

The Common Thread

The common thread shared by the Gompa dog program and my Renal Dysplasia work is my love of the Lhasa Apso and my interest in genetics. Learning, gaining knowledge, discovering answers, applying scientific principles to two totally separate breeding programs are my motivations.

In a quest to learn more about genetics I was introduced to Dr. John Armstrong, a developmental biology and genetics professor at the University of Ottawa. He taught me how to think outside the box. But I am getting ahead of myself.

In 1991 a ten-month-old puppy of my lineage was euthanized because she was in kidney failure. Aware of kidney problems in the breed, but far from informed, I asked her owner to have the kidneys examined. Reports varied and included Renal Dysplasia diagnosis. My vet, who had worked on my dogs for years, thought it was probable that the kidneys had been damaged by an infection and/or antibiotic treatment administered when this puppy and her littermates were 4 weeks old. I accepted her conclusion. In 1996 a five-month-old puppy, bred by Julie Timbers and me, living with Julie, was euthanized due to kidney failure. Julie lives near the University of Minnesota and Dr. Tom Osbourne, a leading expert on the canine kidney. She took the puppy to him for necropsy. Renal Dysplasia was the diagnosis. It was then Julie and I began active investigation into the disease, educating ourselves, our veterinarians and fellow breeders.

Animal Planet provided a peek into the scope of our work in Breed All About It, The Lhasa Apso. The above example has been repeatedly used, including in the award winning magazine series Breaking The Silence, stressing the importance of using the appropriate pathology labs and the responsibility of breeders to educate themselves about various issues within their breeds. This was the subject of an interview with Dr. David Manobla in part three of Breaking The Silence. We were in on the ground floor of the two different molecular genetics projects with the objective of developing a DNA test for RD. One of those projects continues today. I am considered a field scientist; an empirical scientist by those in academia that have worked with me.

There is a balance required, a balance between being a responsible breeder and a scientist. This balance requires a sense of ethics, moral responsibility and knowledge of genetics. Involved in purebred dogs since I was 13, a veterinary technician and a perpetual student I was schooled in genetics. However, Dr. Armstrong introduced me to a different style of genetics, population genetics, diversity rules and principles applied to small populations. He introduced me to dedicated, responsible breeders. Breeders without AKC registered dogs. My world was expanding!

Always having an interest in the Gompa dogs, originally imported into Canada by Gerald D'Aoust, I finally expressed my interest in the spring of 2001 when I learned the group of dogs had moved to Virginia. With my expanding world I recognized the genetic value of this historic gene pool. In addition Cecile Clover recognized that my knowledge and ability would benefit the Gompa dogs. With Mr. D'Aoust's approval, Cecile and I arranged to have ten dogs come to me. She and her Mac delivered them right to my Colorado doorstep, having made a nonstop cross-country trip in a station wagon without a single crate!

Born out of love for the Gompa dogs, Cecile had established the Kennel Without Walls, placing dogs with friends and family. We've taken the Kennel Without Walls to another level with the Gompa Lhasa Apso Preservation Program, currently working on establishing an extensive database incorporating their UKC records and health characteristics into the database and developing guidelines for the breeding program. Application of scientific principles for managing a small population is the approach.

The Gompa Lhasa Apso Preservation Program and my Fleetfire breeding program have always been separate. The common thread between my Fleetfire breeding program and my work with the Program is my love of the breed and my interest in genetics. It's as simple as that!

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