

Mrs. Olivia Burn writes...

Veronica Tudor-Williams shared this bit of history in her books “*Basenjis: The Barkless Dogs*”

“The lot of a pioneer of a new breed is not always an enviable one.

“In 1929, during my first trip to the Belgian Congo, I fell in love with the native hunting dogs, and kept several of them in the bungalow as pets, and to flush game when we were shooting. They proved so clever and companionable, particularly when we were on trek or in camp that I decided to bring some home. Having bred and shown Wire-haired Terriers for ten years, they seemed to me to be the answer to the average person’s prayer! They demanded no trimming nor grooming, they were always clean, sweet and free from doggy smell, and they had high intelligence and faithfulness. I shall always remember the good-tempered chaffing of many old friends among Wire breeders, who kept trying to make them bark at their first few shows, and pretending to be convinced that I had produced them by crossing a Corgi with a Bull Terrier!

“My chief difficulty was to get them recognized as a breed. Finally, Mr. Vevers, of the London Zoo, and several

Kennel Club notabilities, inspected them in quarantine, and agreed to register them under the nomenclature of Basenjis. The literal translation of this native word is ‘bush thing’ or ‘wild thing.’

“Being non-European dogs, without perhaps much natural immunity, I greatly feared the risks of distemper, so decided to have them inoculated before emerging from quarantine. It was forbidden to use the vaccine-virus method, now so commonly and successfully in use, only the vaccine was given, which confers immunity temporarily. After the second dose all five developed a most virulent form of...distemper.

“Only one survived, a very enchanting bitch which I kept as a pet for three years.

“Distemper research was still incomplete then, and it was at this time that poor Countess Howe lost an entire batch of her beautiful gundogs, dozens of them, also from inoculation.

“It was heart-breaking, as well as disastrous financially, all the expense of their quarantine and everything, for nothing.

“In 1933, I managed to persuade a chief of the Feshis to part with a fine typical dog called Kiluba. He came safely through quarantine and my bitch was duly mated to him. She died in three weeks from septicaemia caused by an internal tear during service, a most unusual occurrence.

“I returned to the Congo, very disappointed, but still determined. Fortunately this time I included another dog with the two bitches, the famous Bongo of Blean. Bokoto was already in whelp to him and produced in quarantine the lovely litter that made such a stir at Crufts in 1937 when the breed made its debut. All the newspapers had paragraphs about the ‘Barkless Dogs,’ with fantastic and exaggerated descriptions of their appearances and habits. The kennels were besieged by Press photographers, who

crowded Victoria Station when we arrived for the show. Special police had to be employed to move on the crowds by the Basenji benches. By the second day I was hoarse and utterly voiceless from answering the hundred and hundreds of questions among the familiar din of Crufts.

“Kiluba had been left in kennels during my absence abroad, and appeared very out of sorts when we went to collect him. We think a fish-bone must have caused an ulcer which was revealed during a post-mortem after his death. I really felt then that the Gods of Africa were angry, and did not intend that their native breed should ever flourish on foreign soil.

“However, after years of struggle, loss and heartbreak, my beloved Basenjies did finally become fully established, and have developed into the popular and greatly improved breed that Miss Tudor-Williams so ably describes in this book.”