



THE SAMOYED QUARTERLY

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Samoyed people



LaVera Morgan and Sammys— are they real or aren't they?

The Samoyed Quarterly
Talks with
LaVera Morgan
DARIUS
Richmond, California

This interview was conducted at the home of LaVera Morgan in September 2002 by Lynne Robertson.

How did you get involved in Samoyeds, and what first got you started?

We got started because we wanted a dog, so we went to Pets Unlimited, and picked up a pretty little white dog. After we had him about three weeks, we found out he was an epileptic. But we kept him for nine years. We looked in books, and decided we wanted another dog, so we came across the Samoyed. At that time, they were few and far between; this was back in the '60s. Through our square dance teacher, we found a Collie breeder who knew a Sam breeder. We got our first dog from

Leona Powell, who had the Snowridge kennels. From there, we decided we would show. Our first dog was D'Artganon of Snowridge, "Dart." He died of cancer three points away from his championship. He went to the local shows; we have quite a few of them here.

Why did you choose a Samoyed?

Because they are fluffy, white and pretty. I stayed with the breed because it was a breed we really liked. We liked everything about them. Even the way they destroy the house if you are not here to watch them! They will destroy your house, but it is all right.

How many dogs did you have at one time?

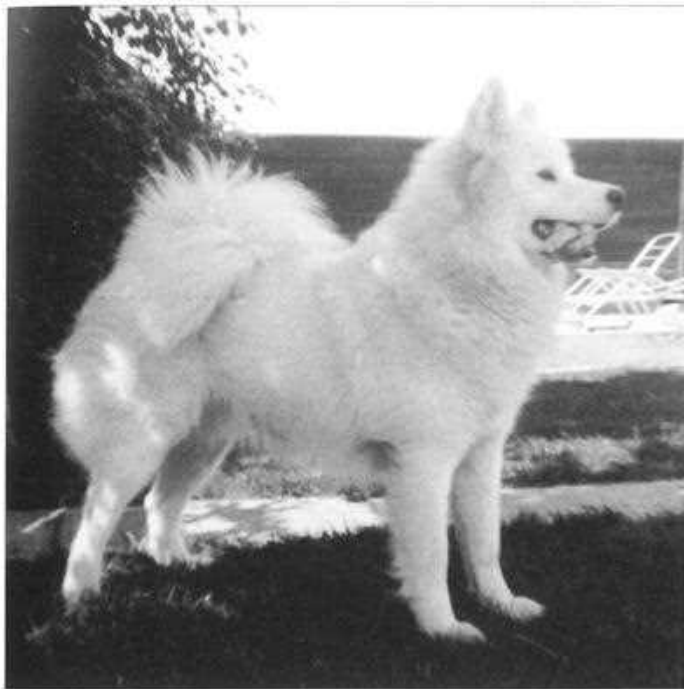
We had four, all males. They all ran together. I didn't want to have any litters, so we kept males. I didn't want to breed because I knew that if we bred, we would keep too many dogs. We were both working, so that wouldn't have worked



Above: Dan with Darius.

Right: Dondi Of Drayalene.





D'Artaganon Of Snowridge, "Dart," our first Samoyed, 1961.



Dan with Dart and Dare.

out. We started Dart out in the show ring, and like I said, three points away from his championship, cancer took him. We also had Dare. Those two were inseparable, they were always together. Even though Dare was the younger of the two, he was the boss of all the dogs we had. All the time we had Dare, we never had to worry about a fight or arguments between the dogs. Yet he never turned on any of them; it was just something about him. We also got him from Leona, of Snowridge kennels. He did very well in the ring. He traveled all over; he

went down south a lot, and I took him to Canada. I took him to Montana and all through those states. He was a good winner. At that time, though, you would find very few Sams in the Group ring. Today, you do see Sams in Groups and winning Bests in Show.

So you think the breed has become more popular?

Oh, yes, very much so.

Has that helped or harmed the breed?

I really don't feel it has done it any good. People may not agree with me, but that is the way I feel. There are just too

many out there now. When they are harder to get, then people take more of an interest and pay more attention to what they are doing as far as breeding.

Were they at stud?

Just Dare and Dante, who both finished very quickly. I didn't keep a record of how champions they produced in their litters. I kept track of their progeny for a while, but then I gave up on it. After Dan died, I figured I would never have another dog, so I got rid of an awful lot of paperwork. Dan was my husband, and he was also involved with the dogs. He

showed the dogs. We both enjoyed showing, but it took him a long time to get started. He got started because I got sick one time going to Santa Barbara. He had to take my place, and then he decided he liked it.

Who was your best dog?

I would have to put Dare and Dante on an equal basis. Each in their own way were special. They were both good winners. Dante was much taller than Dare, but they were both still within the standard. They both had good movement.

Did you also finish them in Canada?



Dan and Dare, 1963.



Dare and Dart with their birthday cake and presents.



Dondi of Drayalene.



Dante.



Dan with Dare, LaVera with Dante, Beverly Millikan with Kan-Do, and Mary Jo Kimbel with a pup.

No, I was just a couple of points away. I never went back.

Which was your biggest winner?

I am not sure. I can't compare Dare and Dante, as far as which was the best. They were equally nice dogs. Dondi was also a fine-looking dog, until the judge saw him move toward him. He was so barrel-chested that we just stopped showing him. Then we had Duffy, but he didn't last very long. He got ill and had to be put to sleep. Then we had a dry spell on dogs for a while. We had Dobri who hated the show ring, and Devlin, who liked the show ring

and was a handful to show. When Dan got his judge's license, he just stopped showing dogs. He didn't feel it was right; he said you were either a judge or an exhibitor, but he didn't want to be both. He went into judging.

Did you continue to show?

No.

Why did Dan decide to become a judge?

Because he liked dogs, and he knew his dogs. He could look at a dog, and know right away whether that was a dog for him to be putting up. He didn't stare at a dog for a long time to

tell. He had an eye for a dog.

So you think there is something to that phrase, "an eye for a dog?"

Yes, there is. When you can pick a dog out on the first go-round, and going over him, you know your dogs. It can't really be taught; it has to be in you to know your dogs. Sure, you can read books and say, "This is the way I should go," but when you see that dog in the ring, it may not be what that book is telling you.

Did Dan feel that because he had been an owner/handler, that made him a better judge?

I believe so. When the dogs

came into the ring, first he would look for the whole dog. His main thing was movement; he was very strong on movement. Then the structure of the dog was next. He died before he went further in any other breeds.

Do you feel showing has changed a lot over the past 40 years?

Yes, when we showed in the '60s and '70s, there were very few handlers in the ring, for one thing. Now there are several handlers at one time in the ring. To be honest with you, I feel the judges place a lot of emphasis on who is on the other end of the



Ch. Darius King Of Snowridge.

lead. Of course, a lot of people will disagree with me, especially the judges. But I feel they do,

some of them; not all of them. There are a lot of owner/handlers who have dogs just as

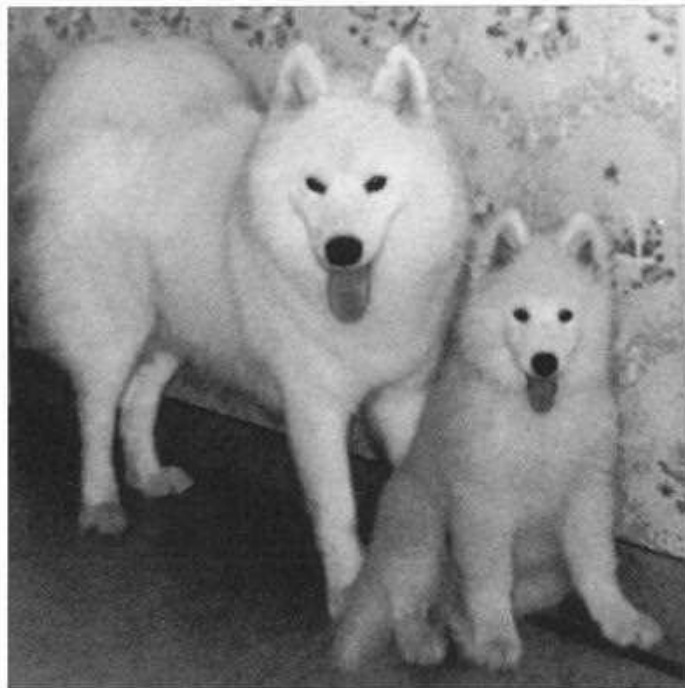
great if not greater.

Do you feel that judging in general is fair?

Yes, I do. Some of the judges should go over the standards again, though. They need



Darius Kroti Kard Of Maki.



Dart and Dare, October 1961.



Ch. Darius King Of Snowridge.

to study.

Is the Sammy standard a good one?

I feel it is great. I wouldn't change any of it. There are some controversies about the standard, but I stay away from that. I don't show anymore, so I don't get into all that.

When you were showing, how did you go about getting the dog ready and presenting it?

That was Dan's work! He had to get the dog all ready to go in the show ring. He was good at it. He had the best teacher in the world, Helene Spathold. She taught him every-

thing he knew. In fact, if he saw a dog that he didn't like when he was showing, as far as the way it was groomed, he would stop and help the person groom their dog. He didn't care if the dog was up against him. He would always help people out.

Did he feel the dogs you showed

were adequately rewarded?

Yes. We showed mostly here in California, and some in Canada, as well as Montana and Utah and other states. I believe the quality of Sammys was about the same in all those regions. They were similar.

Did you ever want to question

any of the judges' decisions when you were exhibiting?

Yes, but I didn't. I was generally satisfied with the AKC's judging procedures.

Did you note any tendency in the judging to put up dogs more than bitches or vice versa?

No, I never paid any attention to that.

Which dog was your biggest character?

Probably Dante. He was a thief! If we had anything laying in the front room, he would go in there and help himself. Or if I had a party and he wanted something, he went in there and took it. He had no thought for repercussions; he knew nobody was going to hurt him. This was his house.

Do you have a favorite story to share about him?

I have one but it is not very nice. When I went into the hospital for surgery, he decided "somebody" (I) was missing, so he used the hall for a wetting post until I got out of the hospital. Then he stopped wetting in the hall! That was why he got the nickname, "Peepot." He had several names, though. Some people called him "Ham-bone," because he was such a ham in the ring. He had a good attitude. He was great, quite a showman. He was a happy dog.

At the time you were first start-

ing, how did you choose dogs or what were you looking for?

We really didn't know. We just wanted a big, white dog. Dan picked the dogs, and he was just looking for healthy pups at that time. We didn't have in mind just because we bought one that we were going to show it. Those we didn't show, we kept. We didn't farm them out somewhere. They lived in the house with the rest of the dogs, and they were groomed each week, like all of the dogs. They always had a show groom.

We stopped showing Dondi because of his barrel-chest. The judges would like him, and they would say, "Now, move him again," so we would move him again. Here he would come, but they would just shake their heads. Dobri just hated the show ring; he was happy until he got to the edge of the ring, and then his tail went down and you couldn't do anything with him. Then Devlin loved the show ring, but he didn't want to stand still. He didn't finish, he was three points away when Dan got his judging license.

I couldn't handle Devlin; he was small but he was powerful. He never learned what the word "no" meant. The one thing that Devlin did that upset Dan was he got on the table. He was sit-

ting on the table once, and Dan didn't know he did that until he walked in on him one day. He picked him up and put him on the ground. I was on the phone and he wanted to "help" me! (laughter) They weren't spoiled, you know.

What was your kennel set-up like?

We didn't have a kennel. When we worked, we did separate the dogs. Eight hours together would be too much! Other than that, we had no kennel. The house was their kennel! They all lived in the house, slept together and ran together.

We never had any problems until we got Dobri. I don't know what happened to him; he liked to pick on Devlin, but not too often. Just once in a while. Caring for all males was pretty easy. When they weren't in shows, Dan would groom them all every Tuesday night. They all got brushed just like they were going to a show. Then of course, the ones that went to shows, he really worked them over.

Did he use any special products or grooming tools on them?

No, just a slicker brush. It was interesting, though, a lot of times a judge would run his hands over Dare's coat looking for something, but there was nothing there to look for. We

never put anything on the coats. His coat just stood out, he had a beautiful coat. Dante did, too. They should have; Dare's father was Rakandi of Drayalene, and he was an outstanding dog. He had an outstanding coat, and behind him was Youck of White Cliff. Of course, he was an outstanding dog, too. They had great pedigrees. We didn't know anything about pedigrees; we just wanted that dog. But you soon learn about pedigrees and what is behind them.

Dobri came out of Dante and a different bitch, and Devlin came from Dante. We took puppies back instead of a fee. They were more or less all from Snowridge and Drayalene. I don't think Helena Spathold of Drayalene really had a kennel; she was set up more like I was. Her dogs were "people," just like mine.

When you were showing, what were some of the problems you encountered along the way?

Just learning how to show, mainly. You had to learn how to stack your dog, and how to follow instructions. But you learn quick.

Did you have any funny or embarrassing moments in the ring?

No, but I jumped a judge one time in the ring. He put up a limping dog over my dog. I was a novice, and I didn't know



Dante, above and left.

I could call him on that. We had a little argument in the ring. Nothing happened; he went his way and I went my way. He wouldn't tell me why he put up the limping dog, except that it was a heck of a good dog, which I agree, it was a fine dog. But it limped, so it shouldn't have gone up. I was a novice and I didn't realize that was a reason to excuse a dog.

We both, Dan and I, did a lot of stewarding. I still steward today. I enjoy being around the people. I don't do many Sam rings; I usually do other breeds. It is something to do; when you are retired, you can't just sit home and feel sorry for yourself.

When you are evaluating a Sammy, how would you describe your ideal Sammy?

First of all, it has to have good movement. Mainly, it is good structure that matters. The coat is just the icing on the cake. I look for a dog like Dare, or like Dante. They are two different type dogs. One judge made a remark one time, someone asked why she put Dare up. She said, "This is a show, and I am looking for a show dog. That is what he reminds me of!"

I like a bear head, more or less. All of my dogs were males, so I didn't pay much attention to the females. They have to have good, dark eyes, a little bit slanted but not too much. Eye color is very important to me; I want the dark eye. A light eye takes away from the dog, it doesn't give as much expression as the dark eye. Good black points, too, which we were lucky with.

The ears have to stand straight; they can't be floppy. They shouldn't be too big, either. It depends on the size of the dog. If it is a smaller dog, you don't want a big ear. Dante's ears were a little bit bigger. In the front, I like a good chest, but not a wide chest. Angulation has to be good.

Why do some dogs look good standing and posing, but not so good when moving?

Because you can set them up to look that way. You can bring their legs in, or move them out farther - you can set just about any dog to look good in the ring.

How should they move, in the front and from the side?

They should reach out, they



Ch. Darius Karlak Cheetal, "Dante," SCA Specialty Winner, Best of Breed, August 14, 1970.

should not pitty-pat.

How should a Sammy move in the rear, and going away?

They should be straight in the back. You don't want to see a cowhocked dog or something like that. You don't want wide movement, and you sure don't want cowhocks.

If you could rate the whole dog on a point scale of 100, how many points would you give the head?

I like to say from one to ten, and I would say about eight points. Movement would have to be ten points. I place a lot of emphasis on movement, and the structure of the dog. The way the dog is built is important. They have to have soundness and balance.

How do you rate type, temperament and soundness in order of importance?

They have to have temperament. If they have bad tempera-

ment, forget it! Temperament is number one, and they have to be sound.

How important is pigment, and would you breed to a dog that had any missing pigment?

That would depend on if a little pigment was missing, a LITTLE.

When you did your breedings, how did you pick your bitches?

They were brought to us. They heard about our dogs, and figured they would complement their bitches. We didn't do that much breeding. We talked to the people, looked at their pedigrees and OFAs, etc.

What was a stud fee at that time?

It was about \$100. We started in 1961, and Dan died in 1988. So it was about twenty years. For a long time, we didn't have a lot of involvement, although we always had the

dogs. I have not had dogs since he died, though.

Was it your experience that coat was very important to winning in the ring?

No. If I had a good dog that could move and the structure was there, I wouldn't worry too much about the coat.

What should be the relationship of the chest depth to the rest of the dog; should the chest come to or below the elbow, and how many dogs have you seen that honestly came to the elbow?

I never paid that much attention!

What is an ideal front, or what kind of fronts did you see in the breed when you were showing?

When we were showing, we had a lot of good fronts. They weren't too wide. There really were a lot of nice dogs in the ring at the time we were in the ring.

Describe the correct topline, and is it functional or for beauty?

It is functional, I would say. You need a straight topline in a Sammy. It is part of their movement.

What is the ideal height for a dog and a bitch?

A dog is supposed to be 23 1/2 inches, but if a dog is over that and it is a good-looking dog, I don't think it should be penalized. Dante was at least 24, maybe 24 1/2. He was never penalized that I know of. Bitches are smaller.

Have you seen a tendency toward "bigger is better" in the Sammys?

Not necessarily. I like the big dogs. Dare was not a big dog, but I do like a big dog, one that really gets out there and moves and shows his stuff.

What is the ideal tail length and set?

The tail has to go over the back down to the hocks. I have seen a few bad tails, some that had a curl in them. It is supposed to go over the back real nice.

What is an ideal foot?

A tight paw.

Do you think dogs with bad feet should be used?

Well, with the right bitch, it could maybe be corrected.

What is the ideal temperament?

Happy! They should be smiling, not growling. I haven't seen many Samoyeds with bad temperaments. What few times we had Dondi in the show ring, in the ring he was an angel, but outside of the ring, you didn't want to come near Dan or me or his dogs. In the ring, he was just a big angel, but he wasn't in the ring too often.

What are the most serious faults in the breed today?

Some of the back ends have a lot to be desired. Some of them are too narrow. Overall, the dogs in the ring today are pretty good. I don't think they should be criticized that much.

Do you think the popularization was more helpful or harmful to the breed?

It has been harmful. There is too much inbreeding. A lot of people like to use what they have, and what they have is good, but once in a while, you have to go outside of what you have.

What were the most common faults you saw back when you were showing?

Some had the wide front



Zane at Redwood Empire, 1964.

ends, like Dondi. I wouldn't criticize too much, though. The breed has been managed pretty well overall. I am no expert, and everybody has their own opinions.

Do you think champions should be specialed?

Yes, because if they are good enough to get their championships, then they are good enough to be specialed. For a period of time anyway, to see how they do. I specialed two of our dogs, and they both did well. The first was Dare, Ch. Darius King Of Snowridge, and then the second was Dante, Ch. Darius Karlak Cheetal. For a while, just about every show they walked into, they won. At

that time, they were great.

Dan's greatest joy was doing the SCA specialty. Just being asked was an honor for him. Then a couple of years later, he got asked back to the same territory, but with a different club. It wasn't SCA. He had 173 dogs that entered at this one specialty, and the judges at that time could only do 175. At that time, all he judged was Sammys.

Why did you both like the Sammys enough to stick with them for so long?

Because it is a friendly breed, and a good breed. It was a family breed, and with us not having any children, they fit right in perfectly. Now the best breed for me is a good old cat.

(laughter)

One cat put me in the hospital; she scratched me and bit me. I wouldn't part with her, though. She is part of the family. More of a "watch" cat than my dogs ever were; she growls if someone heads for the gate.

Why did you decide not to have another dog after your husband died?

Because he did all the grooming on them. Besides, at my age, it is hard. If I were twenty or 30 years younger, I would think about it. But not when you hit my age.

When you had stud dogs, did you help the matings along, or were they natural or controlled?

We always held the male so he couldn't get hurt. Of course,



Darius Temojyn Of Sansasha, "Devlin," Best of Winners.

Dante thought mating was the dirtiest thing in the world. He hated it. He did not like it. He would do it, finally, but he didn't think that was the best thing for him to be doing. I never saw another dog like that in my life!

Do you feel a stud fee should be

the same for a proven and unproven dog, regardless of titles?

Yes. I do. Some of your unproven dogs are better than the proven dogs. It depends on what the people want in the background, in the pedigree, too. You have to look at it and see if that is what you are look-

ing for.

Did you ever refuse to service a bitch, and why?

Yes, if I just didn't like her. If I didn't like her temperament or didn't feel the quality was there.

Would you breed to a bitch with a very serious fault if she were out-

standing in other areas?

No, I wouldn't.

What faults would keep you from breeding to a bitch?

For one thing, if she was too small. Or if she didn't stand up to what Dan thought she should be.

Is it a good idea to breed to the

top-winning dog or bitch regardless of the pedigrees?

No, of course not. Sometimes your top-winning dog isn't always the best match. A big name is fine, but it doesn't always produce the best.

How many litters do you feel a bitch should have?

If I had a bitch, she would not be bred after she was five years old. She might be bred every other year, but that is all. The youngest I would breed would be after she had her OFA number, that is about a year old or so. Not before. I don't think we need that many dogs out there, and why wear your bitch out? I wouldn't want to have a child every year!

When you had puppies back, how did you start training them?

We used a choke chain, just a little bit at a time. They were never force-trained. We took them to matches and walked them around shopping malls. We didn't let people pet them, but we took them out.

When you got your pick puppy, what qualities did you look for?

Probably some show qualities, but that really didn't make any difference. If it was a dog we liked, that was the dog we wanted. Whether it turned out to be show quality or pet quality, it didn't matter. We wanted a big fuzzy white ball. (laughter) We liked dogs with personality, and we were very lucky in that category.

At the time that you were showing, what kennels did you like, besides Snowridge?

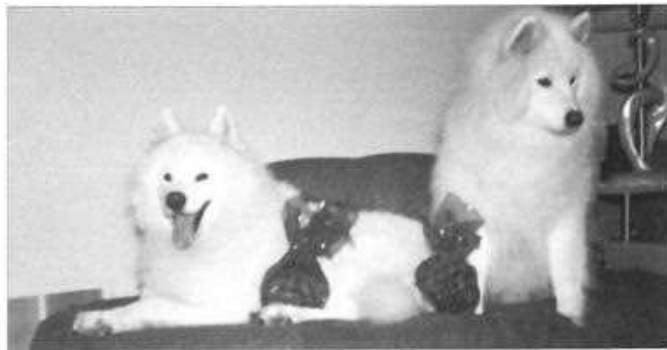
Snowridge was my priority. We liked her attitude and the way she treated us. She was a very responsible breeder, and that was important. She is in Dachshunds now.

At what age did you feel puppies should go to their new homes?

At eight weeks, that is when we got ours. They were pretty easy for Dan to evaluate at that age. When we went to see Dante, we were not going to get him. Dan didn't want any more dogs. We went back the second time, and I said, "I want that dog!" So the dog came home with us. He just didn't want any more dogs at the time; we already had three.

Were you looking more for pets at that time?

Yes, I think so. We enjoyed showing, and the people. Most of the time, that is. We met a



lot of nice people. I don't keep in touch with too many of them anymore. It is easy to make friends in the dog world if you are not competition.

What did you feed your dogs?

Mr. Morgan would go out and buy the highest-priced hamburger he could find, and that was cooked with all kinds of vegetables. I could eat the cheap hamburger, but they had the good hamburger! (laughter) Of course, we used a lot of kibble, too.

Did you feed any supplements?

We used Pet Tabs. It kept them pretty healthy.

How did you condition your dogs?

We just let them run. They played together. Maybe we were too protective of the dogs, I don't know, but we never took them hiking or anything. We started at another house, but it had a big yard, too. We kept them in the garage when we worked; they each had a stall. We had four stalls, so they had a good section to stay in. Our property is all fenced, of course.

Did you ever scissor or trim whiskers?

At that time, we could trim whiskers. Of course, we always trimmed the hocks and the feet, but no body hair. You are NOT supposed to trim body hair. You see it occasionally now. You didn't see it then as much as in recent years. I do not believe in sculpturing a dog; this takes away from their beauty and anyone who knows Sams can tell.

What kennels do you like today?

I won't recommend a person who is bragging or a "pusher" to sell their pups.

Would you recommend for people who are going to purchase a pup to go to the big kennels?

Not necessarily.

What advice would you give to people who are looking for a puppy?

I would recommend someone to question the people, to see if the dogs have been x-rayed and if their eyes have been checked. Be very careful whatever kind of contract they sign, too.

Would you recommend for people just starting out to join a local breed club, a national breed club, or an all breed club?

A local breed club would be best, then SCA. That way they are just with the one breed that they want. Then you can go on to an all breed club if you want later. If you can get in, that is. Some clubs are closed; they have the people they want and that is it.

Do you feel the parent club is doing enough to educate judges and new members?

I believe so. They are very good, very strong.

Do you feel there is adequate literature available on Sammys?

If people want it, yes. Our club puts out a book, *Samoyed Prologue*. Several people wrote in that book, Jan Kauzlarich did a good job, and Dan wrote something on grooming in there. It is pretty good, lots of fine information.

Do you use a computer for any of your doggy activities?

No.

Do you have any funny or interesting stories about your dogs or experiences in dogs that you want to share?

No, we weren't really mixers.

How long have you lived in this location, and where did you live before?

We have been here since 1968. We moved here because it was bigger, both for us and for the dogs. We always lived in Richmond.

What did you and Dan do for a living?

Dan was a supervisor at Mare Island Naval Yard in Vallejo. I worked in an office as

a payroll clerk.

How did the dogs and all those years you spent showing affect your lifestyle?

It really didn't. We did buy this place with the yard in mind for the dogs.

What were the benefits of being in the dogs?

We met a lot of great people. We got to travel a lot, too. We enjoyed the dogs and the companionship. The dogs were always amusing. Sammys are always good for a laugh.

What were the drawbacks of being in the dogs?

There were none for us.

Did you feel that it was worth it?

Every bit of it! I would do it again in a heartbeat.

When you were showing, did you have any feelings as an exhibitor about the crowd favorite, and the applause?

I don't believe in it, myself. If you can't clap for all the dogs, don't clap for any of the dogs.

What were your feelings concerning benched shows?

I enjoyed them. Of course, at that time we only had two, one in Oakland and one in San Francisco. Now we have one, in San Francisco. Dan didn't like the benched shows, but I did. I liked them for the people.

Do you feel if someone has an eye for a dog, they should be able to judge any breed well?

I believe so.

Are there any judges past or present whom you really respect?

Joseph Fagle. He always put Dante up; he never dumped him. When I walked into the ring with another dog, he flat told me, "When are you going to bring me another dog like the one you used to show?" He was pretty to-the-point.

What did you think about the dress of exhibitors? Do you feel it influences the judges?

The judge might take a peek, but I don't think they are going to be influenced by the low necks and all that stuff. I mean, they see so much of it, it is just like a doctor. It is an everyday thing to them.

You have trained your dogs over the years, but what have the dogs taught you?

Tolerance!

Is there anything we haven't covered, or anything you would like to talk about?

Not really, but I'd like to thank you for coming out!

Thank you, LaVera. •