

Meet an Akita Owner with Kay Greisen
interview by J. Creason

Kay, How did you get involved with the Akita breed?

Early in our marriage, Eric was a graduate student at Cal Tech. He was studying radio astronomy and he was away at the observatory a lot. Frankly, I was uncomfortable being alone and thought that I would feel more secure having a dog. Now, I had never had a dog, except as a child we had a dog for maybe a day. Anyway, not knowing anything about dogs, Eric and I were trying to figure out what we might want and we were debating either a German Shepherd or a Malamute, thinking we'd get something exotic. We were just kind of mulling it over, and he mentioned it to some people he knew at school. One of those people happened to be Pete Lagus. Pete said, "Come over and see my puppies. I've got Akitas." We didn't know anything about Akitas. And I had never met Pete and Maggie. So, we went over to their house, and I was expecting to see little puppies. Well, Pete opened the door and along side him I saw this huge, I mean huge head. I screamed. It was Akita Tani's Kuroyama, a dog that at the time was a top winning Akita dog at the matches in southern California. Kuroyama went on to sire the first Best in Show Akita, Wanchan's Akagumo. Within 30 minutes of meeting Kuroyama and Mikan, Eric and I were convinced that this was the breed for us.

Pete's first dogs were from Akita Tani Kennels, which were owned by Liz and Al Harrell. He introduced us to Liz and Al and their dogs. We eventually got our first Akita from them and actually our subsequent Akitas, as well, were from Akita Tani. We started attending monthly ACA meetings even before we brought home our first Akita puppy in January 1969.

Now that you were an Akita owner, what happened next with your involvement and interest in the breed?

Akita Tani Kennels had quite a few dogs. Akita Tani did not own the dam of our first dog, but they had produced her, bred her, and Liz whelped the litter for the owners. Liz and Al owned the sire and we met him. We also met all the grandparents and several of the great grandparents. It was wonderful to see all the ancestors behind our puppy. It was a living pedigree. The thing I really appreciate about the arrangement at Akita Tani was not just being able to see the ancestors of my dogs and what they looked like but getting to know their temperaments. It was delightful how friendly they were. Every time we would go down there, we would visit every dog. We would go, one by one, to each pen and greet each dog, and they would come to see us. We would put our hands in and pet them, and they would wag their tails and lick our hands to greet us.

We would go down to Akita Tani kennels, it seems, just about every weekend to sit around and talk about the dogs with Liz and often a number of others gathered in conversation. This is where I first met Rusty Cunningham (now Rusty Short). They would have handling classes on the weekends; someone would teach conformation. We got started taking our first dog Teru to puppy matches, and that became one of our primary activities. Our social life centered around the dog matches. And, of course, at that time this was in the late 60s/early 70s; we are talking miscellaneous class and puppy matches. In a lot of the conversations with Liz we talked about pedigrees. I was working in a genetics research lab at the time and was interested in genetics in general. Studying pedigrees and learning some dog genetics was grabbing my attention, and Liz encouraged me to join the registration committee.

Teru was the ringleader of his litter. He was a real smart aleck. He apparently figured out how to open the latch to the puppy pen, and he led all the puppies out. He was real cute. He was the only one in the litter with a blaze on his muzzle. He was Al's personal favorite in that litter, and I think Al probably paid a little more attention to him than to the others. One day when I was down there with Teru at a conformation class, he saw Al from a distance. He hadn't seen Al for probably about 6 to 9 months. It didn't matter that I was holding the leash; he just took off and made a beeline for Al. Now, Al was a tall, slender guy and Teru must've weighed about 80 or 90 lbs. Teru leaped up into Al's arms and hugged him

and licked him all over his face, and it was a sight to behold. Al couldn't have been happier. I remember another occasion in conformation class with Tomo. She saw a squirrel and took off, leaving me flat on the ground while she bolted across the field. That was embarrassing!

We got Tomo 9 months after we got Teru. The day we brought her home at 8 weeks Teru ecstatically charged around the yard nonstop until we introduced them. He was so gentle with her; he would literally throw himself off-balance to avoid stepping on her when they were playing. They became fast friends and adored each other.

One of my most unforgettable memories is an incident when I took Tomo to the vet. I sewed a lot and had a fair amount of fabric left over. I made a pair of "season" pants for Tomo because they didn't have any in the pet shops that were her size. I chose some bright kelly green plaid fabric left over from a dress of mine. One day I took her to the vet when she was in heat and wearing her pants. Sitting in the veterinary clinic, I suddenly realized I was wearing my matching kelly green dress. I was so embarrassed. It was like mother and daughter in their matching outfits.

Kay, what was it like being in the breed in the sixties?

There was the parent breed club and the chapter clubs. I was living in Pasadena, California so I was a member of the parent breed club. In those days the parent breed club held regular monthly meetings. When we first started attending, the meetings were small and they were held in members' homes, on a rotating basis as I recall. Then, as the meetings got too large for that, they switched to a regular meeting hall. Now, I don't know what it was like being a member of the chapter clubs but there were, of course, a lot of political wars going on in the parent club; meetings were stimulating and exciting. You never knew what was going to happen. There was always an undercurrent. You would show up at a meeting and suddenly the room was packed.

What I became actively involved with was the Registry. Back in the 50s, the Fishers got the Akita breed into the Miscellaneous class. When the club first formed, Liz Harrell started the ACA Registry, which meant that she put together the papers for the registration of the litters, the American-born individual dogs, and the Japanese imports. The original papers that she submitted to the American Kennel Club in 1962 when the ACA tried to get the breed recognized the first go round included the records of 454 dogs (and weighed 75 pounds). Nancy Hoeltje was handling the registration papers when I got my first dog, and people were not particularly happy with the way things were going. She was extremely slow in processing the papers. So, eventually, a Registration Committee was formed. Monica Vogl headed up the committee. In March 1971, I joined the committee; Barbara Uyeda was a member, and Eric also joined the committee at some point. If there were other members, I don't recall who they were. Eric and I wrote up a booklet of registration rules with new forms because there didn't seem to be any uniformity, and a lot of people seemed confused about what the procedures were. We wanted to make it clear and concise and have everything be uniform. Part of the reason for establishing a committee was to reassure everyone that all forms would be processed equally according to rules. In December 1971, I became the acting ACA Registrar.

It became clear at some point that the breed was going to be recognized. This was shortly before Eric was finishing his degree, and we were planning to move to the East Coast. We were under the impression that, when the breed is recognized, all you do is turn over your records to the American Kennel Club. So, we thought, rather than ship all the records to New York, we would just take them with us to Virginia and at the appropriate time we would drive them to New York (which was agreeable with the Board)... only that wasn't the way it played out. What happened was we moved to Charlottesville, Virginia [with all the stud book files] in Sept '72, and I believe it must've been around October of that year that we learned definitively that the breed was going to be recognized.... because the cut-off for litters was Nov 1, 1972. All American-born Akita litters born on or after that date would have to be registered directly with AKC.

Anyway, the way the system was explained to us was that someone (or some committee) in the club had to process a totally new application for every dog that would be registered with AKC as foundation stock. AKC did not want us to deposit our voluminous records on their doorstep (the records filled half of a 1971 3/4 ton Dodge van). Since we were in the middle of nowhere in Virginia with all the records and nobody but me within 3000 miles who knew anything about how to use them, either I had to do this task or it wasn't going to get done. There were no other Akitas in Charlottesville. We were in a remote location and there was no one we could call for help. So, we bit the bullet because this was important to us. Instead of getting a job, I would simply do foundation stock registration. I don't remember exactly when "the madness" began, but the first thing we had to do in the foundation stock registration process was prepare a bulk mailing to everyone who had ever registered an Akita with the ACA to announce the limited opportunity to register their Akita with AKC during the foundation stock registration period.

So, tell me about the registration process. What did that involve?

OK. The regular ACA registration process involved several things. When a U.S. born litter was born to a sire and dam that were already registered with the ACA, the owner of the litter submitted the litter registration form to the ACA Registrar and, in return, received applications to register the individual puppies. As each puppy was sold, the owner of the litter could give a registration paper to each new puppy owner. Then each new owner could individually register his or her puppy. So when you register the litter or an individual dog or bitch, you submit the application along with a fee. For an import, the dog or bitch had to have an appropriate 3-generation pedigree from one of the Japanese registries. Back then those included Akiho, Akikyo, Akihokyo, Nichiho, Japan Kennel Club, or Japan Dog Federation. Some of the imports had pedigrees issued by Nippon Aiken Club rather than one of these registries. Some were only in English transliteration, some only in Japanese, the rest in both. The ACA registered 686 litters and 3150 individual Akitas.

Now, with regard to foundation stock registration.... if the person wanted the dog registered with AKC as foundation stock, the owner had to file a particular form (with a fee) with the ACA Registry so that it could be processed prior to being forwarded to the AKC. I would send packets of probably 50-100 applications at a time to William F. Stifel, Executive Secretary of the AKC. The eligible dogs were ACA-registered either way whether they were registered prior to or only during the foundation stock registration period. But, if they were ACA-registered during the foundation stock registration period, the letters FS preceded their ACA registration number. Each dog that was individually registered through the ACA received a signed certificate decorated with a gold seal embossed with the club logo. 663 Akitas who were not previously registered with the ACA were registered during the foundation stock registration period, which formally ended February 28, 1974.

During this process I had to write what seemed like a million letters, answer a lot of phone calls, type and sign hundreds of certificates, etc. Many people could not follow the simple instructions on filling out forms; it was very frustrating. I had to send a large percentage of the forms back because they weren't completed correctly. It was incredibly time-consuming. At the beginning of foundation stock registration, I think the first show where Akitas could compete for points was in April '73, and a lot of people wanted desperately to enter their dogs. But, to do so, they had to be AKC-registered. That meant the dogs had to be foundation stock registered. People would call and plead with me to be sure to get their dog's papers done in time for the show. Well, I processed the forms in the order in which they arrived, and I did the best I could. We were totally swamped in the beginning. I was always amused when people contacted me later and asked, "By the way, did you enter your dog in that first show?" Well, no, I was holed up at home processing the papers as fast as I could so everybody else could show their dogs! The first few months during foundation stock, I was working 100 hours a week doing the registrations. I'm not exaggerating. Eric was working his full-time job and putting in about another 40 hours a week helping me with the registrations. All this free for the Akita breed and the Akita Club. And, you know, I think most Akita people today don't even know anybody ever did this.

The ACA recognized me and Eric by presenting us with a lovely plaque with this engraving: “The Akita Club of America, Inc. presents to Eric and Kay Greisen this award for their relentless and unselfish efforts on behalf of the Akita breed 1973-1974”. At the same time I received a congratulatory letter from ACA President Gus Bell informing me that, due to my fine work, the AKC intended to use the Akita as a model for foundation stock registration of future breeds. I felt honored.

In October 1998, I attended the 25th Silver Anniversary National Specialty in San Diego. After more than a 20-year absence, this was my first return to the club. I felt deeply touched that this breed I had worked so hard to register had reached its 25th anniversary (since AKC recognition). At the banquet when different people in the audience were singled out for recognition, some allowed to speak, no one introduced me or acknowledged the contribution I had made. When the acknowledgments were over, and I realized I was not going to be recognized, it was all I could do not to run out of the room and cry. I believe that, if no one had done the work of handling foundation stock registration, there would not have been a 25th anniversary in 1998. I realize that fame and recognition are fleeting; if we’re lucky, in our lifetimes we’ll get 15 minutes. But this was a special occasion marking the *Silver Anniversary of Recognition*, twenty-five years since the beginning of foundation stock registration. And, I had been the Registrar, the one in the trenches who had made it happen. I was deeply hurt by this lack of recognition. I appreciate the fact that I have this opportunity now to describe what I did. [Not only was I not introduced, but the only living founder of the ACA (Liz Harrell) also present at the banquet, was not recognized for her many contributions to the club and the breed.]

Hours before I left for the 1998 National, I received a Certificate of Distinguished Achievement from the Raritan River Akita Club and in September 1999 they awarded me another Certificate of Distinguished Achievement as well as a bronze medallion. I cried receiving this recognition after so many years, realizing that this chapter club had appreciated my efforts.

So, at the conclusion of the registration process, what did you realize, if anything, after handling all of these records for the dogs?

Well, there I was in Virginia with all these records and no one was going to have access to them except me. I thought this wasn’t right. I believed that Akita owners should be able to research the pedigrees of the dogs in the background of their dogs’ pedigrees. So, I wanted to do something to make this data available. I was in communication with Joe Vogl, who was the President of the Akita Club at the time, and also William F. Stifel, Executive Secretary of the AKC. We were all discussing this, and ultimately the concept of the *ACA Akita Stud Book Register* came about. The stud book REGISTER is a compilation of all the pedigree data relevant to AKC foundation stock registered Akitas. It is not a listing of all Akitas ever registered with the ACA (generally referred to as the ACA Stud Book). It includes 4 sections with which you can generate pedigrees:

- The 1st section is the litter registrations: every litter that had foundation stock Akitas or Akitas ancestral to foundation stock Akitas. [528 litters]
- The 2nd section is every individual Akita that was registered as foundation stock. This included both living and deceased Akitas. [1862 f.s. Akitas]
- The 3rd section is every individual Akita that was not individually registered as foundation stock but was ancestral to a foundation stock registered Akita. This section was needed to fill in the gaps and allow the generation of a complete pedigree going back to every Japanese import behind each foundation stock registered Akita. [269 Akitas ancestral to f.s. Akitas]
- The 4th section is a 3-generation pedigree of every import listed in section 2 or section 3. [340 imports]

Now, in order to do the import pedigrees, I had to learn to transliterate some Japanese. I had to get help from some people with whom I was communicating by mail in Okinawa; people whom I had met through registrations when I couldn’t figure out how to do some transliterations on my own. So this was quite a learning experience for me, never having known any Japanese. I acquired a number of Japanese

dictionaries including one very large character dictionary and spent a lot of time learning to read and recognize the characters. I studied the import pedigrees for which we already had official transliterations and learned to recognize the familiar characters that recurred in many of the other pedigrees. I always tried to be sure to transliterate, not necessarily the same character, but the same dog's name the same way in every pedigree where it appeared. As a scientist, I have a natural attention to detail. Fortunately, it seemed to carry over into reading Japanese characters and being able to spell transliterations of Japanese names.

Is this a book that people can still use today?

If they can generate a pedigree that goes back to a dog in foundation stock, then yes, they can still use it. People have asked me how to use the *ACA Akita Stud Book Register* to connect that data to what they see in their current dogs' pedigrees. It can be used in conjunction with the monthly issues of *The American Kennel Club Stud Book Register* (beginning with Volume 90, Number 5 of May 1973) to generate past and current pedigrees. To the best of my knowledge, the copyrighted pedigree data presented in the *ACA Akita Stud Book Register* is not published by anyone else, including AKC. [The only data that, to my knowledge, are not published currently are the 3-generation pedigrees of the imports registered since AKC reopened the Akita Stud Book in 1992.] Incidentally, the number of errors I've seen in pedigrees prepared by breeders...appalls me: not just errors in spelling, but errors of lineage. The stud book can be used to check a pedigree for accuracy.

People can use the pedigrees to see the relationships that exist in the backgrounds of their dogs. If you have any curiosity beyond a standard 3-generation pedigree, if you're interested in researching pedigrees, the stud book register can be used to follow all kinds of hereditary temperament problems and diseases that are cropping up in this breed. People are linebreeding; people are inbreeding. Without looking at pedigrees, you don't know what you're dealing with. And, it may be that you don't have to use the stud book register to look at your pedigrees, but people better be studying their pedigrees and I mean going back way beyond 3 generations.

Obviously pedigrees are important to genetics and health, which is the reason that Dr Angles requested pedigrees in the UC Davis Canine Immunogenetics Project.

That's right. I also understand that he was presented a copy of the *ACA Akita Stud Book Register* to use in conjunction with his Akita genetics studies. Getting back to your question, when it comes to breeding, there are a lot of things that need to be considered. Now, I'm not a breeder but a few things seem obvious to me. You look at pedigrees, you look at conformation, you factor in what's going on in the show ring, and you take into account health history and genetics. If you can go back far enough to bring the stud book register into play, the stud book can help. But, what the stud book register can't tell you is the health issues, genetic diseases, temperament problems, any of that. It can only give you lineage, sire and dam, dates, etc. It also can show you inbreeding or linebreeding patterns when you generate the pedigrees you want.

Which is a starting point.

I believe the best way to address the study of genetic disorders in conjunction with pedigree research is to have an open registry for hereditary Akita diseases and disorders. Liz Harrell proposed an open registry in the 70s, and in return, received a death threat, a phone call announcing that she would ruin lives, plus a great deal of hostility. Barbara Bouyet mentioned in her *Akita Dog* interview that she proposed such a registry without success. On the Akita-L list, I also proposed to set up and maintain an open registry in 1998, and it was opposed vehemently. I think it is a serious mistake to keep these issues secretive. Without information about carriers of hereditary disorders, breeders are playing Russian Roulette.

I propose that, as a membership requirement, the ACA mandate participation in an open registry for hereditary diseases and disorders. One of the main purposes set forth in the original ACA Articles of

Incorporation is to preserve and protect the Akita breed. Specifically, it refers to "...advance the welfare of the Akita dog in America", "...promote better care, control, breeding and selling practices...." I can't think of a better way to do it than this. There are far too many Akitas with life-limiting hereditary diseases being produced and used in breeding programs by uninformed breeders and some others who should know better. The ACA needs to put the welfare of Akitas ahead of breeders' egos and special interests in keeping the hereditary problems in their line secret.

As an Akita owner, what are the most important issues when you're getting an Akita from a breeder?

Health and temperament. To me, they go hand in hand. I need to know that I can trust that the dog has a stable disposition. I'm happy to say that's been the case with every Akita I've had. I also want the dog to be healthy. Not just so that the dog will have a happy life, but also so that I'm not spending all of my time taking the dog to the vet and spending a lot of money treating a condition that ends in heartbreak.

I can take Benny anywhere. I take him down to Los Angeles to visit my brother Arthur, and Benny gets along with his household of dogs, including 3 Bichons and a neutered Black Lab dog that's bigger than Benny. I also take Benny to a regional park where he runs free with his Akita/Chow running buddy Sasha. This 600-acre park has open spaces as well as wooded areas with creeks and a lagoon. There are cows present at times, people on bicycles and on horseback. Benny loves to run full-tilt, periodically returning to check in with me. I put a blinking mini beacon on his collar if we're there near dark so I can see where he is; it's great to see his red light flashing through the trees after dark. When he gets overheated, he goes into the creek and settles down in the water. He loves to greet people and other dogs while he's on his rounds.

How would you describe the ideal relationship between the Akita owner and their breeder?

I've had 4 Akitas. Nine months after I got my first Akita Teru, I got my 2nd Akita Tomo. A year after Teru died we got a 3rd Akita Takane. After Eric and I divorced, I was "dogless" for many years. I got my 4th Akita in 1997. My first 3 Akitas were from Akita Tani; Benny is half Akita Tani. I had wanted to get a bitch puppy and, when I contacted Liz about a pup, I learned about Benny. He had been repossessed after the first owners stole him and severely abused him. He was a year and a half old and needed a good home. At first, I was apprehensive about getting a dog that had been abused, wondering how the abuse would manifest in his behavior. During the last 12 years, however, several cats have sought food and shelter in my yard and home. Initially wild and unapproachable, they were transformed into loving companions through my care and compassion. I felt these cats were my training for Benny. So, I got Benny. What was your question?

Breeders. Can they help an Akita owner?

I learned so much from Liz Harrell. I don't know what it would be like to be a novice dog owner or a novice Akita owner and have a breeder who didn't communicate. Liz was always interested in the well-being of the dogs she placed. In my experience she was never too busy to answer questions or discuss the dogs' care. Since Eric and I had never had a dog before, this was vital for us. We started out with a blank slate, and we called her with questions all the time. We'd ask about everything from behavior to health care to grooming to training to feeding.... Is there more? Oh, yes, potty-training. Liz was full of suggestions. Yes, in retrospect, I can imagine that the breeder's level of interest in the pup [or adult for that matter] could have a very direct bearing on whether it ends up in rescue. If the breeder doesn't provide support to the new owner, that pup could easily land in rescue if problems arise.

How are things different now compared to when you were first an Akita owner?

One of the first things that comes to mind is how technical advances impact being an Akita owner. If you have a computer or access to one, you can get on an Akita list and communicate with other Akita owners

practically anywhere in the world. You can talk to them about health, training, feeding, breeding, fluff, club politics, or you can just be a silent lurker. You can research all kinds of veterinary issues on the Web. The ACA can reach members and non-members alike through its Web site.

There are new food products for dogs [including wonderful things that help prevent bloat], and there are new procedures that are far more advanced than they were 25-30 years ago. And, who would've thought to take their dog to a chiropractor? I'd never heard of it before, but I've been taking Benny lately and it's been having a very positive result. He had a lot of misalignment presumably resulting from his early physical abuse. His pelvis was visibly tilted and, as a result, he was putting about 5 pounds more weight on one foot than the other. Benny had slight scoliosis, and some of his vertebrae were sufficiently out of alignment that he probably had some pinched nerves. After the first set of adjustments, which successfully leveled his pelvis and removed the unnatural spinal curve, his rear stance broadened, appeared more powerful and his gait flowed much more freely. He's been a very picky eater for a long time, restricting himself only to very easily digested foods. Those pinched nerves were going to his gut, and now he's starting to eat a greater variety of foods. Amazing!

Are there any last words you want to say?

Teru, my first Akita, was also my first dog. Once when Eric and I were on a vacation, we were gone for 2 weeks, which was the longest we ever left Teru and Tomo. The night before we returned, Teru died in the boarding kennel. Teru wasn't even 7 years old. Since the autopsy report showed no clear cause of death, I believe he died of a broken heart thinking he was abandoned. I was devastated losing Teru. I absolutely adored him and, losing him, I felt as though my life was shattered. I had spent so much time working on the Registry and working on the stud book. And then losing him so suddenly, so unexpectedly....it seemed like I hadn't spent enough time with him. And it also seemed like I had spent a lot of time thinking about how horrible it would be when I eventually did lose him. I think it's important to focus on spending time enjoying being with our dogs and not focus on Whenever I was at my desk working on the stud book or the registry, the dogs were always there at my feet silently waiting their turn, just waiting. And, in a way, I'm lucky right now, I have time to spend with Benny. I can take him to a park where I let him run loose with another dog through the fields and in a creek. He just takes off and runs free, and it's such a joy to see him do that. I know that he's having a happy life.

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One dog can devastate a breed. I heard a story from a long-time breeder of Cocker Spaniels. A multi BIS winning dog in the mid-sixties had a spectacular apple-shaped head. Just about everybody sent their bitches to him for breeding. When the pups reached around 1-2 years old, altogether too many of them developed hydrocephaly. The breeders began comparing notes, and eventually realized the source of the problem---our boy with the apple-shaped head. Meanwhile, many carriers, who appeared perfectly normal had already been bred, putting yet another generation of carriers and diseased dogs on the ground. It took approximately 20 years of careful breeding to reach the point of not being fearful when doing a breeding. This dog was used in close breedings as well as total outcrossings. Cockers in this country will probably never be free of hydrocephaly. This "popular sire effect" results when people flock for stud service to the top winning dog. If the dog happens to have a genetic disorder (as was the case here) and he is bred to a great many bitches, that disorder can be disseminated throughout the breed in one generation. Sadly, this situation has happened in more than one breed.

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better. It's got to come under control or we may soon be hearing the same words that were spoken to the Kerry Blue Terrier breeders.

I was told about a situation with the Kerry Blue Terriers, a breed that has serious problems with autobitrophia. Cornell Veterinary school collected pedigrees of affected dogs and traced the disease back to three dogs, all from the same kennel. During the Montgomery County, Pennsylvania Dog Show, as exhibitors of the Kerry Blues entered the banquet hall, they were greeted with large posters of the top winning dogs, the number one Kerry Blue of all time, and new up-and-coming dogs and their pedigrees. Delighted people strolled around the ballroom, bragging about their dogs. Shortly thereafter, a speaker from Cornell told the audience that all the dogs on the wall had one thing in common: they were carriers and producers of autobitrophia. The speaker announced that, if they didn't get their act together, their breed would be extinct in 5 years. Everyone was aghast, some were sobbing, and many threatened to sue Cornell for reporting the facts publicly. The biggest multi-BIS winning Kerry Blue of all time was neutered. These breeders did NOT establish an open registry; but after the information identifying carriers was made public, significant improvements were made. However, if everyone had been open about the problems in their line, the disease would've resolved much faster and with deeper penetration into the breed. Autobitrophia still exists in Kerry Blue Terriers in the U.S. today.

I was also told that Bouvier des Flanders have hereditary heart problems, and the Bouvier club hired the University of Florida Veterinary school to do a study for them. When the University of Florida informed the parent breed club that they'd need to establish an open registry, the club voted it down. They were not willing to put the dogs' best interests ahead of their own. They'd rather continue producing dogs with life-limiting heart problems. Go figure.

I read an article in *Time Magazine* from December of 1994 about how the obsessive focus on show-ring looks is destroying the health of America's purebred dogs. I was struck by what it said about how several dog clubs are dealing with genetic problems in their breeds. After the development of a PRA screening test, the Portuguese Water Dog Club tested their dogs, identified the carriers, and stopped breeding them. Within 3 years, the incidence of PRA in their breed was cut in half. At least 3 Rottweiler Clubs forbid the breeding of dogs missing more than one tooth, which may be a sign of a genetic defect. These clubs provide an excellent example of what can be accomplished when breed clubs are focused on the welfare of the dog.

Kay, as ACA Registrar, you spent several years of your life and 1000's of hours on pedigrees to stabilize the breed. You painstakingly compiled all those pedigrees, making sure they were accurate. That was a labor of love to preserve and protect the breed. How do you feel about the imports coming in today?

(Chuckle) My personal opinion is that, because the breed in Japan was developed separately from the breed in this country for 30 years or more, it has become genetically separate and distinct. In my opinion that makes it a different breed. When you consider that the appearance of an animal is a reflection of its genetic makeup, and the American Akitas look so different from the Japanese Akitas, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that they're genetically different.

I am a scientist. I have a degree in biochemistry and I've studied molecular biology and genetics. I understand the basics and beyond, understand a little bit about population genetics and how populations can diverge, and I believe that's what's happened here. Through selection these two populations have diverged genetically. Whereas they may have started from the same gene pool, they no longer represent the same gene pool. I think AKC's decision to open its stud book to Japanese Akita imports again in 1992 without first consulting the parent breed club was totally irresponsible. I know this is a hot political issue. But since you're asking me as an Akita owner and former ACA Registrar, my opinion is: I don't like it. And I don't like that our dogs will not be called Akitas in FCI countries. I have no objection to the Japanese Akitas. I think they're beautiful. I just don't believe they should be bred to the American Akitas. The American Akita is certainly more closely related genetically to the Japanese Akita than it is to some

other randomly selected breed, but in my view, they're not the same breed. Because I regard them as different breeds, my feeling is that, if you want to introduce a different type, just pick whatever breed you like and breed to that. Why pick the Japanese Akita and limit yourself that way? Of course, I'm being somewhat facetious.