

STARK

WEST WORLD

Catherine (Cass) Stark

Here are a couple of stories about some pretty wonderful ladies in the world of Westies.

It was during the 1981 Florida winter circuit and I was at the St. Petersburg dog show with my dog-eared copy of John T. Marvin's *The Complete West Highland White Terrier* clutched to my breast. I'm sure I looked totally lost because suddenly before me appeared this lovely lady saying something like "I can't help but notice you are carrying John Marvin's book." and from that sprang up a hearty conversation about my desperately wanting to have a Westie for my own. So this lovely lady introduced herself to me and it was none other than Barbara Barrie. Without a moment's hesitation she said "I know just the person you want to talk to" and off we went to visit with Dora Lee Wilson, who upon hearing of my pleas of "must have....., will do anything to get....., and really do love this breed" produced a legal sized yellow pad with scads of names and doodles on it. She leafed through page after page and said "I think I can put you in touch with a lady in San Antonio, Texas who may have a puppy. Her name is Kathleen Phillips." I must admit that in my enthusiasm when asked if I wanted a "show" puppy, I said something totally ridiculous like "I'd be happy with anything."

So there I was with a name - Kathleen Phillips, and here is my story of Kathleen. I got home from the St. Pete show and immediately called her. She answered the phone and sounded very "in charge" and businesslike. I later found out she was a M.A.S.H. nurse in the Vietnam war. When I told her of my need, desire, obsession she immediately began to grill me like a drill sergeant. "Have you ever owned a dog? (yes). Do you own other dogs?" (no). Do you have a fenced in yard? (yes). Do you understand what it means to be a responsible dog owner? (I think so - gulp). This went on and on until she felt I was fairly capable of owning a dog, but not necessarily her dog - because the story behind this particular dog was special. According to Kathleen, some months before, she heard a terrible hue and cry coming from her backyard where most of her dogs were playing. She knew from the barking that this was not normal play and she rushed to the

back door only to see four of her dogs in a terrible battle with a rattle snake. In the process of trying to save her precious dogs, Kathleen was bitten on her leg by the snake. She was rushed to the hospital and recovered, but the bite was so bad she was still limping and unable to show any dogs. Even worse, some of her dogs died from the attack. At the time we had our conversation, she had an eight-month-old bitch from her last litter, Ancin of Purston's Katie, out of Purston Primate and Woodlawn's Calamity Jane. She had been the pick of the litter and Kathleen had hoped to show her but, because of Kathleen's injuries, was now unable to do so. The last question Kathleen asked me was "Would you be willing to finish this little bitch - whatever it takes?" I had absolutely no concept of what that truly meant, but on impulse and out of dire need to own a Westie, I said yes. And that was the beginning of my attempts to show and finish my dogs. I will say that I finished Katie and her son on the same weekend in Florida and I showed them all the way to their championships myself. I had much help along the way from my wonderful friends in the Tampa Bay Terrier Club, but one of them told me later "They finished in spite of you". I took that as a compliment.

My last story is about Barbara Barrie again. She and I were entered in the same puppy class at the Tampa Bay Kennel Club show in the summer of 1981. I had prepared myself and my lovely little Katie as best I could, including conformation and grooming classes, but the nerves were more than I could stand. This was my very first time in the ring and I hoped to make an impression with this lovely bitch on none other than Barbara Worcester Keenan, our judge. Just as we were about to go in the ring Barbara Barrie came up to me with a big smile on her face and congratulated me on acquiring Kathleen Phillip's puppy. She knelt down to pet Katie and realized that I had not removed the chalk from Katie's coat. She immediately sprang into motion, grabbed a towel from her husband, Tom, and began patting chalk out. Clouds of chalk was going everywhere much to my embarrassment. Barbara kept reassuring me that it was OK, but that this judge did not tolerate any signs of chalk in the coat. To me this stands out as one of the most selfless acts of kindness I have ever experienced in the fancy. By all rights she could have let me experience the consequences of my forgetfulness, but that is just not Barbara's way. So there she was down on her knees helping me get the chalk out of Katie's coat. As it turned out I took the ribbon that day and as I headed for my grooming area in a total

fog Barbara grabbed me and said I really must get a picture with Barbara Keenan. Of course, what was I thinking? I never missed that opportunity again. Without Barbara Barrie my first experience in the show ring could have been a fiasco and I might never have even found Katie. I promised myself right then and there that I would always try to be as kind and helpful as Barbara was with me. Thank you, Barbara, I will be forever thankful to you.