

THE SAMOYED QUARTERLY

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Samoyed people

The Samoyed Quarterly
Talks with
**Cheryl Wagner
TARAHILL**
Alpharetta, Georgia

This interview was conducted at the home of Cheryl Wagner on November 4, 1998 by Nancy Cozby.

How long have you been in the Samoyed breed?

I got my first Samoyed in about 1972.

How about in dogs all together?

This was where I started, with Samoyeds. This was my first breed. Growing up, I always had animals of all kinds, mostly mongrels and mixed breeds. Samoyeds were the first purebred dogs that I ever owned. Well, I shouldn't say that. My grandfather raised Beagles when I was kid growing up, but they were always for hunting; they weren't to show. So, other than being exposed to some Sporting dogs that my grandfather owned, my family always had mixed-breed dogs. Having Samoyeds in 1972 was my first experience with purebred dogs.

How did you actually get started?

It was a combination of things. I had gotten married, and my husband and I had bought our first house. For me, that was very exciting because it meant getting my first dog. I was ready to go to the pound, spend my \$15 and get my mixed-breed. My husband said, "No, no, no." His family had always had purebred dogs and he had vacationed a lot in Canada. He wanted this dog that he had seen in Canada. It was a purebred dog, solid white with its tail curled up over the back, and that was the kind of dog that he wanted. I was so anxious to have animals living in my life again, I didn't care whether we had purebreds or mongrels, I just wanted a four-legged critter. I started calling Siberian Husky breeders and kept telling them that I wanted a white Siberian Husky. Finally, one said to me, "No, I don't have a white Siberian. I have a solid silver." I asked him not to sell it until I could get there that night. When my husband came

home from work, I told him that I had found the dog, solid silver. He said to me, "This dog was not silver, it was snow white." I called the lady back and told her that I had to have a white Siberian. She said that she didn't think I wanted a Husky, but rather a Samoyed. I said, "Oh my God, that sounds like a dis-



ease!" (laughter)

I was back on my search and this is certainly not the way I would recommend that anyone start the sport of purebred dogs. I bought my first Samoyed from an ad in the paper for the very expensive price of \$115. That was an outrageous amount of money back in those days! I had never read the standards. I had no idea what the breed was supposed to look like or anything. All I knew was that I was getting my critter. My first Samoyed was gay-tailed, curly coated and slight of build. If I knew more about the standard, I could probably tell you more of

her faults, but I didn't know enough to know what was wrong with her at that point. I had invested this awful sum of money of \$115, this outrageous sum of money, and the only thing I could think of to do to recoup this outrageous sum was that I was going to breed her. Before I could do that, though, I was going to make her a champion so that her puppies would be more valuable and, after all, how difficult could that be?

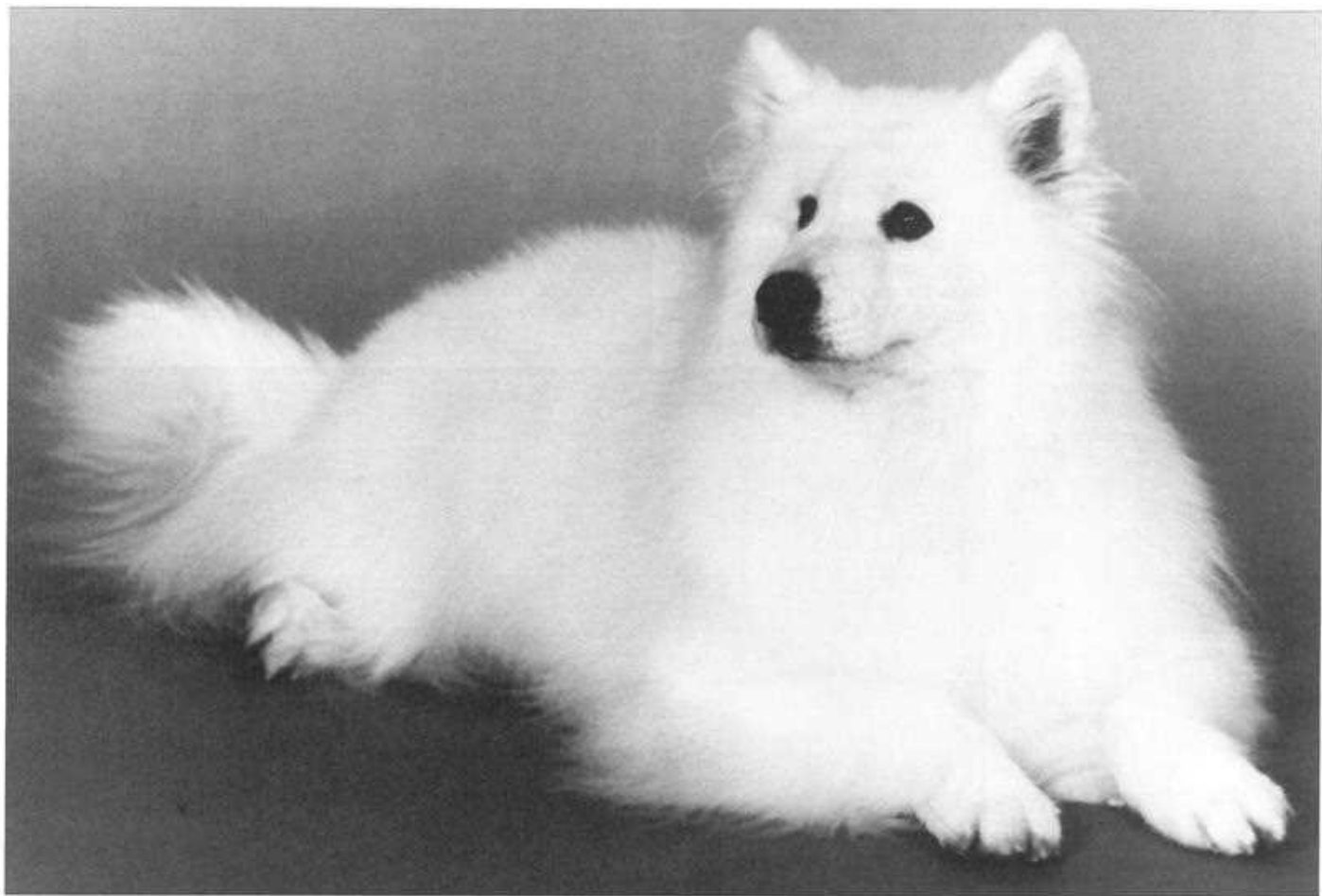
With that in mind, I decided that I was going to make this

match in Lansing, Michigan, on a Sunday, and I was so much smarter than the average exhibitor because - you know what I did the night before - I gave my puppy a bath! I was going to have the cleanest puppy there and, naturally, I would win! (laughter) It never dawned on me when I got to the show the next day, that every other exhibitor was going to give their puppy a bath too. It never dawned on me! I got to this puppy match and Sharon Kreimseiter and Nancy Estes, who were co-breeding at that time, were at this puppy match. They were the very first Samoyed people that I'd ever met. Here I was with this rangy, curly-coated, gay-tailed, snippy-headed puppy, who I thought was perfect and wonderful. Mind you, I've still never read the standard for the breed. Their puppies are all these just off-square, fluffy little cotton balls with these cute little faces and tails up over their backs and looking very different from my puppy, I might add. I think I go third out of three. My next puppy match I go four out of four, and if there are five in the class I don't get a ribbon. This goes on for a while.

At some point at the end of that summer or near fall, I look at this scenario and I think to myself, "Hmm, my puppy doesn't look like the rest." (laughter) As they mature, it is becoming more and more apparent that my puppy is never going to look like the rest of the puppies. Amazingly, I get a copy of the standard. It's a miracle! (laughter) I read the standard and decided that, although this puppy really isn't going to cut it, at this point I've kind of started enjoying this experience. I decided to investigate the possibility of another puppy. I get another puppy from breeders in the area. I won't tell you that they didn't do the right thing. They taught me everything they knew, but unfortunately their knowledge was very limited. At that time, Mark and Janet Russell had purchased a dog from the same breeders. Mark and Janet and I happen to live very near to each other, and we were approximately the same age, young and starting out, and we socialized a lot together and went to dog shows a lot together and learned a lot together along the way.

dog a champion, breed her and recoup my investment with her puppies. Certainly the way everyone should start in this sport. (laughter) The purest of goals - recouping our initial investment and reading the breed standard. These are all good things we should be thinking about.

At that time I was working for Blue Cross and Blue Shield in Michigan, and one of our vice presidents had great Danes. He gave me some information about a local puppy match. I was so well informed about this sport and about Samoyeds that I was going off to this puppy



Ch. Montego's Lady in White CD, taken at eleven years.

The second puppy didn't work out for me, either. First of all, it crawled around on its belly and I could never really get it to show. It was scared to death of everything. Of course, I'm still very wise at that point, because now I've decided that I'm going to take this dog with a temperament that you can't show because it's crawling on its belly, and what am I going to do but breed it. (laughter) That's going to bring it out of its problems, right? Still not learning as much as I should be or certainly not as much as I need, we end up X-raying this puppy - well, actually it's nearly eighteen months old - and it's dysplastic. I just can't believe that it's dysplastic because it can go over a four-foot fence from a dead stop. In fact, it is dysplastic. The co-breeder, Chuck King, did something that I thought at the time was terribly, terribly, terribly cruel, but in hindsight twenty years down the road later, probably did me a big favor. He said to me, "What are you going to do?" I said, "What do you

mean, what am I going to do?" I'm going to spay her and keep her as a pet. He said, "If you do that, I will not honor the hip guarantee." "What?" I said. He said, "If you do not spay her and place her in a pet home, I will not honor my hip guarantee. I will not replace that puppy for you." I thought he was cruel and inhumane.

At the time I had spent \$175 on this puppy, another outrageous sum of money. I was working and by that time, single, and could ill-afford to buy another puppy. I thought he was awful. I think, though, that Chuck saw something then that I didn't see myself, and that was that I was going to be a collector. In fact, I dated a fellow at one point who accused me of being the Statue of Liberty. I said, "The Statue of Liberty?" "Yes," he said, "Read the inscription - give me your tired, your homeless, your huddled masses." (laughter) Chuck King realized that with my personality, I could easily collect every dog or critter that needed

a home. Chuck did a kind thing because he knew, it sounds cruel, just how much I loved that dog. That dog slept on my bed and that dog meant everything to me. He thought if I could place that animal in another home, then I was on my way to becoming a breeder. Really, he was right.

Years and years down the road, when I had an older dog that hadn't worked out to be part of a breeding or show program and people would say to me, "How can you get rid of this dog? Don't you love it?" My answer was, "It's because I love it, because I know it's going to a better place." No matter how good my home is here, no matter how much I love it, it's going to be one of the masses, whereas if it goes to your home, it will sleep on your bed. I know its nails will be too long. I know its going to have a mat behind its ear. I know you're going to feed it scraps. I know you're going to do all the things I told you not to do, but I also know that it's going to meet the

kids at the bus stop, it's going on vacation with you, it will be on the family Christmas card and to me, that's a great tradeoff, and I'm willing to make that every day of the week. In essence Chuck King did me this wonderful, wonderful favor that, at the time, I thought was cold-hearted and cruel, but it was good.

My beginnings in the sport were not sterling, to say the least. I didn't do my homework. I started off with not good dogs. All of my early dogs were either dysplastic, not of show quality or didn't work out one way or another. That was good for me because it taught me some hard knocks. By the time I realized that what I had wasn't very good, I also realized that showing dogs was like heroin. I just couldn't pump enough of it into my system. I was really hooked on the competitive angle of it and decided that if I was going to be competitive, I had to do something about it: I had to upgrade my stock.

I guess because I had such a

difficult time in the beginning, it became important to me in the future, when I was able to have some success, that I help prevent other novices from making some of my mistakes. I always thought it was very important to help novices, to do what I could to.

One time when I was novice (this was back in the early 1970's), I was at a dog show somewhere down in Ohio, and I'll never forget this. There I sat with these two awful Samoyeds. One with this curly coat and gay tail that I was still dragging around because, after all, if you're going to a dog show you might as well enter her and the other Samoyed that crawled on its belly. I think one was in the American Bred class and the other was in the Novice class - these really non-competitive classes. This tall, lanky fellow came up to me and said, "Oh, you have Samoyeds." Youth is a great thing. I got very cocky and arrogant and said, "Yes. I have show quality Samoyeds. I'm at a dog show." He said, "Well, that's nice. My family and I have Samoyeds too." I said that was nice and proceeded to tell him the pedigrees, the breeder, and how wonderful these dogs were and on and on and on. He was being gracious and kind and wonderful and said, "Oh, that's terrific. Yes, I can see they're lovely dogs." He's just being so tolerant and wonderful to me. I found out later that was Bob Hritz, who happened at that time to own the number one Samoyed in the history of the breed. (laughter) Who graciously did not slap me across the face, which is really what I deserved, but instead just went on to say how wonderful it was that his family had Samoyeds too. I look back on that experience years later and thought that he should have just slapped me across the face, but he didn't. I have since become very close with the entire family and I'm very fond of all of them. I thought that's what I want to be when I grow up. I want to have that kind of graciousness for the novices in our sport. I don't know if I have or not, but that's what I wanted to emulate.

That kind of answers the question, "How did you get started in this?" Of course, by the time I realized that I did want to show the Samoyeds, I also realized that I'd become

absolutely captivated by the personality of this breed. They're just mushes. They're great loves, sweet and adorable - they're Samoyeds.

How did you actually find your first real show dog?

Actually, I got lucky in that the breeder, Chuck King, who had made me put this dysplastic puppy in a home, the replacement for that puppy was a bitch named Montego's Lady in

White. At that time I still was being the Statue of Liberty in collecting animals. I've kind of joked about it when saying, "If you have a Samoyed that you don't want, call Cheryl. She'll take anything." I probably had managed to accumulate eight or ten Samoyeds from various pedigrees and places and what-not and, to be perfectly honest in hindsight, all together probably didn't equal one good

Samoyed.

I had this menagerie of animals that I was feeding. I was still married at the time and thorough a series of coincidences (my mother died suddenly and unexpectedly, and my youngest brother who was thirteen years old at the time came to live with me), my husband and I filed for divorce. Again, things at the time that appear to be great tragedies in your life



Ch. Tarahill's Casey Can Do winning his first BIS. The Samoyed Club of America's top winning dog in 1985 and 1986. Handled by Nancy Martin.



Ch. Tarahill's Can Do Too.



*Ch. Tarahill's All Ducked Out
(Ch. Tarahill's Everybody Duck x Ch. Tarahill's One Tuff Cookie).*

somehow, and I hate to sound like a Pollyanna, work out. I would probably have gone on forever collecting Samoyeds that were not going to fit into a breeding program or show program or anything, just collecting, feeding and caring for them. Because of the financial situation I then found myself in, through the death of my mother and my divorce, I could not afford to feed all those critters and my brother and myself and had to make a hard choice. In hindsight, I probably should have chosen to feed the dogs rather than my brother, had I known how he was going to turn out. (laughter) I made the choice at the time that I had to get rid of some of the dogs. There was no way physically or financially that I could afford to do this. So, one by one, I started placing dogs in homes, from bad to better. When I got all done and all was said and done, I had one bitch left and that was Montecgo's Lady in White. Her call name was "Jody" and I decided that she was the only one I had worth keeping. She became my first champion and she also became truly the foundation. Every Tarahill Samoyed since that day has gone back to that one bitch. She was my daughter trapped in a dog's body. She was wonderful.

She and I did wonderful, fun

things together. There are a couple of stories about her, one a fun story and the other kind of a touching story that I've since told to other people who came back to me and told me they were touched by it. Wonderful stories. She got her first championship points with Ron Pemberton. I was in Michigan at the time and Ron put six or eight or ten points on her, but she hadn't gotten her majors. At that time she was very different from what was being shown in the area. She was a big, doggy bitch and the only people who had anything similar to her were John and JoAnne Studebaker. They had a bitch named Yenna Tuva of Windy Ridge. John and I would always fight to get into the ring next to each other because all these other bitches were slighter or more feminine than ours. We knew that if we got next to each other, we would fit in better. That was in about 1974.

Then she went out East to Phil Marsman and finished her championship. I have Saul and Flo Waldman to thank for that because she was very different from what was being shown in Michigan at that time.

I think things have changed in this sport dramatically, and I'm sure we'll discuss that later in the interview, in terms of traveling and how much more

homogenized we've become. Back in the 1970's, people weren't flying a lot or shipping dogs to other parts of the country, so we were far more regional in terms of our differences. My bitch was very different from what had been in the Midwest at the time. Saul and Flo Waldman moved from the East to the Midwest and looked at this bitch and said, "Oh my God, look at the sidegait on that bitch. Look at the movement." At the time, that wasn't very much appreciated in the Midwest, that kind of sidegait, so I owe it to them that they saw the quality in this bitch. They said, "You're struggling to finish her here which is silly because she's so good." Send her to Phil Marsman, with whom their daughter Sue was working, and in the East; they'd really appreciate the sidegait on this bitch. Which is what happened. I think Phil finished her the second weekend he had her. She went East and finished her championship and returned to Michigan.

In the meantime, she had become very much part of my family and one of the things I used to do was give her corn on the cob. Saul, Flo and Sue Waldman had all seen this of Jody: you'd give her an ear of corn and she'd put one paw on each end of the cob and then

roll by roll, just like a human being, she'd eat the corn from the cob and turn the cob as she went. Now she's out East with Phil Marsman and they're at a dog show. Jane and Bob Forsyth were still handling then, and all the big East coast handlers are all at this show. There was a stand there at the dog show selling corn on the cob, and Sue Waldman said, "Watch this!" She buys Jody an ear of corn and gives it to her. Jody's just devouring it, like a pig. She's eating the cob and everything. Sue is horrified because she's done all this bragging, and all these important people are going to stand there and watch. She turns to Jody and says, "Jody Marie! That's not the way you eat corn in Michigan!" At which point, I swear to you, Jody dropped the ear of corn, put one paw on each end and proceeded to eat it row by row, like a lady. (laughter) That's one of my favorite Jody stories.

The other Jody story that I have to tell, which is both sad and wonderful, is that in all the years that I've had Samoyeds, with two exceptions, my dogs have never died. I've always had to make the decision to put them down. One time I was sobbing hysterically in my kitchen because my vet was on the way over to put two old dogs to sleep for me. As he

walked in, I said, "Oh Jan, why can't they just die in their sleep?" He looked around and said, "Why would they? Why would you leave here if you had a choice?" Jody was getting old, she was fifteen and one-half. Tarahill dogs have always been long-lived. I've been very lucky but I've also taken very good care of them too, not having them overweight. She was getting very old and I kept thinking the time was coming and I really agonized over this. Was I going to put her down too soon? Was this just a spell and she was going to bounce back? What if I denied her and myself this extra time together? Was I going to put her down too late and have her suffer needlessly because I was selfish? I was really agonizing over this. Every winter I'd think, "This is her last winter." Then just about the time I'd decide she wasn't going to make it, we'd have warm weather and she'd bounce back, and I'd be so happy that I hadn't done that. Knowing, however, that she was aging, I had been really and truly agonizing over this.

My son was probably six at the time and this bitch had been around forever. She was eight years old when my son entered the world. He had never known a life without Jody. She was on prednisone and getting arthritic. She could get going but you had to help her get up. It was near the holidays, on a Saturday night, and I was throwing a big Christmas party for 100 people. My kennel girl was downstairs grooming the house dogs before the party. She had bathed and groomed Jody and couldn't get her to stand. Every time she'd get Jody on her feet, her legs would go out from under her. The young girl knew that I had this big party and all these people coming, and she wondered what she was going to do. She went and got my-son-to-be husband, Floyd, and said, "I don't know what to do, Jody can't stand up. I don't want to say anything to Cheryl because she's got this big party in an hour." Floyd said to her, "There's no one coming to this party tonight that is more important to Cheryl than Jody." (laughter) "If this dog is going to die, that's fine, but it's not going to be on my head that she dies down here alone without Cheryl knowing about it." So they made the decision to come

tell me.

After all these months that I'd spent agonizing about what to do and when to do it, as sure as that bitch can talk, I walked into that room, and she looked at me and the look was as plain as if she could talk, "Mom, it's time." I knew in that instant that it was the time. I said, "You're right, Jody." I went upstairs and called the vet and asked what she was doing the next morning, Sunday? She said, "Well, I have to do this clinic." I asked that when she was done with the clinic that she come to the house and put my old bitch down for me. She said, "Yes, I'll be there about eleven o'clock." "Thank you," I said, and hung up and proceeded to have the party.

Jody snapped back. She was like a four-year-old! I thought that she could have anything off the table that she wanted. I gave her Baileys all night. (laughter)

Everyone said, "Sure, she's feeling good - she's drunk!" So what, she's going to get diarrhea or an upset stomach and throw up. This is going to be a problem as of tomorrow? I'm telling you, it was like she was dancing the jig that night. She was like a puppy. She had the best time. I stayed up with her that night until the early hours of the morning. Floyd kept looking at her and she was doing so well, she had this great sparkle in her eye and she was just doing great. Floyd said, "Look how well she's doing this morning. Don't you want to reconsider your decision?" I said, "No. She wants to go out on a high note and I'm going to let her. That's the way she's going out." The vet came the next morning and my two daughters (they weren't my daughters yet) and my son were there. They were about six, seven, and eleven. We had explained the whole process and

what was going to happen with the vet that morning. They had their chance to say goodbye to Jody. Then I'm in the kitchen with Jody in my arms. The vet has given her the sodium pentathol and discreetly left because I'm sobbing hysterically with this bitch in my arms. I have no control and I'm just a mess. My son comes in and I think now that was truly a Hallmark moment. That sweet little child with those chubby little arms puts them around my neck and says, "Mom? Why did you have to kill Jody?" I didn't know then that would be the first time he would rip my heart out. (laughter) There were going to be many more times he was going to do that. That's the story of Jody Marie Wagner or Ch. Montego Lady in White, who got her CD in four shows at the age of eight. She was pretty remarkable.

How many litters have you bred?

I have no idea. Isn't that awful? (laughter) People ask me that all the time or they'll ask me how many champions I've bred. I guess I could go through the records and get that number but to me it was never that important. The number you've bred or the number of champions you've produced wasn't as important to me as quality. I never bred a lot. In the early years, in the 1970's and into the early 1980's, maybe one litter a year, sometimes two litters a year. Then I would say from the mid-1980's to the mid-1990's, sometimes two litters a year, sometimes three litters a year. I also never had very big litters. My average litter size in the last decade was four.

I have an interesting theory on that too. Actually I don't have a theory. John Studebaker does. Years ago, John Studebaker and I were at a dog show together with a group of other people. John's background, for those who may not know, was with the pharmaceutical company Upjohn. He did a lot of genetic things with sheep and cows, and genetic studies with seed hybridization. Kind of an interesting background. We were talking about breeding and genetics and such. Jody, my original bitch, was an outcross - an outcross from an outcross. Her father was an English dog named Am/Eng Ch. Fair Villa Kimitaz, and he was an English champion who lived in the U.S.



Natascha at five months old, February 22, 1989 (Ch. Tarahill's Son of a Duck x Ch. Tarahill's Can Do Too).



Left to right: Ch. Tarahill's Everybody Duck and handler Cheryl Wagner with sire Ch. Tarahill's Son of a Duck and handler Chris Jones, and litterbrother Ch. Tarahill's Duke of Earl and handler Shirley Hitter.

and then ended up back in Canada. He was sired by a dog named Fair Villa Istaban of Arabis, who was also an English dog. They took Kimitaz and her dam was ... I didn't think I'd ever forget that. I just blanked. Anyway, she was a Hazel and Ken Prince Neko granddaughter who was then bred to Jac-Lin's Little Debutante. White Thunder of Jac-Lin's - that was her mother's name. Her call name was Trinket. I ended up naming one of Jody's daughters Trinket because I thought that was such a great name.

Trinket had three different pedigrees going on and none related to each other at all, but that's another story on how I think she should have been bred and where. When I was breeding her, I was getting large litters of seven, eight or nine. Her daughters were having litters of six or seven. All of a sudden, I was consistently getting litters of four. We're at this dog show talking and I was telling my personal theory which was that, in the beginning when I had very few Samoyeds, they all lived in the house as house pets and I had large litters. Now that I had

a "more professional" operation and they were in a more kennel-type environment, even though my litters were whelped in the house, the litters were all a standard of four. I assumed, logically I thought, that somehow the connection was their being family pets versus being in a kennel environment and this was reducing their fertility. At which point, Studebaker said no, but that they had done a lot of studies on pigs or sheep, and it was that I started with a very outcrossed pedigree. So even if I bred her to things in her pedigree, which I did do, I still had so much outcrossing going on.

As I moved down in my generations, I was breeding tighter and tighter in linebreeding. At some points, I would tell you that I came close to what I thought was some really tight linebreeding. Pat (Craig) Trotter thought not, and some other people thought I was inbreeding. I guess it's all in your definition, but I was breeding tighter and tighter and I was doing lots of half sister/half brother breeding. John said that the studies with the pigs or sheep showed that the tighter you linebred, the

smaller your litter size got. Obviously that proved true in my kennel.

Which would you say was your best litter?

I don't know that I had a best litter. I would prefer to think of it as a best breeding, and the reason I make that distinction is that I believe I had some good quality in every litter that I bred. I would say best breeding because that's what helped me carry forward. The best breeding I ever did was to breed to Am/Can Ch. North Starr's King's Ransom. He probably was the finest Samoyed I've ever had the chance to put my hands on. He was a wonderful dog! He had some faults but he had wonderful qualities: he had a wonderful front end and wonderful sidegait. I bred Jody to him and out of that litter I got my Trinket bitch. Interestingly, almost all my good dogs I can trace back, one way or another, to that breeding. Some of my best ones.

I have no idea how many champions I've bred. In my old kennel, I used to have the walls lined with certificates of the dogs

I'd finished, that I had kept. I personally probably owned 25-30 champions. People from outside the Samoyed breed came to kennel and were surprised that I had bred and owned that many champions. That doesn't count the champions that I sold. I don't know. I would guess 40 maybe. I didn't sell a lot of dogs to show homes because that was never my priority. My priority was that they go into a good home. Whether or not they showed the dog was irrelevant.

What is the best dog that you've owned or bred?

Best for what? Best in terms of a show record? Best in terms of a sire? Best in terms of a dam? Best family pet? There are a lot of bests there. Obviously, the biggest winner I ever owned was Buddy, Am/Bda Ch. Tarahill's Everybody Duck. He retired as the second top winning Samoyed in the history of the breed and he was the number one Samoyed in the country for two years. He did great winning for me but I don't know that he was the best dog that I ever bred. Ch. Tarahill's Casey Can Do, who was his grandfather, was my first Best in Show

dog, so maybe he's the best dog I ever bred. This dog that's lying at my feet right now, he's a wonderful family pet. My husband and son adore this animal like they never did any of the fancy show dogs. This dog did lots of good winning as a puppy, finished his championship, and he's never been in the ring since. He is a wonderful ambassador for the breed. Everyone who sees this dog falls in love with his temperament and his personality and they'll ask, "How's Rudy?" So maybe Ch. Tarahill's Rue the Day is the best one I ever bred. What's best? I don't know.

What's your favorite story about an individual dog?

I told you the wonderful story about Jody and her corn on the cob. Two of my most memorable stories both involve showing. My old Casey dog, who Nancy Martin showed, it was his retirement. This dog had been to a kazillion, trillion dog shows in the years that he had shown, and he was retiring as the number one Samoyed in the country. This was back in 1986, somewhere around there. As we get old, the mind is the first thing to go - it all kind of fades together now. Nancy was showing this dog in December; it was the end of the year and the last shows of December are the four Chicago shows. It was a very emotional moment for all of us. We were all in the Breed ring, teary-eyed that this dog was going to retire and come home. The judge had pulled the dogs out on the diagonal and she's pulled Casey out to be Best of Breed, Kay Bailey to be Best of Opposite and I've forgotten who Best of Winners was. She's going to send them around the ring one last time. Nancy always showed Casey, who, like his son here, was a big dog, at the end of a six-foot lead. She would let that lead out as far as she could and off she and that dog would go. I guess the judge said to take them around and Nancy wasn't ready with the lead or something, but Casey was ready and away he went. Nancy had no lead on the dog but the dog had been to so many dog shows that he figured he knew what to do at this time. Nancy's following behind him and nobody's got a lead on this dog. As he'd get to a corner, Nancy would tell him to slow down to make the corner, which



Ross with Ch. Montego's Lady in White CD and Ch. Tarahill's Impossible Dream.

he would do and then off he would go again. I stood up to block the gate entrance to the ring, thinking that the dog would be coming around and go right on out. The dog came right around to the Best of Breed sign and stopped dead still, just as the judge pointed, "You'll be Best of Breed!" Kay Bailey looked at me and said, "I wouldn't pay her for today. She didn't really show this dog; he showed himself." I turned to Nancy Martin and said, "Why are we retiring him when he's finally figured out what to do?" (laughter)

One of my other favorite stories is also about Casey. I have lots of favorite stories to tell about memorable things that they've done as family pets, but one of my other favorite show stories is about one of my favorite wins. One of my favorite moments in winning is the show I didn't win. It was Upstate New York with this Casey dog. One of the judges for whom I have tremendous respect for her ability as a judge, is Denny Kodner. Denny was judging Best in Show and Casey had won the Group that day. This was when Jimmy Moses had Covy-Tucker Hill's Manhattan, who at that time was the top winning German Shepherd of all time, actually I think the top winning dog of any breed of all time. Elliott More was showing the Golden Retriever to whom Denny Kodner had given the National. It came time for Best in Show and Denny pulled out the Shepherd, the Samoyed and the Retriever, and very quickly made it a contest

between the Shepherd and the Samoyed. Then she put them out in that huge Best in Show ring, and sent Jimmy and Hatter and Nancy and Casey around together. Nancy just kept letting more and more lead out on Casey and said, "Catch him, Casey." To watch those dogs go around the ring together and at the end, that Samoyed caught the Shepherd, and she actually had to reel him back in to keep him from running up on the Shepherd. I got goosebumps over that. To me it was so exciting to watch.

Ultimately Denny gave it to the German Shepherd, but to even be considered in that kind of company was thrilling. The show I didn't win ended up being more thrilling than most of the shows that I won. Anyone reading this now who knows Denny Kodner knows that she can be very abrupt. I went to her afterwards and I was gushing. I was so thrilled with this and said, "Oh, Denny. How exciting for me to even be considered." I went on about how beautiful Hatter was and I was sincere about that. He was a magnificent animal and Jimmy Moses is the Michael Jordan of handlers. He's incredibly talented and has since become a good friend of mine, now that we've both moved to the Atlanta area. I was in Michigan and Jimmy lived in Upstate New York. I just kept going on to Denny Kodner about how thrilling it was for me even to be considered in the same company. I was going on and on, at which point Denny turned to me and said, "Your dog's no slouch

either," and with that turned on her heel and walked away.

Which dog was the biggest character of all your dogs?

Wow. The whole breed is kind of goofy. This dog here at my feet right now - it didn't dawn on me when he was a puppy, I just thought he was going to be a really good example of the breed. It didn't dawn on me until he got older. One day I turned to my husband and said, "You know what this dog is? This dog is what I've been doing for other people for twenty years. This dog's my pet." This dog, since Jody, is the dog that's most captured my heart. I've had a lot of favorite bitches. I really love my bitches. Trinket was one of my all-time favorite bitch and every daughter of hers has been one of my favorites. The Lucky Duckling bitch who is her daughter is one of my favorites. This dog, as you saw when you came in, is a character. He just sits there and starts with his paw and he's kind of obnoxious about it. He also has a basket of toys and he never chews up anything, which is unusual because Samoyeds can be destructive. Any of his squeaker toys, we call them his babies, he carries around just squeaking them. As soon as the squeaker goes, he loses interest and never plays with it again. He's kind of a character. He just hangs out being the family pet.

Do you feel that pedigrees in this breed can be trusted as to accuracy?

Accuracy for what? The sire is who you say it is? Accuracy in terms of breeders being honest about the genetic faults of the dog?

Would you speak to both?

I think our pedigrees are accurate. First of all, this is an interesting breed in that, for the most part, we're not a lot of big kennels. These dogs generally don't do well in a kennel environment. They do better as family pets. We're not a big money breed. We're not a super competitive breed. If you look at some other breeds like Boxers or Dobermans, you're starting with handlers in the Puppy class at six months old, and it's super competitive. This breed has not attracted that element. It's more of a family, a lot of owner/handlers. In some other breeds that are big time winners and all that, you might have a litterbrother substituted

for the big winner as a sire. I'm not saying that happens, I'm just saying it's possible. I don't think that's generally true with the Samoyed breed because we're not running these big kennel operations. When you send a dog to a breeder, that may be the only stud dog there. Generally speaking, our pedigree can be trusted to be what it says it is.

In terms of genetic problems, I think it's not exclusive of Samoyeds, and it's true of many breeds out there. I have a big luxury right now in that a couple of years ago I gave up breeding and actively showing; the more distance I get between that and today, the franker my opinions become. (laughter) The less concerned I become about offending someone. I probably should have been more concerned about that earlier. There are many Samoyed breeders, as well as other breeds, who are still operating under the ignorance is bliss theory: if we don't test for it, we won't find it. They're right, but that doesn't mean that it won't exist. (laughter)

Have you used inbreeding, linebreeding and outcrossing, and when do you think it should be used?

My favorite breeding is linebreeding. I absolutely love linebreeding. That should be the primary source of breeding that you do. With any breeding book that you'll read, each chapter tells you to start with superior quality animals. I wish I had started with better animals than I did. It took me ten years and three generations to get to a point, an expensive point, that would have been much cheaper for me in the beginning to just buy better animals. I didn't know that then. That would be one of my first pieces of advice. Linebreeding is always the most successful because you're breeding like to like. I like inbreeding, and I guess the reason is that it depends on why you're inbreeding. Just for me, I'm not right and I'm not wrong, it's just what I did; it wasn't important to me to produce good dogs nearly as much as it was important to me to know why I produced good dogs. Sometimes I did something specifically. In fact, Nancy Martin and I used to have a lot of disagreements over my breeding: how she wanted me to breed versus how I wanted to breed. It was important for me to know why I was

breeding and why I was producing something, so sometimes I specifically bred two faults together to find out if it was genotypical or phenotypical. Inbreeding is very helpful when you want to find out if there is a problem in your pedigree and you want it to come to the surface so you know where it is, or if you are test breeding to genetically clear an animal to find out whether it's a carrier of a certain fault.

Number one, linebreeding should be primary. Inbreeding if you're looking to find a fault or if you're looking to double up on something. I was never lucky enough to have two animals that I considered so superior that I was willing to inbreed them. I never got that lucky. Lots of other breeders do that their first generation. It's amazing to me their very first litter they have enough quality. Of course these are the very same breeders that can tell you before the litter opens their eyes that they are show quality.

Outcrossing you can do if your line is lacking something that you want to bring in, and you go to another line that is strong in that weak area of yours. When you outcross, if you're breeding your linebred dog to an outcross, the best thing to do is to breed to an outcross that is strongly linebred.

Who or what has influenced your breeding the most?

That's an interesting question. In the beginning I was influenced by looking at my bitch: what I liked about her and how I thought she needed to be improved. As I said, she came from these three distinct different bloodlines, and I looked at the three bloodlines and what I liked about those bloodlines, I got to pick which one I wanted to focus. Initially in the beginning, I decided it was really the Silver Moon and that part of the pedigree that I thought I liked. I focused on that. Some of that influenced what I liked. I didn't so much become influenced by Samoyed people within my breed because as I said, early on I wasn't fortunate enough to have good mentoring. I don't mean that in a critical sense, I just wasn't fortunate enough to have it. The people who started me in the breed got out of it, but I looked at people in other breeds who were successful and how they

achieved that success. Not the people who had one big winner. Anybody can have one big winner. That's a fluke and a checkbook. The people, like Pat Trotter, who consistently generation after generation were ranked number one in the country, and Julie Gasow. I looked at how they ran their breeding programs and almost without exception, they were linebred.

How many dogs do you keep now?

I have - are we counting Pomeranians too? My husband counts them. (laughter) I say if you put them all together you don't get one whole dog. (laughter) I have the two Pomeranians and the two Samoyeds, Ch. Tarahill's Lucky Duckling and Ch. Tarahill's Rue the Day. When I stopped breeding and showing, Chris Jones, who is still part of my family, took some of my young dogs. I think she has three breedable bitches and a young stud dog living with her. My friend, Ginger Aldrich, here in Atlanta has two of my breedable bitches. They're in their names and they are their animals, but I know where some of my stuff still is if I need a new placement puppy or if I get the itch to get back into the ring again.

What's the most dogs you've ever kept?

The most was probably between eighteen and twenty. I don't think I ever got over twenty, but what Chris and I used to do was keep a lot of littermates. We kept a lot of young dogs but that was a luxury we had. We had the space and the physical help to be able to keep a lot of young dogs. I think this is maybe not true for a lot of other breeds that are more popular and make the big bucks. Certainly for Samoyeds, you don't make big bucks on a puppy. Most Samoyed breeders are breeding for themselves. I certainly was. I was breeding for myself and coincidentally I may have had some other puppies to sell to the public. I never bred a litter with the thought that we'd have lots of puppies to sell to the public. I think that's true for most Samoyed breeders. I kept a lot of young dogs. The theory goes that you're supposed to have - I'm a great one for reading books so I know lots of theories - (laughter) one-third of your kennel as your young stock that is coming up, one-

third of your kennel is your active breeding and showing stock, and one-third of your kennel is your geriatric old dogs that are waiting to go to their great reward. Great theory! Unfortunately, in my case the old dogs never know when it's time to leave. (laughter) They say, "Naw, I think we'll hang on another year or so." These two dogs here, I don't even know how old they are. I'd guess ten and twelve. That's another thing. I never want to know exactly how old they are because then I treat them like old dogs. (laughter) If you don't know, your mind does funny things. The years pass by, and I keep thinking this dog is only six or seven when actually, he's a lot older than that.

In my case, my third, third, third theory never worked out, particularly for Chris and me, because we did a lot of specialing. We enjoyed it, not that it was necessarily productive to a breeding kennel. We enjoyed showing which meant we kept a lot of young males that had potential. As they grew up, sometimes they finished their championships and we'd decide that we weren't going to use this dog in a breeding program or we weren't going to special the dog, and he needed to be neutered and live as somebody's housepet. He needs a better life than growing old in this kennel. Many times we kept littersisters and as they grew up, we'd know that we weren't going to breed both of them and this one has something we need that this one doesn't, or this one has a fault that we don't need that we already have in the pedigree, so why not spay them and place them in a pet home. We were probably skewed in that we had lots of young dogs that, as they matured, sometimes went to homes. We kind of ebbed and flowed. Seems we'd keep a lot of young dogs and then they'd hit that two or three year mark and finish their championships. Then we'd say, "Well, we're not going to need this or that." We'd start weeding out and go from maybe eighteen down to twelve, and then we'd slowly creep back up again, then we'd weed out. I think eighteen or nineteen was the maximum we had.

To be continued ...