

= Pal ( dog ) =

Pal ( June 4 , 1940 ? June 1958 ) was a Rough Collie performer and the first in a line of such dogs to portray the fictional female collie Lassie in film and television . Pal was born in California in 1940 and eventually brought to the notice of Rudd Weatherwax , a Hollywood animal trainer . In 1943 , the dog was chosen to play Lassie in MGM 's feature film , Lassie Come Home . Following his film debut , Pal starred in six more MGM Lassie films from the mid @-@ 1940s to early 1950s , then appeared briefly in shows , fairs , and rodeos around the United States before starring in the two pilots filmed in 1954 for the television series , Lassie . Pal retired after filming the television pilots , and died in June 1958 . He sired a line of descendants who continued to play the fictional character he originated . The Saturday Evening Post said Pal had " the most spectacular canine career in film history " .

= = Birth and early years = =

Pal was born at Cherry Osborne 's Glamis Kennels in North Hollywood on June 4 , 1940 . The son of Red Brucie of Glamis and Bright Bauble of Glamis , Pal 's ancestry is traced to the nineteenth century and England 's first great collie , " Old Cockie " . Because of his large eyes and the white blaze on his forehead , Pal was judged not of the highest standards and sold as a pet @-@ quality dog .

Howard Peck , an animal trainer , brought the eight @-@ month @-@ old collie to Hollywood animal trainer Rudd Weatherwax in order to break the animal of uncontrolled barking and a habit of chasing motorcycles . After working with the dog , Weatherwax gained control of the barking but was unable to break Pal of his motorcycle @-@ chasing habit . Peck was disappointed with the results and gave the dog to Weatherwax in exchange for the money Peck owed him . Weatherwax , in turn , gave the dog to a friend , but when he learned that Eric Knight 's 1940 novel , Lassie Come @-@ Home , was being considered as a feature film by MGM , Weatherwax sensed Pal was the dog to fill the role , and bought Pal back from his friend for \$ 10 @.@ 00 USD . Peck later tried to reclaim him after he became famous as Lassie , but Weatherwax 's legal ownership was upheld . Rudd 's brother Frank Weatherwax , who trained dogs for such films as The 5 @,@ 000 Fingers of Dr. T and The Wizard of Oz , assisted Rudd in training Pal .

= = MGM films = =

The first MGM " Lassie " film was planned as a low budget , black and white children 's film . Pal was among 1 @,@ 500 dogs who auditioned for the title role , but was rejected because he was male , his eyes were too big , his head too flat , and a white blaze ran down his forehead . A female prize @-@ winning show collie was hired to play the title character . Weatherwax was hired to train the star , and Pal was hired as a stunt dog .

During the course of filming , a decision was made to take advantage of a massive flooding of the San Joaquin River in central California in order to obtain some spectacular footage for the film . The female collie was still in training and refused to enter the raging waters created by the flood . Weatherwax was on the site with Pal and offered to have his dog perform in a five @-@ stage shot in which Pal would swim the river , haul himself out , lie down without shaking the water off his coat , attempt to crawl while lying on his side and finally lie motionless , completely exhausted . Pal performed exceptionally well and the scene was completed in one take . Weatherwax said director Fred M. Wilcox was so impressed with Pal during the sequence that he had " tears in his eyes . " In response , producers released the female collie and hired Pal in her stead , reshooting the first six weeks of the filming with Pal now portraying Lassie . Other sources say that the female collie was replaced because she began to shed excessively during shooting of the film in the summer , resulting in Weatherwax substituting the male collie , Pal , in the role of " Lassie " . In any case , MGM executives were so impressed , they upgraded the production to an A film with full advertising support , top publicity and filming in Technicolor . Pal went through his paces with enthusiasm ,

rarely required multiple retakes , and did his own stunt work .

Pal 's success in Lassie Come Home in 1943 led to six more MGM films : Son of Lassie ( a sequel to Lassie Come Home ) , Courage of Lassie , Hills of Home , The Sun Comes Up , Challenge to Lassie , and The Painted Hills . In his earlier years with MGM , Rudd Weatherwax was assisted by Frank Inn , who , for fourteen years , trained Lassies and later supplied animals for the 1954 Lassie television series .

Following The Painted Hills in 1951 , MGM executives felt Lassie had run her course and planned no future films featuring the character . MGM executives then sought a way to break Weatherwax 's contract . Weatherwax was concerned about protecting Pal and the Lassie image he had created from future diminishment at the hands of others . In lieu of US \$ 40 @, @ 000 in back pay owed him by the studio , Weatherwax bargained for and received the Lassie name and trademark .

= = Television series = =

Following their departure from MGM , Pal and Weatherwax went on the road performing an 18 @-@ minute program at dog shows and department stores . Television producer Robert Maxwell convinced Weatherwax that Pal 's future lay in television . Together , the men created a boy @-@ and @-@ his @-@ dog scenario about a struggling family on a weatherbeaten farm in Middle America .

The field for the role of the boy in Lassie was narrowed to three young actors , but the final decision was left to Pal . After spending a week with the boys at Weatherwax 's North Hollywood home , Pal seemed to like eleven @-@ year @-@ old Tommy Rettig more than the other two . Rettig won the role based on Pal 's response , and filming for the two pilots began in the summer of 1954 , with Pal portraying Lassie in both .

After viewing the pilots , CBS executives immediately signed the 30 @-@ minute show to its fall 1954 schedule . Pal retired after filming the two pilots , and his son , Lassie Junior ( who was three years old and had been in training for a couple of years ) , stepped into the television role . Pal would come to the show 's studio home at Stage One of KTTV in Los Angeles every day with his son during filming . He had a bed behind the set , and was respectfully termed The Old Man . Series star Tommy Rettig later recalled , " When Rudd would ask Lassie , Jr. to do something , if you were behind the set , you could see The Old Man get up from his bed and go through the routine back there . "

= = Death = =

By 1957 , Pal was growing blind , deaf , and stiff , and rarely visited the Lassie set . The star of the show Jon Provost later recalled , " As young as I was , I recognized how much that dog meant to Rudd . Rudd loved that old dog as much as anyone could love an animal or person . "

Pal died in natural causes in June 1958 at age 18 ( about 126 in " dog years " ) ; and for months Weatherwax slipped in and out of deep depression . Robert Weatherwax , Rudd 's son , later recalled , " It hit him very hard when Pal died . He buried him in a special place on the ranch and would often visit the grave . Dad would never again watch an MGM Lassie movie . He just couldn 't bear to see Pal . He didn 't want to have to be reminded of just how much he loved that dog . "

= = Legacy = =

In 1950 , Rudd Weatherwax and co @-@ author John H. Rothwell co @-@ wrote a book about Pal 's life called The Story of Lassie : His Discovery and Training from Puppyhood to Stardom .

Several descendants of Pal played the fictional Lassie character following their progenitor 's death . On the original television series ( 1954 ? 73 ) , Pal 's son , Lassie Junior , and his grandsons , Spook and Baby , worked the first several seasons . Mire appeared in a few of the Ranger seasons , and Hey Hey worked the final two syndicated seasons .

The casting of non @-@ Pal bloodline collies in the role of Lassie has met with protest . In 1997 , a

Lassie television series debuted on the Animal Planet network but without a Weatherwax @-@ trained dog as Lassie . A protest campaign was waged , and producers brought a ninth generation Weatherwax dog to the show . The 2005 ? 2006 remake of the original Lassie movie provoked comment when a non @-@ Pal bloodline collie was cast in the title role . Robert Weatherwax has disputed the casting of non @-@ Pal bloodline dogs in the role of Lassie .

In 2000 the Lassie trademark was sold by the eight remaining members of the Weatherwax family to Classic Media . In 2004 Robert Weatherwax 's personal contract to supply a dog to play the role of Lassie ended and neither side pursued a renewal . After several years of stand @-@ in collies that were not related to the line , Classic Media contracted with Carol Riggins , who had been co @-@ trainer with Robert Weatherwax , and her 9th generation dog HeyHey , who had played the role of Lassie during the last 13 episodes of the Canada Lassie series under the Weatherwax Trained Dogs banner . Carol Riggins continues today as the official owner and trainer of Lassie with another " Pal " , a 10th generation direct descendant of the original Pal .

= = Filmography = =

= = Television work = =