

UnderCover Basenjis: Gale Whitehurst

Meet Your Breeder

How did you get started in Basenjis?

In 1975, I adopted my daughter, Ashley. She was an only child, as I had been. When she turned 10, I began to worry about what my life would be like when she left for college. I well remembered my mother's "empty nest" syndrome when I left home, and I did not want to have that experience myself. Thus, I decided I needed a hobby that would occupy my time and my mind. I had been an animal lover my entire life and, as a child, I had raised squirrels, deer, opossum, raccoons, horses, Siamese cats, dogs, and many other critters or birds I found or was given. I had inherited a small amount of money and decided to use it to buy a show quality basenji and Cavalier King Charles spaniel. I kept the spaniel puppy exactly four days before giving her to my mother, but the basenji bore her way into my heart and life. That was in 1986 and, while my first basenji did not turn out to be show quality, she was the best introduction to the breed a person could have wanted.

Why did you start breeding?

My cousin, who lived in Mobile, Alabama, was reading the paper in January of 1987 and saw an ad for 3 four-year-old basenji bitches advertised for \$50 each. She called and asked if I were interested in her going to look at them, and I said sure. It turned out the owner was a former junior handler for a kennel out of Texas, and she had bred her former junior's bitch to a dog that Jean and Jimmie Phillips had bred that belonged to her boy friend. When they split up, she had kept the 3 girls and could no longer keep them. While they were certainly show quality, they were too old and did not have the temperament at 4 to start a show career, so I asked the Phillipses to help guide me in breeding the two tris appropriately to get my first show dog. Unfortunately, the only red bitch of the three was killed when she jumped through a window screen and was hit by a car, but the tris did the trick. When? In the fall of 1987, each of those girls, Star and B, had a litter of puppies, and from those two litters came my first conformation champions, as well as my first lure coursing champions. Both of those old girls, under the prefix Camelot, are on the Brood Bitch Honor Roll, and if you go back far enough on any UnderCover pedigree, you will find one or both of those sisters. God was looking out for me when he sent those two wonderful older dogs and Jean and Jimmie Phillips into my life.

What persons influenced you most strongly?

Without a doubt, Jean and Jimmie Phillips had the strongest influence on me. They became my mentors and my friends, and when Jean died and Jimmie later married Maddie, that strong friendship and mentoring continued. Steve and Tammy Berry have had a great impact on UnderCover dogs for twenty years, as well, as I respected and still respect their opinion regarding basenjis. Another person who I

learned to greatly admire in the early days for her advice on dogs in general was Wendy Wolforth; and while Wendy never handled a dog for me, she was most generous in her suggestions, advice, and guidance when asked. Wendy has retired now, and I still miss learning from and visiting with her. Lisa Jane Alston (Myers), and later Greg Myers, began showing for me in 1988 and have been my friends for over twenty years.

What have you seen improve in Basenjis over the years?

Health screening and temperament.

What do you think today's basenji breeders need to pay special attention to?

Smaller ears, tighter feet, size more to the 16 and 17 inch standard, more wrinkle, stronger fronts. While I have never been a believer in breeding "cookie cutter" basenjis that all look alike, I do think many basenjis these days stray from the standard more than is good for the breed. Functional dogs that can do what they were bred to do, and that might well survive in the jungle and bush if necessary, should be the goal of every breeder. Markings, color, sex, and beauty while standing stacked are all dessert and not the main course of the meal. Movement, condition, endurance, and ability to perform the tasks needed for survival in a hostile environment should be the meat and potatoes of judging a basenji. Speed and side movement, again, are nice, but a basenji's movement is designed for the long run, and in many cases, that long, fluid, effortless stride is being lost in a race around the show ring. In my 20+ years of showing, I've seen speed used to cover up structural faults; and while it looks flashy, it is not what the standard calls for in a basenji. Many handlers, including many professional handlers, get flustered when a judge orders them to slow the dogs down, but true movement should be more apparent when a dog is shown at a moderate speed, rather than a flat-out run.

What advice do you have to a new breeder getting started?

Don't be in a rush to breed. Find a good breeder in your area and shadow him/her for a year before you even think of buying a puppy, much less breeding a bitch. Most reputable breeders won't sell an unfinished bitch on anything but limited registration unless you have shown dogs before - doesn't necessarily have to be a basenji. Many people think they want to show a dog, or think their kid wants a juniors dog, or even think they are smart enough to own a basenji, only to find out later that it costs too much, or their kid has gotten involved with football, or they can't handle a basenji. I know I got burned too many times early in my career and bought too many puppies with UnderCover in their pedigrees to be too trusting of anyone without a bona



Ch UnderCover Lady from Anubis, FCh, BBHR

do not invited the neighbors or your best friend down the street to the whelping; don't invite any other dogs in the house to the event, either; respect the bitch. Remember, basenji bitches have been having babies for centuries, but they much prefer a calm, reassuring voice to a nervous Nelly or any audience.

What dogs that you've seen or owned stand out as outstanding examples of the breed, and why?

I've had the privilege of seeing and knowing many great dogs in the last 20+ years. Probably my all-time favorite was Ch. Jerlin's General Patton, but many others run a close second: Am Ch Escapade's High Five, Am/Can Ch Zindika's Johnny Come Greatly JC, Am Ch Nyanga Signet Sweet William JC, Am Ch Sonbar's Celestial Wizard, Am Ch Candu's Light My Fire, BISS Ch Jerlin-Ankhu Patton Leather JC, and Am Ch Jasiri-Sukari Fire-N-Lines. My favorite thing about all these dogs was

their correct movement. They were/are all balanced and had/have that beautiful, fluid, "I can do this all day" reach and drive motion that, to me, signifies a true example of a basenji. I have had the pleasure of owning, or being owned by, several outstanding examples of the breed. My all time "heart dog" was Jack, BVIS DC Bojak's UnderCover Kojak, SC, FCh, TT. While not the typical basenji you'd ever see, he was a true showman, a truly beautifully moving basenji, and had one of the best temperaments you'll ever hope to find in the breed. He loved to lure course and became one of the early AKC Dual Champions. As of 2009,



Ch UnderCover Tara Sintana, FCh

Jack was listed in the top 25 top producing stud dogs in the history of the breed. Other important dogs in the UnderCover lines are: AOM CH UnderCover Jike of Alabiss, FCh, the first brindles bitch to win an AOM at a National; CH UnderCover Bojak's Caitlan, the foundation bitch for Tad Brooks at Meisterhaus Basenjjs; CH UnderCover Lady from Anubis, FCh, dam of 13 conformation champions; CH UnderCover "Mbuti" Madam Gucci, daughter of CH Escapade's High Five and Ch UnderCover Tara Sintana, Sassy, who should have been my first Specials dog, and dam of 8 conformation champions, and AOM CH UnderCover's Barn Burner, sire of 18 conformation champions

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

Participating in the final work for the Fanconi test and then getting every UnderCover basenji I could get my hands on tested for Fanconi. It just about bankrupted me, but I sure sleep well at night. As far as showing, my single greatest

fide reference. However, everyone has to start somewhere, and if you are willing to take the time to visit breeders in your area and find which one clicks with your personality, most breeders would be happy to sell or co-own a quality bitch with a known quantity. I don't recommend breeding a dog before her third heat cycle, and for most basenjjs that's pushing 3 years old. That gives you enough time to establish a relationship, show your bitch (hopefully to her Championship), have your bitch health tested, and evaluate stud dogs to compliment your bitch. Don't look for a name in a stud dog. Thoroughly dissect your bitch according to the standard and honestly evaluate her good points AND HER BAD. No basenji is perfect, and if you need smaller ears, a higher tail set, or more wrinkle, look for those qualities in your stud dog. Best advice I can give: when the big day comes is REMAIN CALM;



DC Bojak's UnderCover Kojak, SDHR, FCh



Ch UnderCover Bojak's Caitlan, BBHR

achievement was when Jack won the Stud Dog class at the National in 1999. Other achievements that stand out in my mind are: the 1st time Jack got a Group Placement; Awards of Merit on numerous dogs at various Nationals, Class placements at Nationals, BOS with Jack in the Puppy Sweepstakes at the National in 1993, 5-point major from the 6-9 month puppy class under English judge Elspet Ford in 1996. Putting numerous dogs and bitches on the Stud Dog and Brood Bitch Honor Roll shows the continuity in my breeding program that I appreciate. Getting new people involved is a great pleasure, as it's fun to see the dog show world through a novice's eyes. Also, I still feel a great sense of accomplishment and satisfaction even today seeing a young puppy in his first show or on his first lure coursing run. When I can't appreciate those little achievements as well as the significant ones, I'll stop playing the game, but I hope I never do.



Ch. UnderCover Jake of Alabiss, FCh

Anything else you would like to say?

Although Gale Whitehurst is the name most associated with UnderCover Basenjis, it takes a village of people to produce the

success that UnderCover enjoys. While many will say I have an eye for a successful breeding or many will say that I can spot a good show prospect as a very young puppy, there is not a truthful soul alive that will say Gale Whitehurst can show a dog!! Somehow the words "show dog" indicates someone who can show a dog has been involved. I have truly been blessed with the involvement of many people in my show career. From "old timers" Blaise Cline, Jean and Jimmie Phillips, Tammy and Steve Berry, Deborah Mizzoni, and Rose Cuffari, to "middle timers" like Jerry Hope, Anne Rogers, Janice Harrison, Tad Brooks, Hayley Thompson, Connie Camp, Pam and Bill Darwin, to "new



Ch. UnderCover -Mbuti- Madam Gucci, BBHR

timers" like Susan Schroeder, Elizabeth and Mary Claire Ctibor, Krystyl Lyons, and Brittany, Megan, and Olivia Rosener, I have always been lucky enough to be surrounded with wonderful people who were willing to jump in and train and show UnderCover dogs. It is these lasting friendships that have made showing UnderCover Basenjis a wonderful team sport.



Ch. UnderCover Barn Burner SDHR

What is your chosen kennel name?

UnderCover Basenjis



Ch. UnderCover Lucky Lady in Red, FCh

How did you choose this name?

My very first basenji came with the name: Mishelieu's Lady of Camelot. When I bought the old girls that became my foundation bitches, I named them with the Camelot prefix. My first two litters born in 1987 carried the kennel name Camelot. My first two conformation and lure coursing basenjis carried the name Camelot; however, as a Professor of History, I had a hard time with an African dog having an English kennel name. I knew if I were going to change, I had to do so in a hurry. Why? While trying to think of an unusual but meaningful kennel name, I looked at my bed and there were three lumps UNDER THE COVERS, so we became UnderCover Basenjis. Does it have a meaning? I realize it is no more African than Camelot, but it does represent the desire of many basenjis to sleep under the covers.