

## LEAVELLE

## LIBERTY

Linda Leavelle

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts and the love of Westies with other supporters of the breed. They are indeed special animals and deserve as much dedication as we can give them.

In 1955, when I was seven years old, I saw Walt Disney's "Lady and the Tramp." I loved Jock, the Scottie, but I wanted a white one... Why? I really don't know, remember I was seven. Then in 1962 *Look* Magazine published a photo of that year's Westminster KC BIS winner Ch. Elfinbrook Simon and I knew this was the "white Scottie" I wanted. I hardly could have known how many times I'd correct people who loved my "white Scotties!"

In 1974, three years after I married my dear Kevin, we decided it was time I got my dream dog. We visited some kennels and went to a dog show. But I didn't do much research on the breed before I ventured out to acquire my first one. Money was definitely an issue and the \$250.00 price tag was very high! My first puppy was purchased sight unseen from Mrs. Robert Gustin. I was referred to Mrs. Gustin from someone who was advertising in *DOG WORLD* magazine but didn't have any puppies. How very lucky I was that they didn't! Mrs. Gustin was wonderful and we clicked over the phone immediately and I received my bundle of joy sometime later. I picked her up at LAX (when it was pretty safe to ship by air) and I named her Muffy. (As a side note of irony, Mrs. Gustin now has one of the grandson's of my Ch. Liberty's Chairman of the Board).

I tried showing Muffy myself and really enjoyed the sport. I didn't have anyone to go with me or show me how to groom or how to show, so I studied, watched and just did it. I didn't win anything big, but as fate would have it I met my mentor, Mrs. Roberta Mocabee, at a little match show. Bobbie has been a friend for all these years, and I don't think she would mind if I told you how she took my baby, Muffy, in her arms and started PULLING OUT the hair on her head!!!!!! I was mortified! (I didn't know she still had her puppy fluff.) It took me about three months to get up the nerve to visit Bobbie at her kennel in Stanton, California. But I did, and she was honest and forthright about Muffy. I told her I wanted to breed her, so we did with one of Bobbie's wonderful males, CH. HAPPYMAC'S SODA AND SPLASH. Muffy had four girls and one boy in 40 minutes! I thought, this breeding thing is a snap! We placed the puppies and Bobbie traded the pet boy for one of her male puppies, who became Ch. Happymac's Liberty Bill. Bill was my first real show dog. I finished him myself in seven months. He passed away in 1991 at 16-1/2 years old and I still miss him.

Over the years, I learned what really happens when you have a litter. I learned how to groom and show. Bobbie and I went to many shows together, including my first Montgomery. Montgomery County will always be a special show and I wish I had lived closer to be able to go more often. I placed every day with my bitch, Ch. Liberty's Claim To Fame, so I was really happy. After that show, she finished her championship in just 27 days.

One of my favorite dogs, who I had the opportunity to see, practice grooming on, babysit for and play with, was Ch. Ardenrun Andsome of Purston, (Andy) that wonderful Westie shown by the late, great Dora Lee Wilson. He was very hard to fault.

I have seen some great dogs and another one that stands out is Ch. Mac-Ken-Char's Irish Navigator. He, of course influenced the breed so directly and for so many years. He was really a showman. I first saw him up close and personal at a Texas Specialty when one of my bitches won BOS to him.

My Ch. Liberty's Chairman of the Board (Hamilton) has influenced the breed somewhat. He has 39 champions (and his sons have surpassed him); His get has won the WHWTCA Specialty at Montgomery County five times. One of my favorite Montgomery memories was when Hamilton's daughter, Ch. Camcrest And Surely Trouble won BOB from the classes in 1993.

I got involved with the West Highland White Terrier Club of California back in 1974. I became Secretary and learned so much. I went on to hold every office but treasurer and was chairperson for just about every committee. I did their newsletter "The Highlander" for eight years. I joined the parent club in 1979 and the San Francisco Bay WHWTC when I moved to Sacramento in 1996.

During the 1970's the discovery of parvovirus is one of my clearest memories. This dreaded disease was killing off dogs on the East Coast left and right. Dog show people were terrified all over the country of this very contagious disease. There was no vaccine at the time. The veterinary profession was trying hard to get one as quickly as possible. When they did, it came in the form of killed monkey virus vaccine with a protocol of inoculating our little puppies at two-week intervals starting at two weeks until 14 weeks. It was horrible, but we were trying to protect our little guys from this devastating disease. Eventually they came out with the killed dog vaccine, and then of course the live dog vaccine.

Dog shows today are so different than they were 20-30 years ago. When I started showing my dogs, you could get points without having your dog groomed to the hilt. coats were left longer and very little product, if any, was used and absolutely no hairspray. What we did do, was to whip up egg whites and apply them to the head hair, let it dry, brush it out. It helped the head hair stay in place. We didn't "tease" heads; that came later from the professional handlers. Handlers were out there but you could beat them with a very good dog. I find that today, in some instances, you can't beat a

professional handler no matter what his/her dog looks like. It's very discouraging. Owner-breeder-handlers can still win but even with a superior dog and presentation it's very hard and sometimes that doesn't even work. Judges, who do so, should stop relying on handlers to have the best dogs out there, because some times they don't. It's much more expensive today as well even comparing percentages. We didn't have the cluster shows back then like we have now so that helps a little with the expenses.

Westies were #41 to #42 in AKC registrations when I began; today they are much higher . So many more Westies, yet we don't have more in the show ring. We don't have the big breeders anymore. We can't with all the legislation, zoning, and lack of kennel space here in California. What we have are small, individuals who breed on a limited basis to show their dogs. Unfortunately, like everywhere, those that just breed to sell puppies are here too.

I've had the opportunity to judge some sweepstakes and enjoyed it immensely. Our puppies just seem to get better and better. All this is the result of reputable breeders performing in a reputable manner.

The parent club has always been on top of health issues but especially now. I find this so encouraging. Westies had very few congenital problems when I started. Now, of course, they have many (or at least they are identified).

I believe the Westie is in good hands for now, but I do fear for the future of all purebred dogs. Where will a new enthusiast, who wants to show and breed a better dog go? How can we insure that there are responsible, reputable breeders in the future? Today's young people are taught that breeding is wrong. They are bombarded about overpopulation and that adoption and rescue makes you a better person. Sure, we need adoption and rescue; however, I believe there is room for reputable breeders too. We all must participate in countering the myths and become active in organizations that do.

All in all, I wouldn't have missed these last 36 years in Westies for anything. Do I have regrets, sure, like selling the show dog as a pet...or... keeping the pet as a show dog.... but I would not change a thing. The Westies I've owned and bred, the Westies I've known, the places I've been and the friends I've made have made it all worthwhile.

Best Westie Wishes,

Linda Leavelle  
Liberty's Westies