

## GROSSO

Kathy Grosso

When we began showing Westies, back in the middle sixties, Ch. Elfinbrook Simon, owned by Barbara Sayres (Keenan) and Henry Sayres, was the “dog of the decade”. Still fresh from his 1962 Westminster BIS win, we were anxious to see him in the flesh, especially since our first dog was a Simon son (obviously, there were quite a few of those around). That opportunity came when Barbara brought him out to the WHWTCC specialty in the summer of 1967. We watched in awe as this grand old gentleman floated around the ring. We’d never seen a Westie move like that before (or since). At the age of eleven, Simon calmly and confidently took BOB. I don’t think there was a dry eye at ringside.

We’d purchased Merryhart Rippin’ Rory, our first Westie and a Simon son, from Jim and Neoma Eberhardt. Although not an overly pretty dog, Rory was as sound as a dollar, with a hard coat, level topline, broad skull and great tail set. Not surprisingly, he excelled at movement – side, coming and going. His first points, while still a puppy, were under John Marvin, the highly regarded Westie breeder-judge and author. There had been several well-known handlers in the ring that day, and Rory was certainly not the best groomed, nor the best handled, so the win was especially sweet. Neoma put his final points on him a year or so later.

There were a lot more Westies being shown then than now, and the Terrier Group was always a sight to behold. Daisy Austed, Ric Chashoudian, and Barbara, who was living in Southern California at that time, along with numerous other handlers, were a force to be reckoned with. It was a tough challenge for novice amateurs, going up against that formidable crew. Of course, we weren’t the only amateurs, only the newest. In addition to the Eberhardts, there was Bobby Maccabee, Bill and Dee Burdick, Jean McAndrews, and later, Linda Leavelle. There were, of course, a number of other struggling Westie aficionados, all doing their best to show their dogs.

There were many fewer dog shows back then. no Great Western Terriers, no Mission Circuit, and exhibitors didn’t typically travel the great distances they do now. There also were fewer, if any, motor homes. Many of our local shows were still benched. Beverly Hills, Pasadena, Orange Empire, and Santa Barbara, to name a few. Those offered great learning opportunities, as everyone had to remain in the benching area until around 4:00, I think. Once breed judging was over there wasn’t much else to do, except “talk dogs.” I recall “benching” our 8-week old daughter in an infant carrier on the top of Rory’s crate. I’m sure it wasn’t allowed, but I didn’t know any better, and nobody said a word.

There were high profile breeders in other places besides California. Mrs. Daniell-Jenkins (“Of the Rouge”) from Canada, produced Westies with white coats and dark pigment. Then there was Ida Weaver (“Ugadale”) from either Washington or Oregon, whose dogs had strong bone and terrific show temperaments. There were a number of “Whitebriar”

(U. K.) dogs both here and in Canada. That was another kennel prefix which frequently appeared in American pedigrees.

As we moved into the seventies, the number of handlers in the Westie ring increased. Bergit and Clay Coady moved to the West coast. Woody Wornall carved out a niche, and Eddie and Leslie Boyes made their mark. Joe and Pauline Waterman also made their presence known. Then there was Danny Sackos, too. With this formidable cadre of professionals, amateurs were lucky to win WD and/or WB. We all tried to emulate the handlers' grooming and presentation skills, but it was tough to compete against those who often spent seven days a week honing their craft, while most of us had other time consuming things in our lives – like jobs. They were good – no one could deny it. The result was that amateurs tended to settle for finishing their class dogs and really didn't invest too much money, time or energy into showing specials.

Westies in those days tended to be a tad longer in body than they are today. We always looked for an imaginary “square”, from withers to tail and withers to ground. They nearly all had forechest, as the standard calls for it. That seemed to change with the influx of dogs from Europe, who were taller, narrower and shorter in body. The “overhang” virtually disappeared, or at least appeared to, with the new trimming style. Low tailsets were rarely seen until lately. One of the biggest challenges in those days was off-color coats, which are seen much less frequently now. Bitches, especially, seemed finer boned back then. Now it seems like the feisty dogs of old have mellowed. Whereas, sparring used to be a truly exciting sight, particularly with a large entry, it's pretty much gone out of style; I think it's mainly because now the dogs won't spar! Thankfully, the typical, impish, Westie expression hasn't changed. Today, heads seem better overall than in the past, bone is generally better, and coats are whiter. No doubt, as soon as the next big winner comes along, the style will change again. Let's hope it's for the better.

### **QUESTION RESPONSES:**

1. Probably unlike most exhibitors, we did not start out to buy a pet. We were looking for a family hobby. Traditional sports just didn't seem to hold much appeal for us. Vince had some exposure to dog shows as a child, and we were all dog lovers. Actually, Westies were a compromise – he wanted a Doberman and I wanted a Toy Poodle. We realized neither of those would work. Dobes were quite sharp back then and we had three young children. Toy Poodles were never on the horizon, for Vince. However, when we saw the Westie on a billboard for *Black & White Scotch* whiskey, we were both hooked.

2. After visiting a local veterinarian and, on his advice, reading Florence Sherman's book, *How to Raise and Train a West Highland White Terrier*, and then visiting a kennel operated by an obvious puppy mill, we decided to go straight to Florence. She didn't have anything for sale, but she told us about Jim and Neoma Eberhardt's first litter, as it was out of a bitch owned by the Eberhardts, but bred by Florence. Florence was able to get a puppy for us. We didn't get to actually meet the Eberhardts until much later.
3. Jim and Neoma were definitely our mentors. Although relatively new to Westies back then, they had ten years' previous experience showing/breeding Weimaraners.
4. Their wisdom, experience and willingness to help, proved invaluable to us in the ensuing years.
5. Florence was helpful, especially regarding how dog shows operated. I also recall a brief conversation with Henry Sayres at a Westie match. He was quite helpful, too.
6. This was pretty embarrassing. While in the Terrier Group, I observed a Border Terrier, being shown by a young child, getting much too close and friendly with a Bull Terrier, shown by a novice owner-handler. It became painfully obvious that the Bull Terrier, hackles up, etc., was preparing to attack the Border. As a mother, I felt I had no choice but to grab the lead out of the child's hand, flip the dog beyond the B. T.'s reach and get him away from the situation. However, in doing so, I fell backwards and wound up sitting, spread eagle on the ground (the skirts were pretty short in the mid-seventies). Now, my Westie male decided that the Border was a threat to "mom", and was trying valiantly to attack him, too. With a dog lead in each hand and another dog fight fast developing, I could not get up. To this day, I don't remember what happened, but someone must have taken the Border away from me. The only thing I do recall is that my Westie won his second owner-handled Terrier Group in So. Calif. that day! Needless to say, ringside totally enjoyed the show.
7. Of course, my favorite dog show is the K. C. of Palm Springs! That's because we have great judging panels, a beautiful polo club venue and it's very well organized (also because my husband is the show chair.) Montgomery County, Great Western Terriers and Westminster K. C. are, of course, also outstanding.
8. We very rarely used handlers, so it was imperative that we learn to groom. It took a while, but we finally were able to do a fair job. Neoma Eberhardt shared everything she knew and learned about trimming and grooming with us.
9. Eventually, with initial help from the Eberhardts, plus our own trial/error, we

learned to evaluate our own breeding stock.

10. I think the best Westie we ever produced was *Ch. Winsom Lolita*, out of our second litter. Unfortunately, as so often happens, she had breeding problems and produced only one litter. The best dog I ever remember seeing, was one bred by the Eberhardts – *Ch. Merryhart Aspen Able*. I believe he had some *Dreamland* breeding behind him and probably was sired by *Ch. Dreamland's Counselor*, who was owned by Jim and Neoma. We bred to him twice, but never got any puppies (probably due to our bitch). The most influential dog had to be *Ch. Elfinbrook Simon*.
11. Since we live on the West coast and were busy raising four children, showing, and working full-time jobs, we didn't get to Montgomery or any roving specialty until after we stopped breeding and exhibiting in the '80's.
12. We were not able to attend the Centennial due to other commitments.
13. We learned a great deal from John Marvin's book, *The Complete West Highland White Terrier*.
14. Our favorite collectibles are the ceramic Black & White Whiskey decanters, since they helped to start it all.
15. We were active in the WHWTCC way back when, but not in a very long time.
16. At this time, the future of all breeds is in jeopardy. If we don't become more proactive in fighting the repressive legislation being proposed and passed all over the country, not only our breed, but all breeds and dog shows in general, will be history.

With regard to Westies, I think more attention needs to be paid to tailsets and forechests.

Some also need a bit more width in body, especially in the rear. In the next decade or two,

I would love to see perfect Westies (not a bit realistic), bred to the standard, rather than

rationalized exaggerations. No doubt, fashion will dictate.

17. I think there are a number of serious, hard working breeders (like Mary Bradley) doing everything possible to protect the future health and welfare of our beloved breed. Everyone does not need to agree on just how to do that, as long as they're sincere and knowledgeable about what they're doing. My biggest concern is and always has been those who simply want to win at any cost, who shrug off serious type aberrations and advertise ad infinitum, in order to influence judges. Even some of our breeder-judges seem to have fallen prey

to an “if it’s not a disqualification.....” mentality.

18. My earnest advice to current and future enthusiasts is to breed to the standard. No dog is perfect, but decide what you can honestly and sincerely live with, and what you cannot. Try to breed out the less desirable traits. Oh, and one more thing: when Westies don’t appear to be fitting the standard, please work on your universal breeding programs; don’t change the standard to fit the dogs. Remember, too, that foreign-bred dogs may be bred to a standard that’s somewhat different from ours.