my first camera was a Canon and I have stuck with this brand ever since, a bit like a trusted friend! Aud-Helen had an amazing zoom lens and she showed me how this gave the right perspective when photographing dogs.

When taking a photo of any dog, the most important factor in my view is to start with a clean and well-groomed dog! It's very hard to get a photo that does a dog justice if the dog is not looking it's best. The second most important ingredient I think is the background. I try to aim for a plain background, ideally a park setting. A great dog can be photographed in a car park, but he will look so much more impressive with a good backdrop. It greatly helps to have an experienced handler, at least it makes the photo session shorter as it can take a very long time otherwise, although a good result can still be achieved. Lastly, and very importantly, a good 'monkey' – someone who is prepared to do what it takes to get the dog's attention. Most importantly, this needs to be someone who understands the dog as some people (with the best intentions) will throw noisy keys etc. when the dog is sensitive to noise or make noises at the wrong moment.

The willing assistant's ('the monkey') involvement can be crucial and someone who understands what is needed will watch the dog carefully and know how to get his attention without putting him off or getting him bored and doing it at the right time! It's a matter of, for instance, showing the dog 'the cat' just as the dog has got into the right pose... The very last thing that is needed, and nothing can happen without it, is a camera! As mentioned above, I have always had Canon cameras, I think because I have always been happy with them and they have never given me any problems. There are so many good cameras on the market and they will mostly all do a good job. The most important factor about the camera is the lens and I still use the old lens my parents bought me as a birthday present when I was 18...it is my faithful photographic friend! It is a zoom lens 70-210mm and it lets me photograph the dogs at the 'right' distance - I try not to be too close to the dog. I just think that being a little bit further away gives the best perspective and, the dog is not as aware of me. The lens also helps to slightly blur out the background.



I crouch down when I photograph dogs and tend to aim my focus on the dog's shoulder. I like the dog to stand four square and at the same time be as natural as possible, as this way I am more likely to catch the dog when he is posing and lifting himself – every dog can look good or bad in a photo and for me, it's a matter of

seeing the dog's uttermost potential and aim for that - it can take time but it can be worth waiting for. There is an element of patience involved!

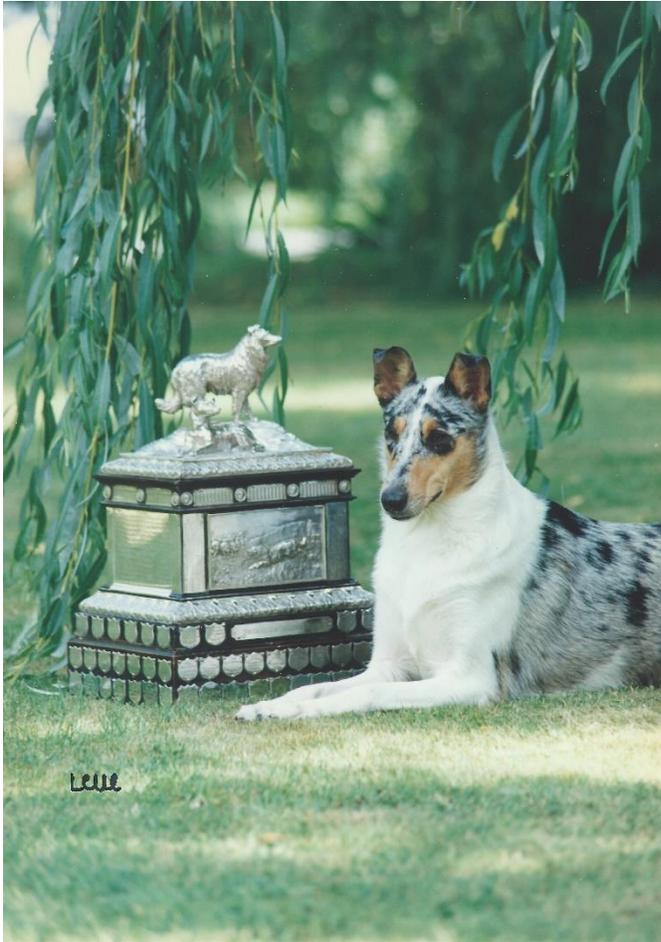


I don't mind if it's sunny or cloudy and I have taken photos in all sorts of weathers, wind and rain being the most challenging! A light drizzle is ok and can give the coats a nice look but any heavier and they soon look wet... Snow is great, but I think it is more suitable for fun! If it's sunny, I try to have the sun behind me as this seems most favourable with the dogs and can enhance their coats if the shadows fall in the right place.

Too harsh sunlight can be hard to photograph in, especially tricolours as they can end up with a lot of 'hard' shadows and it can be difficult to catch their expressions. Blue merles can often look best photographed in shadow or on a cloudy day. The light I love the most is late afternoon on a hazy day, it can certainly give a nice artistic look...

There is an element of luck that comes into play when taking photos... The best example I can give of this is when I took the picture of three Collies in a field, one of each colour. I had imagined this photo in my head for a while and I had a great desire to try to achieve it. On this particular day, the weather and light were just right, and the dogs were clean and groomed... I took the 3 dogs on a lead and used a spike in the ground to tie the dogs to, to secure them to the spot. These were 3 quite calm dogs and I had faith that they would just settle into their positions which they did. I only needed to make a few noises to get their attention and they looked good when looking straight at me. I was pleased with this but then something to one side of them caught their curiosity and they all turned their heads at the same time and this picture just 'happened'.





I have been fortunate to be able to photograph some lovely Rough Collies and also some other breeds including Shetland Sheepdogs, Australian Cattle Dogs, Borzois, Polish Lowland Sheepdogs, Soft Coated Wheaten Terriers, Bullmastiffs, Staffordshire Bull Terriers, Great Danes, Dobermans, Bulldogs, Chihuahuas, Dachshunds, American Cocker Spaniels and horses! And, of course the Smooth Collie.

I will always be grateful to Geoff Duffield who very kindly put a good word in for me with Dog World and I was due to start some work for them on a more regular basis but it came at a difficult time in my life so I did very little with it, unfortunately, but I am proud of the recognition my photos had received.

Lastly, I would like to say thank you for the opportunity to write about my experiences and I wish the All Ireland Collie & Sheepdog Society all the best in the future.

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