

# Meet Your Breeders!

## Susan Kamen Marsicano ~ Apu Basenjjs

**1, 2, 10. How did you get started in Basenjjs? Your chosen kennel name is APU; how did you choose this name? Why? Does it have a meaning? Why did you start breeding? When?**

### **The Story of Apu**

My mother was young and trying to keep my asthmatic sibling alive, when I was growing up, but I brought every stray dog home. She, without fail, had them all carted off. She was doing her best.

I left home at the age of 17 to go to art school in NYC. I left Long Island, NY, in 1958, got out of the subway at Astor Place in Manhattan, and stepped over a sleeping derelict; and so my life began, for real, at Cooper Union Art School. Cooper is a scholarship school. I was so proud to be admitted, and am still proud to be a CUAS alumna.

In 1959, the day after I left home, I walked to the 92nd St. ASPCA in a blizzard (the subways weren't running). That day I got my first dog that I could keep. She was a wee, prick-eared cinnamon colored short-coated mix, with one ear a little floppy, about 3 to 4 months old, and she had distemper. I named her Apu. She went with me all over the world. We had little money, no car, but nice stuff, like Brie and caviar, some small luxuries, and none of the necessities. Apu went to Cooper Union and the San Francisco Art Institute. She posed with all my nude models, striking the same poses.

Apu was 1/4 Basenji. I found this out, in 1961, when Bob Mankey (Cambria Basenjjs) chased me up Nob Hill in San Francisco, asking if she was a Basenji. He gave me his pamphlet on "the Basenji, the dog who didn't bark and cried real tears."

Later, back in New York, I lived on Pearl Street in the financial district, and passers-by kept calling Apu, "Orange." I finally ran into Elsworth Kelly (famous NY sculptor/painter) walking "Orange." He told me that Orange was 1/2 Basenji, born of a Basenji bitch in Paris (belonging to Delphine Seyrig, who starred in Last Year in Marienbad), and he told me that Orange was indeed Apu's dam. Apu & I had over 13 years together.

I buried Apu in the garden at Gansevoort Market & Little West 12th Street. A young girl named Kyrie poured a bottle of wine on her grave. Apu had liked to drink. The time was 1972 and the times, they were a changing.

Four months later I went up to Harrison, NY on Conrail carrying a portfolio of drawings of Apu to show off. That day I got my first Basenji, Bomabwa Blushing Bride. Her breeder, Bobbi Abelson, sent Blush home with me on the train in a Girl Scout cookie box, after giving me a concise briefing on the breed's health and temperament issues. She told me to test Blush for HA when she was 6 months old. I remember that she typed a five - generation pedigree out without notes.

Almost 2 years later I bred Blush to Kathy Helming's lovely Headliner, and chose to name my basenjjs after Apu. At that moment Apu's Basenjjs was born too.

Apu was named after the first truly great art films I ever saw. It was the first film of the great Apu Trilogy ~ Pather Panchali, Aparajito, & the World of Apu: directed by Satyajit Ray, the Bengali master. Apu was the young boy in Pather Panchali and the main character in the trilogy. There is a dog drawn on the wall in Apu's village, and later the dog is there, too. Merchant Ivory has restored the trilogy of films. I recommend them as amongst the best films of all time.

Just last fall my niece began college (5 years at Tufts and the Boston Museum School). She emailed me this: "We just watched Panther Panchali in my film class. Wow. Wow wow, that's a good movie. We should watch the rest of the Apu movies together sometime."

"No one else in the class thought that the little curly-tailed dog was the best part of the film...It is also my film teacher's favorite movie. I can't believe I'd never seen it before, when Apu's have been so important in my life!"

### **3. What persons influenced you most strongly?**

Initially Bobbi Abelson and Barbara Wardell (Nady) introduced me to the health and temperament of the breed, and told me the history, and taught me the pedigrees. Ross Newman, who loved to talk, shared a great deal of information.

Dr. Jean Dodds set me on track to grasping the idea of maintaining a high immune threshold, and remains my mentor.

### **4. What have you seen improve in Basenjjs over the years?**

The effort of our basenji community to expand our gene pool has been extraordinary. One consequence is that we now see additional patternings and colorations. I think there can be no badly colored hound, excluding a color genetically linked to poor immunity or other genetic issues. Our community's foray into the science of DNA markers and testing is top notch.

### **5. What do you think today's Basenji breeders need to pay special attention to?**

That is for each to decide for him or herself.

### **6. What advice do you have to a new breeder getting started?**

Don't breed every year. Give what you do time to mellow. Allow time for you to get some data. Health test, health test, health test. No excuse to breed a dog who has not had a hip x-ray, or is not CERF'd, or who has not been thyroid tested. It's easy to test patellas too. There is no excuse to breed from a dog that is not mentally stable, no matter how lovely. Find a mentor to understand the dogs in the pedigree. Build a pedigree of long-lived (16 years), friendly, pretty dogs. If they can win in the show ring, that is an added Mitzvah.

### **7. What dogs you've seen or owned stand out as outstanding examples of the breed and why?**

I had a real soft spot for Music City Serengeti Jazzman, and before him, for Mamba. I loved Kathy Helming's b/w, Ch Trotwood's Cannonball. I loved Johnny, and M'Bliki.

In my family of dogs I think Ch Apu Days of Our Lives was perfect breed type. I think the same is true of Uschi Grewe's BIS Multi CH Apu Peas an Hominy, and this continues in his get. Two that come to mind are Hanneke Bijker's BIS, Multi CH Isimo ti-n About Teka, and Uschi's Multi CH. Imani ti-n About Teka. I like the fierce brain power and breed type of my "M," who is Ch Apu Little Red Lentil RE AX AXJ CGC TDIA MVB. My dear tri youngster, Apu Guy Noir RN CGC (TDI), is "candy to the eye."

**8. What do you feel are your most significant achievements with the breed?**

I have 2 dogs in the honored group of Master Versatile Basenjis. M and Occhi each have a good shot at living long lives, as well. M is Ch Apu Little Red Lentil RE AX AXJ CGC TDIA MVB, and was invited to the 2006 AKC Agility Invitational. Occhi is FC Apu Occhi Belli RA OA NAJ MC LCX FCH CGC TDIA MVB. See my page in the BCOA roster for 2006 new titles for Apu dogs.

**9. Anything else you would like to say?**

Try doing Therapy Work with your basenjis. It is a valuable way to spend your time. And! Please! Buy raffles tickets for the Lunetta/Kamen Basenji Health Endowment Quilt. ♦



Photo by Susan Kamen-Marsicano

M & Elsie at Senior Residence where we do therapy dog work



Photo by Karen Christensen

"M" in Group



Photo by Susan Kamen-Marsicano

"Guy Noir"

"M" in tunnel



Photo by Tien Tram

# Apu

Basenjis

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