

An Interview with Mr. Joseph Bihari

An interview with Joseph Bihari represents a series of informative lessons on German Shepherd history. Joe began in his then hometown of Miskolc, Hungary and continued to work with the breed after immigrating to the United States. Certainly any visitor to Joe's present home in a quiet suburb of Monsey, New York is mesmerized by the rows of photos that line the walls of a basement room: the room could easily hold a well attended puppy match. The photos, trophies, ribbons, plaques and other memorabilia from over sixty years illustrate not only the success of this special man, but also the history of our breed in this country. Surely there are only a handful of breeders who can boast a very successful livelihood in the sport of dogs. One could easily refer to Joe as an icon or major force of our breed in this country.

Comfortably seated in Joe's dining room, we begin to peruse the myriad of photos and articles that he has accumulated over a lifetime. The walls in this room are covered with photos of the dogs that are paramount to him today. Besides photos of Ch. Bihari's Klodo and other important dogs of today, there are pictures of several very impressive bucks with antlers that any male deer would be proud to wear. "These are Jimmy's new venture: look at the racks on those beautiful animals." Joe beams in admiration. Joe and James Moses have been best friends for many years. "We speak almost every day." Joe informs me. We then fall into yet another story about the relationship between these two friends. "I have so many stories." he states and each story reveals so much more of Joe's past and very full life, a life that can fill more pages than just one review article. As I listen to him, his eyes glimmer with remembrance and his voice often belies the emotion of his experiences; I eagerly anticipate the history lesson and we begin.

How did you begin in dogs?

I always loved working with animals. In my childhood village of Borsodgszt, Hungary my father raised mixed pups, rabbits and pigeons. I always had an eye for training the pigeons and knew each one as it flew over us.

My first shepherd, a very masculine sable came from Czechoslovakia. I trained him for protection and participation in the sport of dogs. The versatility, intelligence and beauty of the breed drew me to the German Shepherd. Besides protection I enjoyed training for obedience and different tricks to illustrate the dog's intelligence. The dog's name was Pajtas, pronounced Pie Tash; the name means 'my pal'. At the time in 1945 I was working as a waiter and only accepted a job where I could keep a dog. Whenever I rented a room, my first question was if I could keep a dog. At the time I was in Budapest and Pajtas bred every local bitch in season. He was a very dominant dog and left progeny all over town. Joe chuckled quietly at this fact.

After WW II, the Russians took away all of the German Shepherds. My position as a waiter was taken away also. Women took over waiting in restaurants; men now had to

work in factories where the Russians felt that manpower was needed. I returned to Miskolc and met Maria. I married Maria in 1952.

Maria and Joe were married for over fifty years until her death in June of 2006.

After the war the Russians confiscated most of the German Shepherds and other large breeds for guard dogs. Somehow Maria and I managed to keep our kennel and were left alone for the most part by the Communists. I did breed dogs for sale to the Russians, but I also had to work. The Russians did not view dog breeding and training as a means of making a living. I took a job as a barber and Maria handled the daytime kennel duties while I did the training at night. It was a busy life, but we had the largest privately owned kennel in Hungary at the time. We were fairly safe until the Hungarian Revolution was put down by the Communists, but that is yet another story.

When did you first begin breeding German Shepherds?

In 1953 I purchased a female German Shepherd from another barber who was also a breeder. I bred her and had seven pups. They were very dark pups and I called them the Miskolc Seven Devils.

Joe, I have heard the story of Rex and viewed the film that you have of him. Can you tell the fancy, especially those newer members of the breed, about Rex? How did you first acquire him?

Well, in 1953-54 some German Shepherd lovers formed a club; we did mostly obedience and Schutzhund, I was active in the club. We trained every night. One day I was riding my bicycle through town with a dog that I had trained to ride behind me on the bike. I used to travel to other towns to exhibit the dog. I saw this puppy. The pup had been a gift to the woman from her husband. Her husband worked for the either the Czechoslovakian or Austrian border patrol. The dog had been bred for the purpose of tracking people who wanted to escape Hungary and the oppressive Russian domination. The pup's dam was a tracking female that had been bred to a Czechoslovakian and German bloodlines. I approached the woman and attempted to negotiate the purchase of the pup. She was not interested at first. Then the husband took his wife on a vacation and they left the pup in a coal shed for the weekend. The dog had no water or food. I went back to feed and give water. When the couple returned home, I convinced the woman that she could not leave the pup like that again. Eventually she sold me the pup. I bought her a Dachshund and gave her money besides. I always tried to use good business sense and used my finesse to obtain Rex. Rex was special and I could see that even at four months; my intuition proved correct for so many reasons.

Once you bought Rex what was your plan for him?

I had Rex trained by the time he was one year old. I continued to be very active in the club and the appearance of Rex was quite different from the earlier dogs of our group. The early dogs were thin with very little depth of body. Rex was very bodied and the dispute between club members arose about which style of shepherd was preferable. We had a good competition in training especially because of this difference. In 1956 Rex

became the Grand Victor in confirmation. He also won the Grand Obedience title at the same show and beat out his rival from Miskolc by seconds on retrieving an object.

In 1956 Rex earned the title of Grand Victor forever. To do this he had to go BOB for three of the biggest shows like our National. No other dog had ever received that title before or ever since then. I could no longer show Rex because there was no other dog that had ever attained this title; therefore no other dog could compete against him. All of this took place just before the Hungarian Revolution against the Russian rule.

Was the Hungarian Revolution your reason for emigrating to the United States?

I always wanted to come to the United States. I had tried to escape in 1945 immediately after the war. I was caught at the border and jailed. At the time I also belonged to a hunting club so the Russians confiscated my guns and now I was a marked man. After I was released from jail, I was not allowed to go within five miles of the border. I did not try to escape again until December 1956. At the time we were much better off than most people in Hungary. I bred dogs for the police; we had purchased a home and we had a kennel with thirteen dogs. We left all of that behind." *I remembered Maria telling us earlier in our friendship "We had our under clothes and our over clothes, blankets for the children and Rex when we left."* We walked away from all we had built together. We knew the repercussions of the Revolution would also cause serious changes in Hungary. The possibility of never being able to breed again created a strong desire for me to escape. I had always dreamed of coming to America; it was time to try to make my childhood dream come true.

We left our home at 3am. in the December cold. After traveling to Budapest by train, we continued with short walks and further train rides until we reached ten miles or so from the border of Austria. The trip took days. To avoid attracting attention from the authorities, we slept in barns and on the floor in people's homes. We had other relatives who joined us. Maria's sister, other friends and their children were among them. Young Joe, our son, was just three years old at the time. We sometimes had to carry young Joe and the other children on a blanket between us through muddy farmland that made our walking very difficult. We told the children to be quiet or the Russians would hear them. Finally we reached a barn where we joined twenty-two other refugees, planning to escape. The main problem that the group had was Rex; the others were afraid that Rex would give them away. They thought he may bark and reveal our position to the border guards. Thankfully I had planned on that possibility and trained Rex to give a silent signal of danger. I refused to leave without Rex! I had left all my other dogs behind in the kennel in the care of other relatives. I knew that Rex would not betray us; if anything, he would protect us. Rex actually became, not only our leader, but also the savior. We would not have escaped without him. He could smell and hear the surroundings far better than any human being,

Mounted border patrols were everywhere. Since I had trained Rex for night patrol, we went ahead to insure our safety. At one point Rex froze and stopped in front of me. At the time we were close to the border; it was extremely cold and we were sinking in deep

mud. By now we were carrying the children on our backs. Rex emitted a low growl; I had trained him to both attack and disarm a man, but we did not proceed in that manner. I knew then that it was not safe to continue in that direction. We retreated and headed in another direction to the border. Then we found a barbed wire fence. Once we crossed over the fence we knew that we were safe. At that time we heard many shots in the direction from which we had retreated. Rex had saved our lives that night and we now had the opportunity to rebuild our lives without political oppression. I always thought that America would be a wonderful place to live; it is a great country where freedom is respected and people can better their lives. I always knew that the United States was the best country on earth!

In Austria we registered with the American Counsel and began a four month process to come to the United States. We lived in a refugee camp for Hungarians. The living conditions were somewhat uncomfortable with twelve people staying in one small room, but we were intent upon our purpose and felt that we had endured the worst in our dangerous escape from a place no longer our home. I worked as a barber in the camp always trying to improve our family status and well being.

We learned that the quota for refugees to the United States had been filled but I was persistent. While waiting for the consulate's decision, I continued training Rex in the park. We worked on agility and Rex's ability amazed our audience. This recognition also helped me to gain the push to recognize my own potential. Rex amazed the spectators with his ability and intelligence. I **never asked Rex to do anything that he could not do.** Rex came with me to the consulate and Rex was recognized by those authorities. They had heard of us! Somehow the authorities finally approved our passage to America. But even then our departure was questionable. At first the officials would not approve Rex's going with us but my tenacity and ability to negotiate paid off. We were told to pack our few belongings and prepare for our departure. You can only imagine our excitement!

A military transport brought us to the United States and we arrived in April of 1957. Most of the people on the plane were professional people like doctors and lawyers; to this day I think that only my persistence and Rex's reputation brought us here. We arrived at Kennedy airport and were sent to a refugee camp, Camp Kilmer (an army base) .

What happened when you arrived in America?

We did not know the language and the authorities asked me if I knew anyone in this country. At this time the United States had begun closing its doors to Hungarian refugees and the authorities here were anxious to place us. At first they wanted us to go to Minnesota or St. Louis, but I did not think either place would be good weather for the dogs. Eventually we learned that there were relatives in Corning, New York who had escaped before us. The officials contacted these relatives and learned that a church group from their area had sponsored them when they had arrived.

Was Rex allowed to go *with you* from Austria?

No, we had to leave him behind with the Austrian Humane Society until our new home in the United States was established. The church agreed to sponsor us and we traveled by train to Corning. At the time we had only \$5.00 from the Austrian consulate in our pockets. We went with another family who had escaped with us. A man, named Mr. Dual, from the Methodist church became our sponsor. He helped us send a telegram to Vienna to get Rex and also found me a job as a barber. He helped me to buy a chair and a bicycle to get to work. Within three weeks or so after we settled in Corning, Rex was flown from Austria to us. The church people brought us to pick up Rex. Finally we had all arrived! When we returned to Corning, all of the family and the newspaper people were waiting for us. The newspaper had heard our story and did a feature on our escape and Rex. That is how the Americans first learned about Rex.

Do you still keep in contact with any of the people who escaped from Hungary with you?

Well there were thirteen family members in the group; two of the children are still alive. I also have a friend in Vancouver. He was a former freedom fighter and a friend from Miskolc, my town. He too had to leave Hungary because the Communists were after any people who had been freedom fighters. He left most of what he had including his wife and children, but he worked hard and he is a millionaire today.

What was your early life in the United States like?

I worked as a barber in Corning and began to learn the language. It was easy to be a barber; I needed to know one word, "Next". *Joe smiles again at this remembrance.* I was always thinking - how can I cut faster; what can I do to get better? Before long I was doing more heads than the Italian man that I worked for. I always was competing in whatever I did.

Soon I began to breed dogs; we had to move several, I think five times, because of complaints from the neighbors about the dogs.

What did you do with Rex once you and the family were settled in Corning?

I went to find dog shows. An old judge, named Julius Due, saw Rex perform at one show. He was a German judge. I demonstrated what Rex could do. I asked someone to find a rock and throw it into the woods. Then I sent Rex to find it.

The people were amazed when Rex returned with the right rock. After that a reporter, Charles Harpin, from Ithaca, New York heard of Rex and he came to see him. He paid me to train his girlfriend's dog and before long the reporter became my manager. Within two or three weeks we traveled to North and South Carolina. We performed in three different cities to illustrate just what Rex could do. Soon Rex was asked to perform with Superman on his program. This was a good opportunity; however it was not long before Superman became upset over the billing.

How so?

The program was billed as “Rex the Wonder Dog and Superman”. *Another wry smile escapes as we speak.*

What other television, movies or stage performances did you do with Rex? As a teenager I remembered seeing Joe on the old program ,To Tell the Truth .

Yes, I was on *To Tell The Truth*. You remember me? *I nodded.* We were on *The Gary Moore Show* and *What’s My Line?* also. We did work in the movie *The Naked City* with Peter Falk. You remember him Peter Falk? *Another nod.* We did *Captain Kangaroo* and other shows that I do not recall at this time. My manager also called the *Ed Sullivan Show*. Rex did commercials in New York City too.

Did you train dogs for celebrities?

Yes, I trained a dog for the map maker, Rand McNally, also a dog for Yvonne Lendel, the tennis star. I was known in the early years as a problem dog specialist.

When did you lose Rex?

He was thirteen years old. *The loss seemed too painful to pursue even years after Joe had lost him so I moved on quickly to the next question.*

Did you ever show Rex in conformation in the shows here in the United States?

No, the United States did not recognize the Hungarian pedigree nor the championship. The AKC had not yet approved the recognition of some other country’s pedigrees.

Did you breed him?

Yes, his pups sold well and for a good price at the time. Of course Rex’s reputation was paramount to those people, not the pedigree.

Joe, you said that you arrived here and began to breed dogs; when did you first acquire an American bred dog?

By this time I had decided that I did not want to just sell puppies as pets; I wanted to breed the best dogs, not just pets. So I went with my manager to North Carolina to purchase a puppy from a famous kennel, called Wallingrove’s Kennels. I acquired a puppy from them but unfortunately the pup became ill with distemper. The vaccines of the past were not as good as today. Despite all the money I spent to save her at Cornell University, she still died. Later another older bitch was sent from the same kennel as a replacement, but she was a long coat, who unknown to us at the time, had accidentally been bred to her brother. After the litter was born I gave her pups away. I no longer intended to purchase a pup and instead bought a year old female from Kobeil’s Kennel in Syracuse. I had seen her brother Kobeil’s Jory at both the all breed and specialty shows. He was a very handsome with excellent conformation. He also had attitude and animation. The female was Kobeil’s Geta. I considered what dog to breed her to have my first real

American litter.

How did you decide upon a stud dog for Geta?

Oh, that is another story! I wanted the best stud dog for her. At that time there were not as many breeders as there are today but the kennels were much larger and well known. One of the biggest of the kennels belonged to Mr. Ernest Loeb. He imported most of the German dogs at that time. He had imported a dog for another kennel, called Yorkdom Kennel . Ernie suggested I go there where I met the manager of the kennel. Most shepherd people will remember or at least have heard of Lamar Kuhns. Most of the German Shepherd fancy remember him today as a handler of shepherds, but he was also a knowledgeable man for breeding. Anyway there were some imported German bred and one American bred male from which to choose. I found Geta's head refined and I wanted to improve her bone also. Although Lamar suggested the American bred male, I decided upon a German import, Ch. Wotan Vom Richterbach. Since Geta's sire was also a German import, GV Ingo vom Wunsehelruve, I believed that the German import head would improve the pups. GV Ingo was owned by Margret Fisher of Waldenmark Kennel.. Mrs. Fisher won both the GV and GVX in 1952; her GVX was Afra von Heilholtkamp. I still to this day appreciate German bred head as a standard for the breed. We had nine pups from that breeding and I was correct in improving bone and head.

Did you keep any whelps in that litter?

I kept a female. Since this was my first litter I called her Agnes Gold of Bihari Wonder. Eventually I dropped the Bihari Wonder; the name took too much space on the individual registrations. Later I change the name to Bihari only and placed the kennel name before the dogs name rather than after. Later I bred Agnes Gold to Ch. Bernd Vom Kallengarten. Ch. Bernd had been imported by Ernest Loeb who later became one of my good friends, but of course that is another story. From that litter I kept a male Ch. Falk of Bihari Wonder CD.

Ch. Falk began a line that produced some of the great dogs of that time. Ch. Colbert's Melissa of Lakeside ROM was one of them. Both her breeder and owners are well respected names in our breed, Connie Beckhardt and Dan Dwier, both top breeders from New Jersey. Connie Beckhardt, who bred Ch. Colbert's Ernestin vom Berndater to Ch. Falk produced Melissa. Later Melissa was bred to GV Ch. Lance of Fran-Jo ROM . This breeding was repeated a second time and ultimately produced two very important dogs of the past, Ch.. Lakeside Gilligan's Island, a Best In Show recipient, and Ch. Golly Gee of Lakeside, litter sister to Gilligan. The second breeding produced GV Ch. Lakeside Harrigan. Melissa, Gilligan and Harrigan were co-owned by Connie and Dan. With a third breeding Connie produced Sel. Ch Colbert's Reno of Lakeside ROM. The entire story of my line can be found on my website now.

Joe, I would like to get back to your life for the Review readers. Now that you were breeding and exhibiting your own dogs, how did you acquire Bihari's Kennel in Nanuet?

As I told you, we had moved five times because of the dogs. In Corning we were living in a farmhouse without amenities. Always wanting better, I was working in the show business. One day we packed up our belongings and five dogs to move closer to the city. We had no address to go to. It was five hours from Corning to New York City and the constant drive to do commercials with Rex had become tedious.

We looked for a place with space for the dogs. We knocked on farmhouse doors and finally found a realtor. When we went to the kennel in Nanuet in November of 1959, I was able to make a deal with the owner because I did not intend to develop the land. The agreement was that the owner would remain there and we would stay in the old unheated home behind the kennel. She was impressed with Rex and I think he really convinced her. When we moved there, the newspapers had an article; it was titled *Hungarian Family Moves To Nanuet With Rex The Wonder Dog*. The article attracted many training jobs. Our training was a family effort. The dog would spend three weeks training with me, then with Maria and finally with young Joe who was seven or eight at the time. Before the dog was returned to the owner, he would have to work by responding to hand signals.

Once you owned Bihari Kennels what did you foresee and hope to accomplish in your breeding program? What was your plan?

I always had in my mind to breed the best German Shepherd I could. That was my plan! My motto was "Breed Best to the Best and Hope for the Best!" I always wanted to make progress, to work hard for progress to be happy!

What was your first National Specialty ?

My first National was in 1958. The judges were Breed- Specials Bob Williamson with Mary Leary, judging males and Ray Smith, judging bitches. I placed first in Bred By with an Agnes Gold daughter, named Alice Silver of Bihari Wonder. I trained her with Rex.

**What impressed you the most or what do you remember the most about that first National? **

Well, one handler died in the ring. You see at that time when the judge moved a handler up, he did not stop the class to do so. They do today. The handler had to run to get ahead of the other handlers. That handler died trying to do what the judge asked of him. After that the AKC changed the procedure. Now all the dogs have to be stopped for a dog to be moved ahead of others.

I have learned that you later began to handle dogs in the ring for other people. The handlers began to call you the "Hungarian Hurricane". How did that come about?

I belonged to the professional dog handlers group. I joined in 1960. In those days you had to be a part of that group to be paid. They called me that since I am short and my legs had to move so fast to keep up with the dogs, and maybe, because I would work so hard to win. I continued to handle for some years. I mostly handled dogs that I bred and sold. I did not usually show dogs for other breeders since I did not see myself as a public

handler.

What were some of the memorable dogs that you handled ?

At first I primarily handled only my own dogs; dogs that I owned or bred. I concentrated mainly on training, boarding and breeding. Seldom would I show another person's dog. To me the owners were not as important, only the dog, and the dog must meet my ideal. The dog had to be a good specimen - a good one according to the standard! The 1959 Sel. Ch. Dapper Dan comes to my mind. Also I handled Sel. Ch. Bernd vom Kallergarten at the Long Island National. He went second Select.

You have owned so many good dogs - Champions- can you guess just how many?

I have had so many and such a variety. I have both bought, imported, co-owned and bred so many! I would venture to say around 90 champions or close to that number.

What are some of the most memorable dogs that you have owned besides Rex of course?

My first champion Ch. Bihari's Nando. Unfortunately he died young. He was the closest to the temperament, animation and structure in my mind. My son, Joe, finished him while I went north with Omar, a dog I was showing at the time.

Then there was Ch.Omar Undargo of Bihari Wonder. He had it all. I sold him as a pup with the understanding that he would be shown, otherwise he had to be returned to me. I bought him back and paid them much more than they had paid for him as a pup. He took five points in his first show in New Haven. The judge was Jim Norris. The next day in No. New Jersey under judge Ray Smith, Omar took another five points. He finished under Shirley Becuhler two weeks later at Greater Barrington Kennel Club. He was Select three times.

Another good one was Sel.Ch. Norvik of Bunker Hill, son of 3x Select Ch. Omar and Bihari's Pax.

Also Sel. Ch. Bihari's Klodo (the first Klodo). He was sired by Ch. Eko-Lan's Paladin and a German bred bitch, Helma vom Sturmwolke.

I also co-owned Sel.Ch./GV Seiger Sheft of Delshire. He was an excellent producer. He sired many good ones for me.

My first import was Ch.Greif vom Asterplatz. I bought him in 1964 from Walter Martin; both Martin and his brother Herman were lifetime friends until their deaths.

Unfortunately Greif died while I was in Germany. Greif had been with the handler at the time of his death. Maria called to inform me. Walter felt so badly that he sold me Greif's brother as a replacement. It was at that time that I purchased a bitch named Asta vom Haus Bernuis. Ernie Loeb and his agent were shocked at the fact that I made this purchase. She was, however, a gold mine as a producer. Many people bought her progeny, Ruth Fisher, Scootie Sherlock just to name two respected breeders. Ch. Asta ROM also proved to have intelligence; she produced an obedience victor, Bihari's Uncle Sam. Sam achieved many perfect scores. He was one of the best obedience dogs in the

All Breeds. He won many challenge trophies.

Finally a dog that I considered to be the best dog I have owned since Rex was 2X Sel. Am. /Sel. Can. Ch. Woodhaven's In Search Of ROM. He was almost totally undefeated in the ring. He produced ninety nine litters . I was only unhappy with his name since I have a belief that the dog should be called by his name, not a nickname. How do people immediately know the dog if he has more than one name? His call name was Indy, but he was a good one and so everyone eventually knew the two names for the one dog. George Berstler, Jimmy Moses and Moris Bartucci handled him.

Speaking of handlers Joe, who are the handlers who stand out in your mind after all your years in the sport of dogs?

Well, first there was Lamar Kuhns. He was an excellent handler, however, he could be very temperamental in his relationship with the people not the dogs. Jack Mc Mann was a top handler when I first came to this country. Also Ernie Loeb handled even before Jack McMann; Ernie, however, did the most winning. He probably finished more Grand Victors than any of the other handlers. There was also two other old time handlers, Jim Norris and Bill Dooley. Only the old timers might remember them today. Also Gloria Birch and Cappy Pottle, they do not handle now.

Today Jim Moses is the best for handling and management of the dogs. There is no question about it; he has held that position for many years. George Berstler for our area is always in demand and I would also include Leslie Dancosse on the list. Lenny Brown a long time protege of Jimmy has certainly attained his own expertise, and of course, there is Kent Boyles in the middle of the country . Out west Jerry Guzman is one of the best. There are many others, whom I may have left out, but also do an excellent job.

What about your best producing bitches Joe; which of the many that you have owned come to the top of the list?

During the years I would say in the 1960's Ch. Asta vom Haus Bernius ROM., Ch. Bihari's Olga for the 1970's and in the 1980's Ch. Bihari's Cincy . In the 1990's Select Am. / Sel. Can. Carob's Tina of Bihari.

Many exhibitors choose to co-own. Have you co-owned many dogs during your career?

I was never anxious to co-own and I usually think a long time before I make that decision.

Recently I have begun to do so but with caution. I co-owned Select Am./ Sel. Can. Ch. Bihari's Droll ROM ; he was the Canadian Grand Victor. Also I co-owned Select Am./ . Can.G.V.Ch. Rallyn's Jaego CD ROM. Jaego went from the obedience ring directly to the confirmation ring in Canada that year. He earned the highest score in obedience and then went Grand Victor. It was a good performance. I also co-owned AOE GV / Sel Can. Ch. And The Beat Goes On TC ROM and AOE 2XAm.Sel/Can Sel. Worth The Trip PT, TC

ROM. Now I co-own Sel. Ch. Lyloak's First Knight and others.

How do you decide upon a stud dog for one of your bitches?

I always consider what I want to make better. I want to correct what I am missing and what I want to improve. I also consider the genetics, the bloodline. Some improvements can be coat, bone, head piece, overall structure but always according to the standard. The standard is the BIBLE and should never be forgotten! My greatest advice is to always refer to the standard - review it over and over again. Good breeders should always be ready to learn and improve. Never assume to know it all. As my good friend Ernie used to say : “ They think they know because they do not know how much they should know!”

So above all, structure, bloodline and pedigree are paramount. My advice to new people is to first study the standard. Second look at the dogs and understand why the dog functions in the correct manner. Some people do not understand why a dog functions properly. And finally listen and learn from successful breeders. You can not learn while you are talking!

How would you proceed to begin a kennel or line today?

First I would buy the best bitch that I could afford. Spend the money to buy the best! A pet bitch will not produce. There are so many variables to good breeding but a good bitch is the beginning, then of course listening and learning from those who are experienced and successful.

What is your opinion on inbreeding?

I do not believe in it; it is not a long run or lasting situation. I will admit that many good producers have come out of inbreeding, known today as line breeding. In Europe they do not do close inbreeding. My Sel. Am./GV Seigrin Ch. Anton's Jessie was an inbred bitch. However good she was, she could not produce naturally. I had to use a c-section on her. I only bred her twice for that reason and she was a very good one.

How have dogs today improved from your early days in the breed?

We have made good improvement in the temperament of the dogs. This is primarily because of the implementation of the loose leash test. Ernie and I decided loose leash was needed in the breed many years before the test began. A dog needs to know that the person is coming to him and needs to accept the judge .

In movement we have improved quite a bit. We have much more suspended and harmonious side gait today. Fronts and rears work smoothly together as they should. This is important since the dog needs to be able to herd for hours not just run the ring a few times. Harmonious motion is a big part of the standard.

Are there specific problems that you see that still need improvement in breeding of the German Shepherd?

Despite the improvement in motion, we still have breeders who need to understand structure better. Straight fronts and short upper arms are two such issues. With these problems the dog does not function properly.

Also today we have many mediocre dogs and only a few real stars. That problem is often fostered by kennel blindness and lack of breed education . There are too many people who are close minded and think that their dog is the best one. They do not recognize the faults in their dogs and therefore do not know how to correct them. They can only see the faults in the dogs owned by others. The best way to realize the faults in their dogs is to point out or recognize the good virtues in the dogs that wins or beats their dog.

Good advice Joe! What about the stress that today's breeders place on the OFA?

I believe that today the OFA is important and should be a factor in breeding, but it is only one part of the dog. Now the number designation and also the DNA identification has become important. Now, false assumptions or claims are prevented; the procedure helps to keep people honest .

What is your opinion on artificial insemination and implants?

I believe in a natural breeding as the best. If a bitch is too tight, then it is not good; breeders do the artificial and perpetuate the problem in the progeny. The same with the male. If he will not breed naturally and always needs to do artificial, that trait is also passed on in the line. In Europe they do not do this kind of breeding. The male must breed by himself and the owner just holds the bitches head. They believe the dog must have libido and drive.

I do think there is a positive side to artificial breeding. Shipping sperm makes it easier to breed to dogs that require distant travel like the west coast. People have availability to any dog that way.

How do you select a puppy to keep or buy from a breeding?

Again I look to the standard and all that is presented there. I am also concerned with the pedigree. Good dogs are not produced from mediocre stock or paper - pedigree.

Obedience people believe in training a dog from eight weeks. When do you begin the training of your dogs?

For obedience I begin at six months and let them be a puppy until then. For the show ring I start at eight to twelve weeks

Today exhibitors talk about the All Breed verses the Specialty ring, do you have any thoughts to share with the readers on that topic?

To me the All Breed is not a student of our breed and to me they can not have the ability to know all the nuances of each breed. If I do not feel that I know all there is to know about the German Shepherd, then how can someone who does not raise or live with the

breed know about them? I think that if they do not really know the our breed, the judge can do harm to our dogs. Also our breed has a ground covering gait that can not really be seen if the ring is small. To judge our breed on standing is not judging well.

What about the judging you have seen in the Specialty ring today?

The procedure has improved with much more consistency in the format. The temperament test has eliminated problems and has helped to improve our breed. More specialty judges recognize the side gait but some are still lacking in knowledge. The parent and specialty clubs have the responsibility to offer education to the members to improve their knowledge.

Can you outline your judging procedure for the readers?

Experience and knowledge are important before you can judge. My procedure is much like that of Ernie (Loeb) and Connie (Beckhardt). The dogs come into the ring in catalog order. Next I ask the handlers to take the dogs around the ring twice, once my way and then how they prefer to exhibit the dog. My way must include a loose leash to see the dog as he really gaits.

Now the dogs must pass the individual test. I approach the dog with confidence and the dog should exhibit the same. The loose leash requires just a pat on the dog. Temperament remember also means that I can run my hand down the top line with my right hand, while holding my left hand on the neck. Then check the tail and testicles. As I do this, I also watch the reaction of the dog; is he comfortable or suspicious?

Then I watch the dog going and coming. The dog should go away easy to avoid hock weakness and not wobble. I also check the shape of the rear assembly; there should be an oval shaped croup and the tail should flow easily and be natural, not be tucked under the dog. The dog must be straight coming back, not pulling from right to left, and not throwing out an elbow. The entire front assembly should fall into place without the help of the handler.

When the dog proceeds around the ring with the handler, I double check the side gait. It is important that the judge know why he/she gives the dog the placing. The judge should evaluate according to the standard, the characteristics, the side gait, the proportions, and the animation of the dog. Above all, the judge should not waste time.

And what about giving points to puppies?

The judge needs to consider first how the dogs perform and the standard. To put up a puppy, the judge needs to also consider what the puppy might be in the future. Some puppies do not grow into what was expected.

Any other comments on the conduct of judges in the ring and in their relation to the exhibitors and clubs?

Judges need to be given respect and they should expect the same from the exhibitors and the handlers. Again I must stress the importance of knowledge about the breed. Also

today with the cost of travel and sometimes bringing in a judge for a show, the judge must be concerned with expenses that they charge to the club.

What about “double handling” any thoughts on that aspect of our sport ?

“Double handling” are the wrong words for that practice. It is MOTIVATION! Our breed needs motivation to sustain a continued full gait with ears up, not looking at the ground. The German Shepherd will not go around without motivation; the German Shepherd loves his owner who needs to be in the right place for the dog to show the best. “Remember the beagle does not chase an animal in the woods if there is no animal to chase!”

What advice do you have for new exhibitors who want to get into conformation?

The main problem that I see today is that people want to be an instant success whether showing or breeding. I spent from 1957 to 1964 to develop my breeding program and finish my first dog(s). I finished my first three dogs in 1964. The new person in the breed must first take the time to learn the breed. They need to listen, read and ask questions. Today we lack education on both the national and regional levels. Today instant success is more important than knowledge. Newcomers need to listen to the breeders, the handlers, attend educational seminars and study the breed. A knowledgeable breeder or exhibitor knows what they have. They should know all the faults of their dog’s structure, and for breeders, know what line will produce the correct structure. Honesty, integrity and knowledge should be components in our approach to our breed and breeding program.

Good advice. How about nutrition Joe, what do you feed your dogs?

The owner or breeder should feed the best that they can afford and what makes their dog look the best and perform the best. I have found Purina Pro- Plan to be the best for my dogs. I get large puppies from my bitches. My puppies have good pasterns and the food seems to keep the bones and muscles growing better together.

Joe, there are new people in the breed who have only heard or seen photos of Ernie Loeb. I know that you and Ernie were very good friends. Could you give the readers some insight about your friendship with this legend of the German Shepherd world?

Well, that is yet another chapter in the story of my years in German Shepherds. I met Ernie when I bred Geta to a German dog he suggested to me. He became my good friend and mentor but that was not as easy as it may sound. Ernie was a cautious man. When I went to his kennel, he asked me quite a few questions and also asked me my opinion about some of the dogs. He listened to my answers but did not say much at the time. We bred the bitch and Ernie invited me to come back to his place; one day he invited me to stay for dinner. Our friendship continued to grow from then on; once Ernie was a friend, I could not have asked for a more loyal or true friend. We traveled to Germany each year for twenty-six years. Today Ernie would feel that there is too much of the human element

involved in the sport of dogs and that it has become too much of a money business rather than a sport, designed to improve our breed. Ernie always said “a lot of people think they know because they don’t know how much they need to know” and ... “ they are satisfied with mediocre knowledge because they do not have to take a test.” In the past Ernie had a great influence on the breed; today I would say that Jimmy (Moses) and George (Berstler) would lead the list in both the All Breed and Specialty ring. Together Ernie, Jimmy and I imported many dogs from Germany.

I remember one time Ernie, his wife Selma, Maria and I were at a show together. I was judging that day. For the raffle Ernie and Selma had donated a beautiful picture of Sel. Ch. Bernd vom Kallergarten on velvet . Maria bought just one ticket. Since there were no children that day to pick the raffle ticket, I was asked to draw the winning ticket. I pulled Maria’s ticket number. Ernie and Selma were move to tears with happiness. Ernie said, “I can think of no better place for the portrait to go!” Ernie emphasized that I would recognize the value (historically and emotionally) of the picture to the breed and also I handled Bernd at the National in Long Island. Ernie was disappointed that year since he felt that the GV’s pigment and bone should have been better. Lamar had been on the GV that year and Harold Sands was the judge. Of course we had asked for and respected the judge’s opinion, but we did not have to be happy with it!

I know from the beginning of the interview that Jimmy is one of your great friends in the breed and that he is judging now. Any other judges whom you consider to be good friends.?

Oh, I have made many friends and acquaintances over the years. I consider Didi Ardoin, Ed Barritt and Ralph Roberts to be among the oldest and the best too. But I have many friends in the breed over the years. I prefer to deal with people who are concerned with the betterment of our breed.

Joe, knowing you, I am aware that you never brag or talk about the awards that you have earned from your peers. Could you give us an insight into some of the recognition you have earned from the German Shepherd fancy in the USA and in Europe?

I have had much success and have many things to be thankful for: Recently I received a gold pin and pocket watch for my fifty years in the SV .

Rex won GV Forever in Hungary; he had to go GV three years in a row to accomplish that title. No other dog has ever repeated his performance.

I received the Donald Cliff Memorial Sportsmanship Award in 2008 from the GSDCA. Although I began judging in the 1970’s, I was elected to judge the breed at the 2000 National Specialty.. I consider that to be a high point in my career. We retired the challenge trophy in the NNJGSDC club with GVX. Anton’s Jesse.

I was President of the GSDC of NNJ for the 50th Anniversary.

Finally every champion that I produced was also an honor because their quality was recognized by the judges and other breeders.

Finally Joe I know that you have been the president of NNJGSD Club for many years. How has the club changed over the years.?

I was elected for three tenures in the club as the president. The final time has been eleven years. I am retiring this year (2011). Over the years our club has been successful because we have tried to offer many activities to the members. We have confirmation, show handling, obedience, and education programs. Our club meets every Tuesday for some activity. At one time we had a very active breed evaluation program. Three people would evaluate the dog from nose to tail. We would also travel to other clubs to educate them on the evaluation. The evaluation faded today since people today want instant stars.

Would you like to add any final words for the German Shepherd enthusiasts who will read this interview?

Newcomers need to stick with knowledgeable breeders and listen and learn. But above all, we must all do the same for our lifetime!

Thank you, Joe, for allowing me to do this interview. It is a great honor to learn more about you, your life and your experiences in the German Shepherd world. But for me the greatest honor is to be able to call you my friend. - Lee