

MEISELS

#Sylvia K. and Dr. Gerry G. Meisels

Today, our Westies are at the center of our lives. We love our little white furry people as if they were our children; they are what make our house a home. Each of the eighteen adults in our house has his or her own personality. Most have been born into our hands and reared by spending their days in the family room with us, sitting in our laps while we eat, watching television, or reading. The adults are rotated through the house; well, the girls mostly because the boys have to be watched all the time or they'll do what boys do. Our days begin with taking care of our dogs, and end with taking care of our dogs. All this didn't happen at once, but evolved over nearly half a century.

When we were married in 1958, we really wanted to have a dog as the first additional member of our family. Sylvia had grown up with dogs while Gerry's wishes to have a dog were thwarted by the WWII and postwar conditions in his native Vienna. Gerry had always admired German Shepherds, and Sylvia was predisposed towards an Old English Sheepdog, her last dog before we were married, but both of us didn't think that we could accommodate a large dog in the one-bedroom apartment in which we lived at the time. We decided to be systematic and investigate what breed we might want. We started to go to dog shows in Pittsburgh, where we lived then, and fell in love with Jeannie Grindle's Westies. Shortly thereafter we moved to Ramsey, New Jersey for an advancement in Gerry's job. We went to look at dogs at a number of shows including Westchester and Westminster, and the national specialty then held in New York City the day preceding Westminster.

Once the decision on the breed was made, not in the least for the wonderful personalities we saw in Westies, we investigated breeders and visited a number of kennels, including Frank and Claire Brumby's famous Rannoch-Dune Kennels on Long Island and Barbara Worcester's (now Keenan) Wishing Well Kennels in Little Falls, New Jersey. It was at the latter that we found a lovely bitch puppy we bought as a pet with no intention of entering the show ring.

Fate then intervened. A couple of days after we brought the puppy home we noted that she had an eye problem, and the vet confirmed that she was blind in one eye for unknown reasons. We called Barbara whose immediate response was – no problem, bring her back, I can give you another Westie puppy bitch in her stead but there is a condition. She is sired by Ch. Elfinbrook Simon who just won Best in Show at the Garden, and she is the pick puppy of the litter. If you take this puppy you must promise to show her. How could we refuse? Soon our new puppy, who eventually became Ch. Wishing Well's Scottish Lass (Bonnie), was in our arms and we entered the world of conformation shows. Barbara mentored us and taught us a lot, and we also learned a great deal from the outstanding Westie handler Cliff Hallmark. However, we were very occasional exhibitors when all shows were benched. Our daughter Laura was born in October,

1962, shortly after we had our first Westie litter, sired by Ch. Symmetra Snip (1960 Montgomery County BIS winner), again thanks to Barbara. In the summer of 1965 we moved to Houston, Texas as Gerry left his job in industry to become a Professor of Chemistry at the University of Houston.

It was then that the pace of showing increased. It was more than showing dogs; it was also a way of becoming part of the community. Mrs. Emily Clarke, a long-time Westie breeder in the Houston area, connected us with Alex Mitchell, a native Scotsman who had retired after a career as a professional terrier handler in the United States, who taught us a great deal about stripping and grooming. Bonnie's son, Ch. White Oaks Sapient Sasser, was our first champion, and was among the top ten in group competition for 1968. Bonnie finished a few months later. In 1968, her daughter Ch. White Oaks Christmas Present was High Point bitch.

Our daughter Laura began to show Westies at the age of seven. She only competed in Junior Showmanship once, before the 10-year minimum age went into effect, but at that one show she was best Junior Handler! She also competed successfully in the conformation ring. In 1971 she experienced the wonderful thrill of handling her Ch. White Oaks Lover Boy to BEST IN SHOW at an AKC all-breed show in Louisiana, earning Group 1st under Mr. Max Riddle and BIS under Mr. Vance Evans. Laura's record as the youngest handler to guide a dog to BIS in an AKC all-breed show still stands, more than 40 years later. There is no way to describe the excitement of that day. Everyone at the show was riveted to that ring, and the tension of hopeful expectations was so strong that it was almost palpable. Without doubt, it was the greatest highlight of our life in the conformation ring.

Lover Boy was also a top ten Westie. He was followed by a number of other fine White Oaks Westies, such as Ch. White Oaks Serena the Witch who was awarded Best of Opposite Sex at the 1975 Montgomery County National Specialty by Ms. Annie Clark.

In the early 70's, we co-founded the West Highland White Terrier Club of Southeast Texas, along with Tom and Barbara Barrie and Dick and Gwili Furnival. Gerry was the founding president and served as president until we left Texas, and Sylvia was secretary for several years. Both Sylvia and Gerry served as specialty show chairs. Gerry was also on the Board of Directors of the Houston Kennel Club.

In 1975 we moved to Lincoln, Nebraska where Gerry was Department Chair and later Dean of Arts and Sciences at the University of Nebraska. He was repeatedly invited to Europe to make presentations on his research. On one of these trips he brought home from England a Norwich Terrier puppy, (to become American Ch.) Simon of Culswood from Mrs. Margaret Cullis. Simon was one of the first Norwich in the US to win the Terrier Group, handled by Sylvia. That repeated itself with a number of other nice Norwich Terriers from England's top kennels. Eng., Am Ch. Ragus Lothario was the top Norwich in England and subsequently the top Norwich in America, shown by Gerry. He was undefeated in the breed for three years, and was the first amateur-owner-handled Norwich in America to go Best in Show. We did not stay in Norwich for several

reasons: losing a whole litter of puppies probably to the then emerging Parvo virus, an untimely and unexplained death of a young bitch, and the inability to do justice in time, energy, and resources to breeding programs in two breeds.

In 1976, the whole family spent three months in England and spent every weekend going to dog shows or visiting kennels. To see shows with 10,000 entries such as Birmingham, Windsor, and Peterborough was a thrill. We came back with six Westies, including Ch. Whitebriar Jerrell who finished quickly and was Winners Bitch and Best of Opposite Sex at the National Specialty at Montgomery County-in 1976 under Barbara Keenan.

Our routine showing range in those days was large. Lincoln, Nebraska is in the geographic middle of everything, but everything is 500 miles away. We showed from Minneapolis to Oklahoma City and Denver to Chicago and St. Louis, and points between, with occasional excursions to California, Texas, North Dakota, Indiana and, of course, the annual trek to the National Specialty at Montgomery County. That intensity continued up to about 1983 when Gerry became Dean of Arts and Sciences. During our 13 years in Nebraska we were also active in the Cornhusker Kennel Club, of which Gerry was President and Delegate to the American Kennel Club. Sylvia and Gerry also served as Show Chairs. In 1988 we moved us and our 16 Westies to Tampa where Gerry had been appointed Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of South Florida (USF). That put an even bigger crimp into our dog activities. We did not show for several years. The job and the social obligations that came with the job kept us very busy. We lived on a deep water channel in Tierra Verde, 10 minutes by boat from the Gulf of Mexico and naturally we had a 43 foot sport fishing boat on the dock behind us for five years.

Our Westie Phoenix arose from the ashes in 1995 when Gerry stepped down from that position but continued at the same university as Director of the Coalition for Science Literacy and Professor of Chemistry. Thanks to Joanne and Jaimi Glodek's assistance and persistence, we were able to get our last breeding age bitch pregnant. We finished her, Ch. White Oaks Bonnie Bright Eyes, at the age of 8-1/2 years, after she had produced a litter of five. Our entire current breeding program descends from her. We kept two girls from that wonderful litter. They were our soul and salvation during difficult personal times. We re-focused our lives back on our Westies, and have shown and bred actively since then. Both of the girls finished. One ("Jenny") became a top producer of six champions; the other was the dam of four champions. We lost Jenny in late 2004 to a bout with cancer after six months of chemotherapy.

We campaigned some of their offspring, including notably Ch. White Oaks Without Warning (Lightning), Ch. White Oaks Miracle of Love (Mikie), Ch. White Oaks Wings of Pride (Squire, Best Bred by Exhibitor at the 2002 AKC Eukanuba Invitational show) and Ch. White Oaks Tiggerific Love (Tigger). Lightning was a top ten Westie, and Mikie was among the top 5 for two and a half years. In 2000 and 2009 we won the national awards for most wins from Bred-by-Exhibitor class in both dogs and bitches. In 2001 and 2002 we showed six Westies to their championships. Our 2004 additions to

the champion circle were Ch. White Oaks Windy's Heartbreaker (Hearty), Ch. White Oaks Bonnie Wee Rose (Rosie), and Ch. White Oaks The Empire Strikes Back (Striker), the last two entirely from the Bred by Exhibitor class, and thus qualifying for the AKC Eukanuba Invitational show in January 2005. All dogs since then were shown and finished from the BBE classes. Ch. White Oaks Windy's Miracle of Love (Miracle) and Ch. White Oaks Windy's Gentle Breeze (Breezie) finished with 5 point majors early in 2005 during the tough January Florida circuit, taking half of the points available for which they competed. Ch. White Oaks Lady Tiffany (Tiffany) and Ch. White Oaks Bound for Glory (Boulder) finished later in the year. Boulder was shown as a special; he was a group winner with multiple group placements and in the top 10 before he retired in 2007.

Sylvia has always done all the grooming. Initially Gerry did most of the handling, but that changed over the years. Now we share handling in the classes but Sylvia shows in the groups almost exclusively. Gerry has been judging since 1972 and now does the Terrier group but has not pursued his judging career further because it interferes with what is truly a family activity. Sylvia is approved to judge Westies, Norwich, and Norfolk.

We typically breed a litter or two a year, so the whelping box keeps us busy as well. We moved away from the water on Tierra Verde and built a new house in Thonotosassa, a suburb 12 miles East of Tampa city center. The house is on six largely wooded, agriculturally zoned acres 15 minutes from Gerry's office. The house was specially designed to provide an area just for dogs, a smaller area just for people, and a large "mixed use" area where we spend most of our time. For the first time ever, we have 1200 square feet of covered, screened outside runs on patio paver blocks. We have a separate whelping room and small run just for the new mother and her puppies. There is not a speck of carpet in the house, everything is ceramic tile.

We continued to be active in dog clubs. We are among the founding members of the Florida Suncoast WHWTC. Gerry was founding president of both clubs, and resumed its presidency in 2007. Gerry is also Delegate to the American Kennel Club for the St. Petersburg Dog Fanciers Association, and a member of the AKC Delegates' Advancement and Advocacy Committee and of the Editorial Board of the delegates' quarterly newsletter *Perspectives*. Sylvia became AKC Delegate for the Lakeland-Winterhaven KC in March, 2004, while Gerry served as President of that club from 2006 to 2009. Both left those positions in 2009, but remain active in the club.

In 2009, Gerry was elected to the Board of Directors of the West Highland White Terrier Club of America. He has chaired that club's AKC Judges' Education Committee since 2007. He has presented a number of seminars on Westies to judges and breeders, most recently at the WHWTCA Centennial celebration in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. In 2010 he was appointed to the steering committee overseeing the production of the revised Illustrated Standard of the West Highland White Terrier. He was co-chair of the show committee for the Roving National Specialty held in Lakeland in February, 2011.

Our Westies have been Sylvia's whole life (well, almost). She does not take on many other responsibilities any more. She judges occasionally but working with our dogs is her life's mission and joy!