

As long as I can remember I have been interested in dogs. My parents had a large old volume from around the turn of the century, *The New Book of the Dog*, that I paged through constantly. The color plates were marvelous, and the photographs of early corded Poodles and Maltese and King Charles Spaniels extremely intriguing. I envisioned myself with several of each.

My grandfather had bred Bull Terriers in the Twenties, and my childhood was filled with tales of the amazing exploits of his dogs. But the Bull Terrier we had when I was a child just wasn't my cup of tea - he was a little too much dog for me.

When I was in high school my parents bought me my first nice dog - a miniature poodle bitch. I trained her in obedience and with her breeder's help and advice I did breed her, but eventually my mother and I realized she was probably not the caliber of dog who should be bred, and she was spayed. It was a difficult concept for me to accept, for like many other novice breeders, I had hoped to be able to use her to produce something really nice.

In 1974 I bought my first Sheltie bitch, the future CH. Sandmere Mollie Malone,

C.D. The opportunity to purchase Mollie presented itself when her breeder offered me the chance to choose whichever puppy I wanted from a well-bred litter of four or five. I wasn't sure I would be able to pick the best puppy, but I knew that being allowed to choose at all was a rare opportunity. With that in mind I examined all the bitch puppies, and Mollie stood out as being the most balanced puppy in the group. At eight weeks she stood four square naturally on her own, and tracked around the room with an easy way of going. Her temperament was showy even at that age - another plus. I realized that there was no guarantee that she would be able to finish, but the pedigree was good and the puppy was well put-together. I took a chance.

In the spring of 1975 I handled Mollie to a first place win in the Junior Puppy Sweeps at the American Shetland Sheepdog Association National. I was really not a handler of any sort; Mollie won that class on her own.

That summer Mollie picked up 10 single points. After taking time out for a litter she finished, winning a Working Group One from the classes under Joe Gregory along the way.



In the photo lower left, Erica with her Ch. Wits' End Country Charm (Ch. Romayne's Sportin' Life x Ch. Sandmere Malone CD) who had Group & Specialty wins in very limited showing. Charm produced two champions and a Group winning daughter that unfortunately did not finish. Ch. Sandmere Mollie Malone, CD (Ch. Sandmere Tommie Tucker, CD x Ch. Sandmere Starina) shown below with Erica's daughter, Rachel - age two. Mollie (above) wins the Group handled by Barbara Gresso, the year -1977.



Over the years I averaged about one litter a year - not really a way to become a breeder of import, but I tried to make each breeding significant. I grew out one or two puppies a year; sometimes I hit it and sometimes I chose the wrong puppy to bank.

In retrospect I feel regretful that I did not take better advantage of the knowledge and expertise of a few friends who were definitely breeders of merit, among them John Buddie of Tartanside Collies and Tom Coen, Macdega Shelties. One of the nicest litters I produced was the result of advice from Tom, who suggested a dog for Mollie who was not his own, but who ultimately gave me a litter of several lovely bitches. Again, I only kept two, but both of them produced champions, and my favorite, CH. Wits' End Country Charm, had specialty and group placements owner-handled, in an extremely limited career.

For several years I stopped showing dogs completely while two of my daugh-

PROFILE: Erica S. Venier

This is another in a series of profiles on Cavalier enthusiasts who are new to the CKCS, but long time fanciers of another breed.

ters seriously showed hunters and studied dressage.

Watching their lessons intently over many years opened up another world for me - that of conformation in action: conformation that you can not only see, but also feel. Eventually my youngest daughter became my teacher, for as a student of equine conformation she was able to explain to me how a given animal would feel if she were riding it, and why.

When I decided to return to dogs, I knew that this time around I would work more closely with those people whose dogs I admired, and who seemed to have the same priorities that I did as a breeder. After attending shows and observing the breed for about a year, I got in touch with Joy Sims of Bramble Cavaliers. Joy had a group of dogs who were sound as well as pretty, and she was more than willing

to share her knowledge with those who were sincere. She had come to Cavaliers from Salukis, and her determination to produce sound dogs was apparent.

While type is paramount and should be every breeder's goal, soundness is our obligation. It is unfair to create a dog who can't properly move well enough to be comfortable and live a healthy life, unencumbered by poor structure. I felt a kinship with Joy on this subject, and was thrilled when she allowed me to purchase an extremely sound Black and Tan male, Bramble Coco.

At Joy's home "Ryan" caught my eye as having plenty of reach in the front and correct drive in the rear, but appreciation of his lovely head and expression came later, after I had spent additional time observing Cavaliers. In less than a year Ryan finished his CKCSC, USA, AKC and



Mother and daughter - Ch. Wits' End Country Charm (above) and her daughter by Ch. September's Rainmaker, the Specialty winning Ch. Wits' End That Darn Cat (below). John Buddie of Tartanside Collies was a big supporter of "Kitten" and admired her long before anyone other than Erica had noticed her. Pictured in 1985.



CKC championships, with major wins under Anne Rogers Clark and Virginia Lyne, among others.

There are different ways, many equally valid, to produce quality dogs. I prefer to maintain an intimate relationship with my dogs, and therefore choose to keep my numbers small. Although I realize a smaller breeder is not as likely to produce as many super stars as a larger breeder, I am happier when I have fewer dogs, and enjoy having them live in the house, as members of the family. Cavaliers especially seem to benefit from close contact with their family. They have a great capacity to learn, and I try to have fun with that.

My hope is to be able to produce typey dogs with sound minds and bodies, on a small scale. As before, I intend to work diligently with a small group of quality individuals in the pursuit of excellence, doing more showing than breeding, and breeding only those individuals whom I would be proud to show.

Integrity, honesty to yourself and others, and working towards the best interests of the dogs is part of that - which means not breeding the dog with the heart murmur or poor hips or questionable temperament, even though it breaks your

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Erica and Ch. Bramble Katie in 1998





heart to eliminate that one from the breeding program. Parting with dogs who haven't quite "made it" is a difficult part of the process, but one that I am familiar with from my years in Shelties.

This time around I'm older, hopefully wiser, and certainly more able to devote myself to the dogs in a way that I was not prepared to do in the past.



CKCSC, USA, AKC, CKC Ch. Bramble Kerfluffle, "Pixie" finished her club title recently under Dr. Annukka Paloheimo. Joy wanted Erica to take "Pixie" and show



her, and she also left ideas for future breedings. Erica was "over the moon" to have been able to finish her for Joy. Upper left & directly above, "Ryan". CKCSC, USA, AKC, CKC Ch. Bramble Coco.