



Breeders' Briefcase

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Mentors and Mentees Part Three of Three

By Lisa Dubé Forman

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The relationship between mentor and mentee cannot be underestimated. As I said earlier it is a process of maturation and development. Interestingly enough as I write this article my dogs provided me with an ideal example of mentoring. Here I sit at my computer and outside my window I am observing my two intact males wandering around. The young male who is 18 months of age is continuously following the 5-year old stud dog around the fenced yard as the older male investigates every tree and rock my bitches have been near. I have females in season and so the elder is teaching the young. As the stud dog does so does the yearling. The older male teaches the yearling by example or some may believe the yearling simply imitates the elder. But the result is the same: the yearling is learning by and from his mentor. So it goes with us. Whatever the breed, the process is the same.

Yes, the learning aspect can be done via books and DVDs. Nevertheless I feel – and I am certain that many experienced, long time breeders will concur – these tools alone do not bring about a thorough understanding of a breed. Hands-on interaction with a number of dogs located at your mentor's cannot be duplicated

at a show. How else will you learn the intrinsic details of your breed but to go over detail after detail on your mentor's dogs? These sessions are not limited to intrinsic details of your breed but may also be significant to a particular group of dogs such as, in my case, sighthounds. There are many nuances in learning about sighthounds that my mentors taught me extremely well and to this day we still discuss various constructs of a sighthound –the essentials - the non-negotiables of attempting to produce the ideal sighthound. In my opinion, this cannot be learned by only observing dogs at a show ring. It can take years to absorb the many aspects of the canine musculoskeletal system and canine behavior and one accomplishes this by ongoing interaction with a veteran. As I said earlier, and it bears repeating, if a mentee had the privilege and opportunity to learn alongside a notable, qualified mentor with excessive hands-on training, going over lots of dogs and observing movement, the mentee would be able to discuss the anatomy and its interdependence with the muscle physiology vis-à-vis that particular breed's ideal skeletal construction.

The point is we never stop learning. I have often said and strongly feel

that even AKC judges who have been approved for dozens of years should still attend breed specialties to keep apprized as to the evolution or devolution of the breeds. Yes, read whatever you can acquire on your breed. Look at presentation material from when your breed originated such as print material, antique photos, and old movie recordings, but you cannot stop there. Reaching out to a doyenne of your breed is critical to learning and interpretation. If you are lucky enough establish rapport with several veterans in order to learn various viewpoints as we are all human and typically do not agree on every point except the fundamentals. The opportunity to learn at the knee of several mentors is extraordinary. Respect: at the risk of sounding impudent, respect is not merely acquired based on how many blue ribbons are accumulated or the number of group and best in show wins. I personally feel that in today's dog show sporting events achievements such as these are largely viewed with cynicism, and rightly so. I will not digress at this point but I suggest reading my previous article titled *The Dog Show Game, Telling it Like it is*.

I believe respect is earned through accumulation of knowledge and how one applies this all-inclusive knowledge. In breeding I believe respect is attained by becoming as knowledgeable as possible regarding your breed with all the mentioned recommendations and then breeding with that hard earned knowledge, irrespective of harmful and oftentimes manipulating outside stimuli. The latter being what appears as current breed trends: as the breeds are being restyled and transfigured. Respect is earned by breeding to the criterion as originally set forth and being

stubbornly fixed on your goals. To breed with consistency and with a vision is what earns one respect today in the dog show world – even begrudgingly from those who criticize. I believe that many veterans would quickly concur that it is a compliment received when your line of dogs is repeatedly viewed as consistent – when another remarks that they can always recognize your bloodline at a show. To achieve such consistency comes from dedication, pursuit of one's vision and remaining steadfast to the overall shape, look, and presence of that particular breed. It does not come from the act of arbitrarily collecting specimens of various lines or breeding to them based on some of their dog show records or point accumulation. Respect that you garner from contemporaries and even protégées is fulfilling but the most valuable and meaningful is the respect you will have for yourself. This feeling is not achieved by going the shortest and easiest route or by taking shortcuts to fulfill a passion for being the best at what you do. After much studying and learning through hands-on mentoring experience, in addition to the unrestricted sacrifices made by yourself, you will have pride, dignity and respect that stand out even when you are not winning in the show ring. Remember the often misquoted Grantland Rice, an American sportswriter who lived from 1880-1954, who once wrote, "For when the One Great Scorer comes, / To write against your name, / He marks - not that you won or lost - / But how you played the Game."