

Akita People  
"Akita World" talks with  
Loren and Cristina Eglund,  
Antioch, California

This interview was conducted at the home of Loren and Cristina Eglund in November, 2001 by Kristin Fairbanks.

*How long have you been in this breed, and how did you get started?*

Loren:

When I was a kid, I always liked dogs, and I read about all the different kinds of breeds. I lived in Iowa, and at that time Akitas were pretty scarce. Most of them were in California, and a few on the East Coast. In 1961, I was in school, and there was a publication that came out that kids get all the time. I was in seventh grade, and it had a picture in it of Akitas from Japan. I clipped that out, although I could never find any information on them. I was always interested in dogs, and I was looking at a Dog World magazine when I found a subscription to Northern Dog News magazine. I liked the Northern breeds, but no one breed stood out. Then in 1964 a *Northern Dog News* article was written by Liz Harrell and Sonya Dorman and it was all about Akitas. It had pictures and everything, and it kind of snapped. That was the breed I was looking for. Before, I liked several breeds but just couldn't decide on which one.

Also in 1964 I subscribed to Akita News from the American Akita Breeders, Inc. Living in Iowa on a farm, I didn't see my first Akita until about 1969; after I moved to Minnesota, and found a guy about 150 miles away who had Akitas in Wisconsin. I went there and saw his Akitas, actually I went several times just to look, but I was in an apartment and didn't have room for dogs. So later in the '70s, after I bought a house, I went to California and looked around at some breeders there. I had been subscribing to Akita Journals, so I knew where some were, and I had written letters and talked to people. I looked around and finally came back with a dog. He was a brindle and he became a champion, but he wasn't really that good a dog. So I never really used him for breeding purposes. From there, it just kind of grew. You start looking for that special bitch. Actually, at first, I had four deposits on bitches, so my plans were way, way too big. (laughter) But only two of them came about, and that turned out to be Ch. Eastwind Glacier Fox Of Northland. She was Best in Sweeps at the 1982 National. The other one was Ch. O'BJ's Wild Alaska Of Northland, who was a Sachmo daughter and a Sachmo great-granddaughter. She had quite a bit of Sachmo in her. She finished at ten months, completely owner handled, an old Working Group winner at nine months. So they worked out pretty good, and were a couple of really nice bitches.

One of my deposits was for a pup out of a red, white-faced Japanese import named Megami, but Sheryl Langan never had any more pups out of Megami. It took a long time getting them because I had deposits on them, and I wanted the pick of the litter; I was looking for something that was tightly bred who had good, quality parents. So that kind of worked out. From there I kept showing and breeding. I was back in Minnesota at that time.

Cristina:

He was into it before I met him. I met him and it was like a package deal. In fact, when I met him, I thought it was a pick-up line, because he asked if I wanted to come see his dogs! (laughter) That was the first time I had ever heard something like that! I said yes, and I looked at them; I was shocked. I had never seen an Akita before; they were big. I was sitting in his living room, and there was one dog who wouldn't let me move. Loren said they didn't bite or anything like that, and he walked into the other room. Well, this big dog, a brindle, scary-looking dog was sitting there by me. I thought he was going to attack me or something!

Loren:

He was a pussycat.

Cristina:

But he was scary! So I got quite a feel for the dogs then, and to be very frank, at first I was excited, but yet I didn't know anything about it. Then he started taking me to dog shows.

Loren:

I won Best of Breed one time when she was with me, and we couldn't stick around for the Group. We had to go to the Renaissance Fair.

Cristina:

I didn't want to stay, I wanted to go to the Renaissance Fair and we did. I don't know why. Why did you do that?

Loren:

I was single. (laughter)

Cristina:

But that is the way it started, and then it was more his thing than mine. Then I fell in love with the dogs. I had a little Poodle, and the Akita almost ate my Poodle. He went after the big dog's food, and that is not right. All of the sudden I saw my little Poodle on the ground and thought, "Oh, my gosh!" We can't have that, so I ended up taking a real liking to the Kites. They are nice, big dogs. I got stuck with the Toy Poodle after my daughter left, but she was a cute little dog. I did manage to sell her to a nice home. But then I got right into the Akitas.

*How many litters have you bred ?*

Loren:

Not a lot. We always wanted something out of Glacier, and she was five years old before we got any puppies out of her. She only had nine or ten puppies in her lifetime, and four of them became champions. Up until 1994, we had problems with some health things, so some were given away. We probably only sold about twenty puppies for money up until then. From 1994 on, after the imports from Japan came in, things started cooking and we started having a few more litters, all from completely new stock. Generally we had a litter or two a year since then. Sometimes you'd like to have more but it doesn't always work out. We only have five dogs total; that is our maximum. Some of them are getting older.

Cristina:

We are breeding to get a beautiful akita. We are not worrying about how many litters we are going to get out there or whatever. A lot of people want what we are going to give them, so we want to put just the right Akitas together to make that beautiful Akita. This is where different types of Akitas come into mind. There is a type of Akita called the American Akita, which is a beautiful Akita and is structurally sound and lovely. There is also the Japanese Akita, which is just gorgeous, more aesthetic to the eye, I guess. They have a beautiful face, headpiece and so on. We like to actually breed the two together to make the most beautiful Akita. They closed the doors to letting in the Japanese import for about ten years or so.

Loren:

It was about eighteen years, actually. It was February, 1974, when they closed the doors to registering imports from Japan. Then in April, 1992 they opened them back up again. So for eighteen years, you couldn't register an Akita from Japan. Japan was in an Akita restoration phase, but after the war there weren't that many Akitas left. A few of them came over here to the United States, but the majority of them were a little different type from what they were actually trying to breed over there. American breeders went in different directions, majority-wise, but the standards were basically the same. The Akita Club of America standard is pretty much based on the Akiho standard, which is a club in Japan that deals strictly with the Akita breed. So even though the standards are pretty much the same, the look is often different. But then they have different types over there, too, within that group, and we have a lot of different types over here as well. Sometimes, some of the types don't always match the standard as well as they could. The ideal dog would be the standard type.

Cristina:

So that is what we try to breed for, the standard type.

Loren:

It doesn't really matter whether you breed all Japanese or all American or something in between, it is just the individual dogs you are matching up in order to produce a quality dog. That is what becomes important, selection of the breeding pair.

Cristina:

You take dogs that are compatible, that complement each other. If you find one dog lacks something, you try to breed it with another dog that has what the other dog lacks. This is what our goal has been. If you have two good specimens that you want to breed together, sometimes one might not have exactly everything you want, and the other one might have more. Then if you try to breed in a way where your physical compensation is good, you get a good Akita that will match the standard. That is what we want to do.

Loren:

Our philosophy is that we want to keep in mind the best of a quality that we have ever seen, and then try to strive for that. Sometimes you don't realize, maybe a specific feature of a dog, the eyes, ears, coat quality, or whatever, just how good it can be until you have actually laid eyes on such an animal. You don't know if it is genetically possible. So once you see that, that should be your goal; to breed dogs that have that kind of quality. Not just mediocre or barely meeting the standard, but excelling in all those features.

*How did you come up with your kennel name ?*

Loren:

Well, I guess I lived in Minnesota, for one thing. I always liked Northern breeds, so it just seemed like a good name to describe a lot of my first dogs, and probably even some now. We have Northland names, like our first one, who was Cee Jay's Yukon. We had Eastwind Glacier Fox Of Northland, and Gaylee's Arctic Fury Of Northland. We had a couple of Tundras. We had O'BJ's Wild Alaska Of Northland, and her son was Northland's Call Of The Wild, after Jack London's book. We called him Buck for short. Some of our dog's names now have kind of wandered off, with more natural type names. We have some named after wildlife art prints, like Embers At Dawn, Out Of The Shadows, Shades of Sunset, and things like that. Other names were Snow Drift, Snow Crystal, Mackenzie River. and High Sierra.

Cristina:

We like the dark red Akitas, or brindles. We like white, too. Those are the colors we really like to breed for. But if you get a really pretty nice black and white one, a real dark black. they are good, too.

Loren:

As long as you don't have all those little speckles and spots. Freckles and ticking and stuff. The white is not clear anymore if you have that. Clear color is something that is in the standard; when you are talking about the standard, you really consider every detail of the standard and to have even better quality than just meeting it. Some breeders try to weaken the standard to excuse undesirable qualities of their dogs. You can't be kennel blind.

*Do you think the standard is a good one?*

Loren:

It is a pretty good standard, but there are areas where compromises were made in the beginning. Things like free of wrinkles when at ease, rather than just plain free of wrinkles. They are describing the skin on the forehead, the points to remember section does emphasize that "Most Akitas have no loose skin on their heads at any time. Under conditions of excitement, a slight wrinkle on the forehead is acceptable but not desirable." That is one area.

There are different things that are in the standard that they have softened in order to get them to look more like the old dogs, so the AKC would recognize them. I would prefer to see some of those things tightened up a little bit, and some things to be clarified. Like nose color; exactly what is a butterfly nose? What is total lack of pigmentation? I am not sure I have ever seen a dog that had total lack of pigmentation, even though they can get pretty rosy and pink. It would almost have to be an albino to be that way. Some judges are confused by that.

There are a lot of things that are missing, like full cheeks, which was in most of the standards but is not mentioned in our standard. Thick ears, not something that is mentioned, but it is something all the original standards had. Most breeders like thick ears, and agree that is a better look, but it is not mentioned in the standard. Eyes, it mentions that they are triangular, and some people say they can be almond-shaped, but that is not really correct. Ever since the beginning standard in 1934, in Japan, it always had the raised outer corner of the triangle as being part of the standard. Well, when our standard was made, the upward slant was eliminated, but it still is what we really should be striving for. You get a triangle that slants down the other way, it kind of drags the whole face and expression down. Things like that.

Color is another thing. The standard that the ACA had in the beginning had changed a few times. For awhile, it didn't accept whites, and then it did again. In a 1960 version of the ACA standard, it says, "No more than one-third of the coat may be white and the white may appear only on the muzzle as a blaze, on the chest or forelegs, as a collar, or on the hind paws and tip of tail." The committee that formulated the standard accepted in 1972 considered making mismarked pintos a disqualification, so that the pintos didn't become so outrageously ridiculous in the way they looked. When they are undermarked or poorly marked, or lack balance, they detract from the dignity of the breed, and they look like a clown.

The introduction to the standard says, "If it were necessary to describe the Akita in one word, DIGNITY would suffice. For it is this concept that the breed embodies. Whether in proud stance or no-nonsense movement, the head dignified presence is its most distinct quality. Each element described in the standard is designed to contribute to this impression." There are a lot of things that could be improved on and added to, but overall, you should be able to read the standard and understand somewhat what the dogs should look like.

Cristina:

A lot of head's are losing the look they should have. That is why we have gone to Japan and looked at the dogs there. I think what is happening is a lot of them don't have the nice, triangular eye; they have more of a round eye and some of the dogs don't have the breadth of skull they should have. Or the cheeks, for that matter. Then they have long ears, long thin ears, when they should be thick and cupped. That is why we should improve the breeding aspect.

Loren:

You have people who totally misunderstand the standard, too. In the last issue of Akita World someone was talking about how she understood the standard, and said she understood the part of the standard that referred to the muzzle as being two to three muzzle to the skull, but rather than describing that as five equal parts, two parts being equal for the muzzle length and three parts equal for the skull length. She understood that basically to mean a one to two ratio, where one-third or one part was the muzzle length, and two-thirds was the skull length. Well, that is incorrect. Some people misunderstand that terminology, for some reason. Somehow they think the two-to-three means two-thirds and one-third, and that is not what it means. It means 40 to 60 percent. Things like that they misunderstand. Size is a very misunderstood thing. The standard is so specific, and so clear. It says bitches 24 to 26 inches and males 26 to 28 inches at the shoulder. That is the standard, and anything within that size range is equally acceptable according to the standard. So it doesn't mean that 27 inches, being right in the center of 26 and 28, is something that is most ideal. A 26-inch dog is equal to a 28-inch dog, as far as the standard goes. But because we have a lower limit disqualification, under a 25-inch height for a male and under 23 for bitches, they somehow think that is part of the standard height. Or because we have no upper disqualification limit, they think the bigger the better. Some Akita people say the dogs can be as big as you want them to be, that there is no upper limit. Well, just because there is no oversize disqualifying fault, it does not mean that it is not faulted. You have people advertising that their dog is 28 1/2 or 29 inches tall. Well, they are openly advertising their dog's fault, as far as size goes.

Cristina:

They always think the bigger, the better. That is a misconception. The Akita is supposed to be a substantial-size dog. But say that you had two Akitas and one was huge and a structural disaster, and then you have one that is maybe 26 inches that is beautifully structured, well, you are going to take the 26-inch one and give that one the reward. But some judges are poorly educated; they think the bigger the better, no matter what it looks like.

Loren:

They get used to seeing certain things, whether it be the short-legged problem that we have in the breed, or whatever. They get used to seeing that certain look, or the German Shepherd look where the muzzles tend to be a little longer. They may not look snipey because the muzzles are so overdone, and large and powerful. It overpowers the face, rather than being balanced. Everything needs to be in balance. These dogs are not meant to be Mastiffs. Probably one of the worst things people do, and it is always the first thing out of their mouths when they are describing the standard, is the first line of general appearance where it says, "large, powerful, much substance and heavy bone." This could describe many breeds. Beyond that, they could hardly care less, it seems. When you start looking at some of the dogs it seems that way. Whereas the Japanese tend to be a little more artistically inclined, because they emphasize things like the shape of the eye and the ears, and the quality of the coat and richness of the color. They look for the full, large tail and things. Things that really add to the beauty and the appearance of the dog, and are really part of the standard Akita.

Some people think color is the least important thing in the standard, but the standard doesn't say that. It emphasizes color. Back in the points to remember section, that has followed the standard ever since its inception, it mentions that "Rich, clear colors are desirable. Especially with pintos, well-balanced markings are vital to the overall appearance." If something is vital, it is critically important, and you see pintos or so-called mismarked pintos that have just horrendous markings. Markings can detract so much from the dog, and colors that are so washed-out and dull that it just doesn't add

dignity to the appearance of the animal. So to say that color is not important, or the least important, is not something that they can base that opinion on in, the ACA standard. Color is the first thing you see. It is the only thing mentioned in the standard that encompasses the entire dog.

*Do you see some colors go up in the ring more than others ?*

Loren:

Possibly. To some extent, anyway. The average dog out there is not going to be your brilliant reddish-orange color. Old dogs like Baby, Buster, and our old Big Mac had it. We are starting to see some whites now that have done well, but sometimes they have to be pretty dam good or they are not going to do as well as some other color might. If you have a really striking brindle, something that is very unusual in color but very beautiful, especially if the striping comes all the way down to the face, that has always been kind of a hard one to sell to the judges and to some breeders. I personally believe it is one of the most exotic colors there is, and beautiful. A natural look, like a tiger. Sometimes that may be harder to finish.

Cristina:

Because the judges don't see it as much.

Loren:

It could be, too, that the dogs they see winning are a different color, so they are thinking that the winning breeders have this color. It could be any thing. Lack of knowledge, even. But a lot of breeders like those colors, judges just aren't as familiar with them.

Is there anything that can be done to improve judging?

Loren:

I have been a member of the judges' education committee since 1994, and we have seminars every year at the National. We do slide

presentations and have live dogs in. We discuss the standard, and what the standard is actually talking about, and all those things. But there is only a limited number of judges who attend those. There are some other ones that are held throughout the country on occasion, too, but even if you do have a good judge, sometimes judging isn't always just about the dog. That's kind of the way it is. Sometimes they are thinking about other things, and why they are doing what they are doing is hard to say. You know that going in, so you accept sometimes that maybe you are not going to get very competent judging in some instances.

On the other hand, there are other judges who are pretty good. Breeder-judges, some of them, tend to have a little better eye or appreciation for the details of the standard, in the aspects of what you are lacking in the breed.

Like eyes, which is one of the major problems right now in the breed. We are not very good at all in that department, but if you don't breed to the dog that has an exceptional eye, you are not likely to get it if you don't breed to dogs with a correct characteristic. It is kind of a shotgun approach, you do have to get quite lucky breeding dogs that don't possess exceptional quality.

Cristina:

Ideally, it would be wonderful if you could take bits and pieces from different dogs and put them into one dog. Then you could have that beautiful Akita. There are a lot of beautiful Akitas out there, don't get me wrong. It is just that you want to better the breed, and sometimes when I go to dog shows I get really disappointed. I look out there and I think there are so many improvements that could be made, and a lot of times people are just breeding this one to that one, maybe because the dog has been winning a lot. I'm not saying breeding to winners is wrong, because our dogs have won, too. They have done their fair share. Everybody has, but I am just saying sometimes the winning dog is not necessarily the best dog. People will breed to that dog just because of that, because they are blinded by thinking that since the dog is winning, that is what they want. Then the judges see the same type of dogs always going in the ring, and if they do see something that is different, and maybe a little bit more to the standard, they will put up the one that is more like the other dogs, rather than the one that looks different but is more ideally to the standard. It gets a little bit depressing, when you go to a dog show and that happens.

Loren:

Well, if you could build them instead of breed them it would be a lot easier! (laughter)

Cristina:

With the whole dog show thing, you have to really enjoy it to be in it. As I said before, the judging isn't always the way we would like it, and that isn't just because your dog didn't win. It's that you look at it and you wonder how that other dog could win.

*Do you think that is more a result of politics, or the lack of knowledge?*

Cristina:

Both.

Loren:

It is kind of a vicious circle between breeders and judges. Judging really has more to do with the direction the breed takes than breeders do, because breeders breed what they can win with. Oftentimes, their priority is winning, rather than breeding to the ideal standard - some aspects of the standard don't have to be real good in order to win in the AKC ring .

It is kind of a breeding philosophy, too. People are breeding to win, and they tend to breed just those particular dogs that are already winning. They maybe eliminate dogs that have much better features, maybe it is an outcross, let's say, which may not produce as much consistency in the litter, so you may not produce as many champions, but you do have an opportunity to produce one dog that is superior in certain qualities. It may not be their interest. The standard and the ideal specimen may not be as important to them as producing a lot of winners and champions.

The biggest example of how judging influences a breed more than breeders is looking at the dogs in Japan, and the dogs in America overall as a group. Not singling out any individual dog or line. How much different they are because of the different types of things that they are emphasizing. The judging is what controls what breeders basically are breeding. Judges tell us they can only put up what the breeders bring them, so I guess you have to lay some blame on the breeders, too, because theoretically they should be strictly trying to improve the breed, no matter whether they win or not. Then again, that opens up an excuse for breeders to breed dogs that are not at all competitive, and that is not right, either. You need to keep an eye on the show ring, and understand the things you do need in order to be competitive and yet not sacrifice other things. It is a fine line. I have judged a couple of Akita specialty matches and Sweepstakes at Regional, Independent, and National Specialties. The last time I judged, I would not look back and change a thing, but it is easy to second-guess yourself. Judging is also a learning experience.

*Have you ever used a handler?*

Loren:

Yes, occasionally. Most of the time I show my own dogs. Cristina doesn't show.

Cristina:

I just don't feel like running around that ring! (laughter)

Loren:

I'm getting to where I'm not so sure I do, either.

Cristina:

He does a beautiful job of showing our dogs. He has finished our dogs, basically. But we had used a handler once, mostly for one of our bitches that we had. She was one that came right from Japan and that was when the doors were just opened again. She was so different-looking, but she was gorgeous. Just beautiful. We took her to a dog show, because she looked so darn gorgeous, although we didn't start showing her until she was pretty old. We just didn't know what we were going to do with her.

Loren:

We got her from Japan as a puppy. We called her Japan, because she was one of the first ones brought over here. When we got her, we were basically taking a chance. We wanted some features that the Japanese dogs had that we don't see in America. Enough of them in one dog to use for breeding. So Frank Sakayeda went over there, and got one for us. He had imported a bitch that in 1992 won Winners Bitch at the National. We wanted a puppy out of her, because she had been bred to a Meiysho winning brindle over in Japan, but she didn't have any puppies. So Frank went to Japan and brought her back for us. Even though Frank speaks their language and knows the breed very well, we weren't expecting to get the kind of quality we got in her.

We didn't really show her much, maybe six or eight times, the first four years of her life. We just got her out once in awhile and showed her off. But she started looking so good that we decided to enter a show because it was close, a weekend of shows. We actually had a judge change at the last minute which was okay with me. She won that day, so I thought maybe we should start showing her more. So we did, and we got Al Lee to do some of the showing for us, because we didn't want to go to all the shows. We thought a handler might pull it off, because she looks a little different than the average dog out there. Gosh, she finished really quickly. She had about eight weekends, and I think six of those were in California and two were in Oregon.

The Oregon shows she didn't do anything at, but each weekend, in California, she picked up points, including a couple of majors, and finished. I put four or five points on her before that, just in the little showing we had done.

Cristina:

We were shocked because she looked different, but she was standard. She is a beautiful bitch. She has enough bone, she has the thick, curved ears, with beautiful triangular eyes that are swept up and beautiful cheeks. She had a nice muzzle, and she is beautiful.

Loren:

It is probably due to an old judge, C. Seaver Smith, who gave me the points and talked to me while we were getting a picture taken. He said she was the only one in the ring that had the correct forward slant of the ears, and beautiful balance. That was probably part of it. Nice sidegait, and all that. It kind of got us going. I told him we got her from Japan, and he said he didn't know anything about the imports or how they were different. He said she seemed a little smaller than some breeders like, but she was still standard. He had said that to me one other time, fifteen years earlier, in fact. It was when I had shown Glacier, and he couldn't find anything wrong with her, just thought maybe she could be a little taller. So it is funny how he kept the same line of thought all those years.

Cristina:

But actually Japan and Glacier were good-sized animals. Bitches, you know. They are not huge, like some. They are standard, and they are beautiful animals. This judge was able to see that, and I see a lot of other judges who are able to see it too. She finished so quickly, and she was directly from Japan.

Loren:

Anyway, he got me going on showing her, because we won that day. He asked me about some of the differences, and I told him that in Japan, they tend to be a little bit more artistic, focusing on the details of the standard. He said that was the Japanese way! (laughter) It is a big controversy right now, with Japanese and American dogs, and the talk of splitting the breed into two breeds.

Cristina:

I don't see that. If they would have done it, and had went about splitting the breed like they did in the FCI countries where they gave you a certain amount of time to breed toward the type of Akita that you were after, say the Japanese or the American type Akita, you had time to do it in. Then splitting the breed wouldn't have been bad. But the way a few wanted to do it here, there are some people who just messed everything all up. They want to just split the breed, 100 percent, Japanese or American pedigree. That is not going to cut it, because there is not enough Japanese in the United States. The quality is poor. We were fortunate to have some good quality Japanese stock to work with.

Loren:

In the FCI countries, they were never cut off from Akitas in Japan for eighteen years like we were here. They knew a breed split was coming, so they had time to breed in that direction. Some breeders had actually been breeding Japanese type since the 1992 JKC standard change. And when they split the breed there, they did it by type. They didn't do it by pedigree, they didn't need to have a dog directly from Japan to be typed as Japanese. In fact, they still have some countries that are still splitting the breed, and they will be continuing to type dogs all the way through the end of 2004 from what I understand.

Interestingly, 100 percent American has been typed Japanese and vice versa. So the FCI's manner of splitting was totally different from how the small faction here wanted to split the breed. They wanted to make it 100 percent Japanese, and another faction wanted 100 percent American. It didn't make a lot of sense, because if you force that, then a split in AKC would not be compatible with the Japanese Akitas in FCI countries, because they didn't do it that way. Then you end up having three breeds in the world rather than two! James Crowley indicated that a breed split, all of the details would have to be worked out so that no one is unfairly penalized. Akitas that are mostly Japanese pedigree would be severely penalized if they were not allowed to be in the Japanese side. One-hundred percent Japanese dogs can still be shown so they would not be penalized even if not split at 100 percent.

Cristina:

The sad part about it is we have more Akitas than any place in the world. There are so many of the Akitas that have been around when they had closed the doors, the old time Akita that was brought over here, and that is what we have been breeding constantly. We have so many Akitas here, so finally when we do get the chance with Japan opening its doors in 1992 to let the Japanese Akita in here, we should take advantage of that. They are beautiful, and we should try to breed toward that beauty, which is the standard type of Akita using both animals.

Loren:

Some people don't want the breed split because they think staying as one breed will add genetic diversity and might improve the health. Other people think that since Japanese breeders don't OFA hips or CERF eyes, etc., that somehow their dogs are a risk. Dogs are dogs, though. Our stock came from their stock. I doubt that there is much difference healthwise. But just because you have one breed here, and you have imports coming in from Japan, does not mean that you are going to add a lot to the genetic diversity unless people are using those dogs. And the majority of them are not. Ninety-nine percent of those who think not splitting will greatly add to genetic diversity have never bred to an import. So there has really been little effect on the breed.

If you really wanted genetic diversity in the breed, you could split the breed according to some formula, say anything over 50 percent Japanese pedigree would go on the Japanese side and the rest on the American side, or have some similar percentage, since I think the AKC will only do a pedigree percentage type of a split. I don't think they will just do it by type like they will in FCI. If you gave people enough time to know what is coming, so that the dogs we have now would still be able to be shown, then you would be encouraging breeders to use diverse stock to breed toward the percentage needed to qualify for the Japanese or American breed. You'd probably have more genetic diversity in both breeds by doing it that way than you will by keeping it as one. But it is better to keep it as one, in my opinion, than to use a hard-line approach that is different than FCI. One-hundred percent wasn't the way JKC forced the split. They were allowing the FCI people to breed in that direction using whatever stock necessary.

It is understandable that since the FCI has split the breed, the JKC no longer encourages starting a breeding program using both American and Japanese stock in order to breed toward Japanese type. ACA voted down pursuing a breed split a few years ago, although it can be revisited again shortly. There may be a little backlash from that from JKC, but there is a reasonable way to do it if it were to be done. I was emailing somebody in Europe who is prominent over there with the Akita breed, the Japanese side of it. I mentioned that some people here want to split the breed at 100 percent Japanese. She wrote back and said it is only because they are afraid of the competition. It basically comes down to what is in their kennel, and wanting to win, rather than what is good for the breed or what matches the standard the best. It is a discussion where you could go on and on. In fact, I have a 1971 ACA newsletter that included letters arguing for and against a breed split, including renaming the Japanese Akita and American Akita. This was two years before the AKC recognized the Akita breed. Both types are thus part of the original foundation stock.

Cristina: At this point, I don't think it would be suitable at all to split the breed, because it wouldn't be done the right way, so why bother? Why not just keep the imported ones that come in here, and just have them with the American type Akitas and then breed toward the standard.

Loren:

The funny thing is, the small faction that wants 100 percent Japanese and the small faction that wants 100 American both want to make two different breeds. But they are at odds with each other, since both groups cannot have their way only one group has a chance to have their side be at 100 percent. The only way both groups could have their way is if the



breed were split three ways, 100 percent American, 100 percent Japanese, the rest as Akita. These groups are probably the ones most responsible, because of their hard-line approach, for this breed not having enough votes to split.

I know several people who are for one Akita, but would consider it, or would not be totally opposed to a split, if it were done in a manner that would be beneficial for all and wouldn't hurt anybody. It would be beneficial to the dogs, as well. A reasonable split would still allow people who want to breed 100 percent to do so and still have a place to show. It would increase the numbers and the diversity in the lines, as well as the number of breeders and geographic distribution AKC requires, and thus, you would be able to go directly into a breed rather than have to be stuck maybe in Miscellaneous class for years. This class does not allow for earning championship points, nor does it allow dogs to compete in Group or Best in Show.

Cristina:

But you would have to take the time to do all this.

Loren:

There is a lot to be worked out, and whether it will ever come to that or not, I really don't know. It is not going to really influence our breeding program, but it does influence other people, because they have mentioned they are worried about this or that. That is why they don't do this breeding or that breeding. If they knew in advance just where things are going to go, well it may help. Say, for instance, that you have a black-masked Akita that is 75 percent Japanese. Maybe you want to show that dog, but if you split right now at 75 percent, the dog might be disqualified because the standard on the Japanese side wouldn't allow for the black mask. So you hurt that person, although their dog could be used for breeding. But you know what to expect going in what to expect coming out, and those are the kinds of things that should be fair to all. Some people just don't care as long as it is good for them personally.

Cristina:

We have pondered it, and talked it over, and we think if it is not going to happen the right way, don't bother with it. Don't even split the breed. Everybody will be happy and everybody will just breed their dogs the way they want. Nobody has to go into anybody else's breeding program. If people want to use them, they do. If they want to show them, they do. But the judges have to be told that if you have a gorgeous Japanese-looking type out there, it should be given the same consideration as the American type when they fit the standard, even if they look different than the others. Just because there are not as many of them in the ring, they should not be given any less consideration.

Loren:

It was about two and one-half years ago when we did a poll in the ACA. The question asked all ACA members was, "Should the ACA consider splitting the Akita into two breeds?" The results were 43 percent wanted to pursue a split, and 57 percent didn't. Our ACA bylaws states that we need a two-thirds majority to pass such a split. Then of course, if a proposal is made and sent to AKC, they would either accept or reject it or modify it. So it still wouldn't be an automatic thing. But at that point they still needed 50 percent more votes than they got to really pass such a thing. It will probably come up again in 2002, and we will see how it goes then. I don't expect there to be a lot of change, unless there is a little change in some of these 100 percent attitudes.

*How long do you think that kind of change would take to actually be in effect?*

Loren:

That should be part of the proposal. My thinking would be to give people three to five years. Say you make it at some percentage that is reasonable, and pretty much if you think about it, anything over 50 percent Japanese breeding shows the direction that somebody is breeding toward. If you set it further in the future, you could put that percentage higher, say maybe 75 percent, and that gives people a chance to continue on what they have already started in producing a Japanese type with good soundness and size and bone and all the things that their standard calls for just as much as our standard does. So that would be the best way to do it in my opinion, but that is just one opinion out of probably 700 ACA members.

*Do you feel that you have established a distinguishable line? What are others looking for when they think of your line?*

Loren:

Though some have told us they were impressed by the fact that our type has been consistent for twenty years, our bloodlines are now totally different. And our dogs do not look like the common Akita. What others are looking for is that look. But we really haven't done enough breeding to have established a solid, strong line so to speak. We are just now getting into several breedings that are the first Northland to Northland breedings, so we are only in the second generation type of thing. We probably need to do that a bit longer, and keep working on it, to actually establish something. But our dogs do have a look that is sometimes a little different.

We often have people say our dogs are beautiful. Oftentimes, it is people who don't really know dogs and aren't into the dog show scene. Maybe they are looking at our website ([www.northlandakitas.com](http://www.northlandakitas.com)). They see our dogs, at shows, and say they are the most beautiful dogs they have ever seen. That makes you feel good, but you have to realize they are not really connoisseurs of structure or the standard. But it does bring up a point, and that is sometimes I think breeders and judges forget to look for beauty. They are looking for all these things, and maybe they have a really good dog, but it may not be an attractive dog. If they add a little beauty to the breed, whether it be in color, markings, coat or whatever it is, that would add dignity to the breed and make our dogs more attractive. Sometimes the man on the street can see beauty better than a judge or breeder. It is a different perspective.

### *How would you rate type, temperament and soundness, in order of importance?*

Loren:

A dog that doesn't have a reasonably sound temperament is going to be worthless to you. If it is a fear biter, or human aggressive, it doesn't matter how good the dog is or how well it moves. It is not going to do you any good. So you have to keep an eye on temperament, but you can buy good temperament, or get good temperament even at the pound. Just breeding for say a healthy dog, or a good-tempered dog, is not a good reason to breed in itself. Type and soundness, you have several people that tell you they want the exact same balance between both, but you can't always have that. You can have a dog who is extremely sound, a beautiful moving dog, but it can have terrible, terrible type. It may hardly look like an Akita. In that case, that dog is worthless to you in a breeding program. Whereas a very typey dog can be improved upon structure-wise if necessary. So type should always come first; you should know it is an Akita by looking at it. That doesn't mean you can have an unsound dog, or a dog that runs with its legs flying all over the place. You have to have a reasonable degree of balance and soundness, but you can give up a little of that for good type.

When you are looking for soundness in the show ring, it is just down and back and around the circle and that is about it. You have really no idea what that dog is capable of physically, in its agility, quickness, how high it can jump, how fast it can run or how quick it can move. It really doesn't test all those features, how much an endurance a dog has and things like that. So you are only looking for show ring soundness. Sometimes a dog can move down and back pretty cleanly, and move around smoothly enough, but it is still not as quick and agile and fast or it can't jump as high as another dog. We really don't get much endurance by running around in the ring once or twice.

Type becomes probably the very most important thing. If I have to make a choice between type and soundness (I won't cop out like many who respond to this question), I would go with type first. When you look at our standard, the standard has three sentences on gait. "Brisk and powerful with strides of moderate length. Back remains strong, firm and level. Rear legs move in line with front legs." That is what is in our standard. The rest of our entire standard is all dealing with type, so how do you give more than 50 percent importance to those three sentences over the entire standard that we have? It is senseless to put that much emphasis on it. That is somewhat, though, the AKC way. That is the way a lot of judges judge. That, to me, is the wrong way to judge. You'll hear judges say, "Well, I'm not going to put up a dog that doesn't so move just so." You know, so what if it has a slight movement flaw? Does it still get around the ring with ease? If so, and that is the dog that is dripping with type, that is the best dog and that is the dog you should go with.

Cristina:

It is important that the dog moves fluidly and nicely, but that is not one of the most important things in this breed. Some judges, when they judge, you would think that is the most important thing that there is in this breed, and that's not true. It's the whole dog, the package. Some judges will put up an awful-looking dog just because it moves great; what the heck does that mean?

Loren:

You can understand how beautiful it is to have a wonderful-moving animal, it just takes your breath away. We used to have Arctic, who had nice type, but any time I showed him, people would come up to me and mention his movement. You could feel it on the end of the lead; he hardly touched the ground. When I would run him on the bicycle, and he went into a full gallop, a lot of dogs have a little up and down to them, but he would just stretch out and back, and that level topline was just incredible. It was beautiful to watch. Then I think about awhile back, watching the world show on TV, and they had this breed, what was it, Italian Spumoni or something? I don't even know what it was. (laughter) But this dog put on such a beautiful show, and it ended up going Best in Show at the world show, and the woman who owned the dog was

asked why she thought her dog won. She said it was because of his movement! She didn't mention type. When you get past the breed level, movement and showmanship and all that comes more into play. But Group judging and Best in Show judging really has nothing to do with the standard in the Akita, and that is what judges should keep in mind when they are judging the breed.

Cristina:

A lot of other dogs are much more agile than Akitas. Akitas are beautiful, and they move well. They are just not the best movers there are in dogs. But that is the type of dog that they are. Akitas are supposed to have strides of moderate length. But then, you have judges who like certain things. Some judges love the red color, or the great moving dogs so it depends on what judges like.

Loren:

They were originally a hunting breed in Japan. They were also used for guard work, and they have a dog fighting background, too; although the AKC Complete Dog Book leaves this part of Akita history out. So there were three purposes they were used for. A hunting dog needs to be somewhat agile, but doesn't have to be overdone, and they were never really meant to become like a giant breed. Our standard says in the introduction that "the Akita is in the bottom range of the large-size breed category." so it is not a giant breed. Unfortunately, Americans try to overdo it, and they make things too big everywhere. Sometimes they lose balance, and they start getting looseness to the lips and the skin, and overdone Mastiff like muzzles and that type of thing.

Cristina:

A lot of times people don't really judge for the right reasons on a dog. Or breed for the right reasons, for that matter.

Loren:

Some people think the Japanese changed their standard, but that is really not true. Akiho still uses the 1955 standard, only the all breed JKC changed their standard to only allow certain color markings. Just because their dogs are different than ours, or because some of the dogs looked different back in those days, more like ours do now, it is just because they didn't have much to work with when they were trying to restore the breed or recreate the breed.

In the beginning, the dogs were not really that large that were Japanese type dogs, according to the FCI standard that states, "Originally Japanese dogs were small to medium in size, and no large breeds existed." The first standard for all Japanese dogs in 1934 included the Akita in the large breed class. That standard described one basic type for small, medium and large dogs, so they were all basically considered one breed or one type, but of different sizes. In fact, from 1934 to 1937, they also had intermediate classes besides large, medium and small. They had medium-large and medium-small, so they could fit into there, too. They were cross-breeding and trying to restore the type and they had all different sizes. So that was the original plan, that knowledgeable breeders back then knew. They were to increase size while maintaining the primitive Japanese type dog.

Unfortunately, they had to do a lot of purifying, because they couldn't find large breed dogs that really looked like the Japanese type. The large dogs were the most impure at the time. Medium dogs were the most pure, even more so than small dogs. So they used medium dogs in some of their breeding to try to restore it, then the war came and there were only a few dogs left, and some of them returned with servicemen. They weren't necessarily the type that was originally intended for the breed. However, American breeders did not understand all this back then.

Since we are discussing a little history, I just want to mention that we owe a great debt of gratitude to Mr. Tatsuo Kimura. He has spent decades translating historical data on Akitas and Japanese dogs. We have spoken often, and traveled to Japan as a group. I think he gets a little discouraged that more Akita fanciers don't show a little more interest in the history of the Akita.

*Are your breeding natural or controlled?*

Loren:

It just depends.

Cristina:

They are usually natural, but lately they are controlled.

Loren:

It depends on the bitch and the stud. If they can get it done, fine. If not, then we help them out or do whatever we have to do, even if we have to do an AI. You do what you have to do to get the breeding.

Cristina:

Lately we have had to AI.

Loren:

Yes, the last two breedings were Ember. We hadn't had a litter for two or three years, then we had two or three litters. One was a litter of one and one was a litter of eight, from the same bitch. She just didn't like the stud, and the stud didn't care to be not liked, so we did AIs with her. She likes her other male, and she will mate with him all day long. Since Ember only had one pup, we repeated the breeding and got eight pups. But generally we won't ever repeat a breeding that gives us a normal-sized litter. If a breeder repeats a breeding three or four times, they should quit breeding all together. There is absolutely no good reason to repeat that often. There is no planned breeding program in effect. It is a wrong philosophy to breed for a market, or to breed to a cheap or local stud because that male is easier to get to. I traveled over 2,000 miles round-trip to breed my first litter, even though I had a champion stud at home. Several times I have sent a bitch to the East Coast to get bred. If you can't do it right, don't do it at all.

Cristina:

These dogs get put together whether they like each other or not. It's tough.

Loren:

The actual getting the dogs bred is the hardest part. If it is a specific breeding you want, it can be hard.

Cristina:

I'll never forget, Loren came home from the vet one day, and he had been trying to get Lion to ejaculate to test his sperm. I asked him what happened, and he said they brought out an ugly Collie or something. (laughter)

Loren:

This woman was supposed to be a specialist, but she gave up in a hurry when he let out a yelp and looked at her like, "What are you doing down there?" It was a Sheltie.

Cristina:

A Sheltie, and here is big beautiful Lion. That is his name, and he looks like one, too. Loren said that, and I didn't really think the stud cared what the bitch looked like. They just smell it, don't they?

Loren:

It definitely depends on how good the vet is at it. Getting them together is the hardest part, and getting them pregnant. Sometimes they don't take, sometimes the timing is wrong or whatever. The whelping isn't so bad, I usually sleep with them all the time when they are about ready to whelp. I sleep with them for a week or two after they whelp, to make sure she doesn't lay on any of them.

Cristina:

I make him sleep with the dogs, I don't.

Loren:

I am out in the garage with them.

Cristina:

Which sounds worse than it is. We have a nice, carpeted area, and that is our whelping area. We put a big, long section from an old couch down there. It is really comfy, but I'm not going to do it. He will. Actually he is the dog person, I won't sleep with the dogs.

Loren:

She likes the fun part.

Cristina:

I go out there every day. We have our own business, so what is good is that the dogs aren't left alone all the time. I get out there in the middle of the day, where some people who have dogs keep them closed up or all alone all day long. We give our dogs a lot of attention, even though they are outdoor dogs.

Loren:

We let them out to run around the backyard, and we have a hill back there to run up and down. It is plenty for the five dogs, for us.

Cristina:

I go out and give them a snack in the middle of the day and clean up their kennels and everything, and pet them. I make sure they know we love them. I don't like to see people have too many dogs; then they can't give them all the attention they should have.

Loren:

You can't do it all yourself, when it comes to breeding, unless you have big facilities and help. There used to be a lot of big breeders like that, years ago. It is not true so much anymore. We have people who kind of think like us, and we co-own some bitches with them. It helps to keep things going that way. Cornelius Campbell is one of them, and Josh Popkin, Bill Burland, as well as Michael Sclafani, Suzette Morettini and some others. It helps because we can keep things going a little bit and have some nice dogs produced without trying to do it all yourself. You just can't do it, especially living in town. You don't have room for all that.

Cristina:

You are only supposed to have three, but we have applied for a license to keep more. And our dogs are not troublemakers, so there has never been a problem.

Loren:

They came out here one time because a neighbor complained they were barking and looked at our dogs and said our set up was really nice. They said they wished they had this in their animal place.

Cristina:

We have never had any problems, and everybody around here has dogs. I think their dogs bark way more than ours do.

Loren:

Most of them don't even bark, but one barks if something happens, but that is about it. They are not real big barkers as a rule. But you sure hate to have one that did bark all the time for no reason. That would be awful.

*Can you describe your set-up?*

Loren:

We have five kennel runs, and it is covered with tin over the top to keep them out of the weather and the sun. The bottom door is concrete blocks, which gives a little more drainage than straight concrete. There is sand under them, I just laid it down and it was pretty easy and quick. It keeps them clean if I want to put them in there before a show. They have a doghouse on the outside of the kennel run, it is attached by a door. They are about 12 x 6 kennel runs, and we also have

a dog yard, where we have pea gravel all around so they don't get too muddy or dirty. Then outside of each run, we have a space that is like a second run, where pea gravel is, so we can keep them separate and they have a place to go do their duty. When they have that, they don't mess up their own kennel runs. Sometimes you see dogs that are stinky and pee-stained, but our dogs don't get like that because they have a place to go, and they like to keep their kennel area clean. For the most part, they never do anything in there unless they are closed in their runs and they have to. We also let them out in our big main yard, so they can exercise more. Sometimes we take them for walks.

Cristina:

They get out once or twice a day just to run. We have a big hill back there that is almost like a treadmill. They can run up and down the hill, and it's better than a treadmill. They all get to do that at least once a day. They go in pairs, a male with a female. And our dogs love apples; they eat apples off the trees. They pick them right off the tree and eat them.

Loren:

It was easier when we only had four dogs. When we were in Japan, we had seen a bitch at the Akiho show, the big show over there. Actually, we were casually looking for something we liked. Then we found just what we were looking for, and over a year later we were finally able to make contact through Mr. Naomasa Hirose in Japan and we got her owner to release her. He only had one Akita, and that was Ouka. Josh Popkin went in on it with us so we could afford her, and we got her over here; she is just a gorgeous bitch. Right now she is looking just great. She has matured out, and she has gorgeous coat, and a lot of guard hair all the way down the sides of her body, not just a little bit on the top along the back, full cheeks, and she is nicely balanced. She has turned out to be a gorgeous bitch. She won Reserve Winners Bitch at the National in 2000 in Maryland. There were about 131 bitches.

But there are no points to that, in the AKC system we have. Again, I don't like it, but that is the AKC way.

Cristina:

At a specialty, or a National, Reserve is the second best, but wins over 130 bitches, but gets no points. They have the Winners Bitch, and the Reserve Winners Bitch, and she won over all the others. In fact, she won over Open class, which was the biggest class. To me, it is like, wow, she won Open Bitch, and is the largest class there is, and then was defeated, which was fine, but I was just thinking that at a National a point system should have points for that.

Loren:

At regular shows, even if they gave something for Reserve as well, and there were enough dogs there, you would probably have more entries and better chances of winning. Then different types could win more readily. Even then, it is a bad system compared to the Akiho shows in Japan. There they have several judges and they have to do a written evaluation, and they make their decisions based on the look of the dog. Though they do eventually place them, they rate them according to their qualities. So you can have the Meiyosho, which for awhile was called the Taisho Award, and that is the highest award you can attain. And you can attain that only at the headquarters show twice a year, and only on older dogs. But some years there may not be any that win it, because there are not any good enough, and other years there could be several that could win it. They are rated against the standard rather than against each other. Though in some of the classes they do eventually place them, still they get their rating. So that is a lot better way of doing it, because you don't have to keep running to shows all the time and being at the mercy of the system. You could be judged by judges who have twenty-plus years in the breed, and they come to a consensus and they rate it against the standard.

You really only need one win there to be recognized as good as your dog is. Here you have to keep going every week if you want to become the top dog in the nation. You spend a lot of money, but I guess that is why. Somebody makes money on it, so that is probably why they do it that way. The system sucks, and no matter what system you have, even in Akiho you are still at the mercy of judges. Akiho, in Japan, has had their judging scandals also. They have a branch here in Los Angeles, for Akiho, and we went to it a couple of times. Japan won the top gold award there one year, and Shadow won another year. Shadow got the Best Male in Show Judges Award, but he wasn't old enough to go for the gold award.

Cristina:

It was a beautiful statue you won.

Loren:

It was a nice little diversion from AKC. The judge, Mr. Yamashita, brought over the statue for the judge's award, and it is just gorgeous.

The judge told Mr. Hirose about Shadow, and when Mr. Hirose saw Shadow when he stayed at our place, he told us Shadow was better than any brindle male in Japan. Also, JKC chairman Mr. Kariyabu judged him, and he told the crowd he had good type.

Cristina:

Japan got the highest award that year, and that was the first year we brought her to an Akiho show.

Loren:

I have never seen a statue as beautiful as this one that Shadow won. It took my breath away when he brought that out and presented it to us.

It was fun when we went to Japan. I was an ACA delegate at the first World Akita Congress. They treated us really good in Japan. While we were there we attended the JKC National Akita Specialty. That was in 1996, and in 1998 we went back to Japan and went to the Akiho show and got to see that. It was something we always wanted to do, and we finally did it. When we were in Japan, we also went all the way up to Odate, which is about 400 miles up from Tokyo. We took the speed train, and then a slow-motion train. We went to the Akiho headquarters, and went to the Akita museum they have there. It was where we met Mr. Ogasawara. He took us to see his new puppies. He is the breeder of Ch. Seihoh, owned by Richard Hellman in Italy. Seihoh has over 50 world titles. Mr. Ogasawara also bred Tomonobu-Go, the first Los Angeles Akiho Tokyuyu winner. Tomonobu was Glacier's grandfather. Glacier was the 1982 National Sweeps winner.

Cristina:

It was freezing cold, and I walked over to the rest room, it was a hole in the ground. That was different.

Loren:

How about the bathrooms at that place where they had all the shopping? There were, no doors! It was open on both sides, and you can see everybody going to the bathroom.

Cristina:

It was unusual! It was an experience, I guess. I loved Japan, though. The people are wonderful there.

Loren:

It is a very polite society. They don't take tips, either, and that is different.

Cristina:

We went to tip the bellhops in the hotel, and they said no. But you do have to pay a fortune for everything. Everything costs more money, but there is no tipping. The food was really expensive. Then we met a fellow, and that is a story ...

Loren:

Yes, they have a statue of Hachiko, the famous dog. who went to the train station for years after his master died, waiting for him to return. This is a true story, and he did this for nine or ten years or whatever before he finally died. They put a statue up at the Shibuya train station, and it still is there. We happened to be visiting that statue, and we met a guy who was also visiting. He said we looked familiar, and what are the chances of this? Come to find out, his name was Carl Jones and he was from England. He was in Japan on business, and he had seen me in the ring in the 1995 National about a year or so earlier in Chicago. So when push came to shove, we started talking, and then we ended up spending the day with him and his business associates, and they took us around Tokyo. We went different places and had something to eat, and had a great time. It is something when you can go that far away and meet someone you have known. What a small world it becomes. Carl had the number one bitch in England about that time.

*Would you consider the Akita a popular breed ?*

Loren:

It is fairly popular now. Years ago, nobody knew what an Akita was. Of course, O J. Simpson might have changed some of that, because he had an Akita. But I have been noticing in the Gazette where they used to have maybe 1,000 Akitas registered every month, and now it is only about half that. So I think there are fewer and fewer of them being bred, which is probably a good thing.

Cristina:

Oh, it is good, because a lot of people who breed are the puppy mill breeders.

Loren:

I think they were in the upper 30 or 40 most popular breeds out of 159 in AKC. The dogs were considered hunters of large game, bear hunters mostly. The thing about being bear hunters, for some reason, some people think because they hunt bears, they were supposed to look like bears. That is not really accurate.

*What is the ideal temperament of an Akita ?*

Loren:

I don't know if you ever meet an Akita that has the most perfect temperament, but you see a lot of really good-tempered dogs. The standard really brings out the temperament. The Introduction says, "The breed character is reserved, silent, dominant over other canines, and although the Akita is unruffled by minor irritations, he is alert toward other dogs and a serious challenge is met with swift retaliation. With man, the Akita is a delightful companion and he gives devotion and protection more than he could ever take in food and shelter. Friendly strangers are treated with respect but trespassers find the door barred by an awesome figure." Then under the temperament section, it says, "alert and responsive, dignified and courageous, and aggressive toward other dogs." So they don't get along with other dogs of the same sex very well, generally speaking. There are always exceptions, but you always have to watch that. That is kind of a downside as far as having a lot of dogs. Fights are no fun.

Cristina:

Our little bitch that we got from Japan is so easygoing, but if a bitch comes after her, naturally she is going to fight back. But she gets along with everyone pretty well. Actually, most of our dogs are like that, but there is still that thing. We never trust two females or two males together.

Loren:

They are very smart dogs, and they know, just what you are doing and what you want. They are also independent by nature, so they may not want to do it. They may want to do what they want to do instead. Sometimes that can be a challenge and that dog needs training. But you have some that are very willing to please their master, more so than others. They can be protective.

Cristina:

Then we have Shere Khan, who is the easiest male dog that we have.

Loren:

Suzette has him, and he is a wonderful dog. He has a wonderful temperament, and he has been a good ambassador to the breed in that way.

Cristina:

You can let kids play on him and jump all over him. He is really sweet.

Loren: When he was out with Nancy Bowen being shown in Ohio, she has a couple of little kids and he was a strange dog in their house, but she said he would just lay there and take it. They would be running trucks over him and everything, and he just took it.

Cristina:



That is not really normal, you know. For any dog. But he is a good-tempered animal. The little male puppy that we had, we bred a beautiful little brindle male that has that same type of temperament.

Loren:

This last breeding we did, I was ready to get rid of all my dogs and keep this puppy. I don't think I have ever felt so close to a puppy. He was out of Shere Khan and Ember, and he was so willing to please. He was such a loving puppy, and he is so good-looking on top of it. I just loved that dog.

Cristina:

We took him to a GGAC specialty match, and this fellow in New York was going to buy him, but the deal fell through. So we had him for awhile. I didn't want to get rid of him, because he was so beautiful, but we have five dogs. At that point, if we didn't have so many dogs we would keep that beautiful little sweet, wonderful puppy. We took him to an Akita specialty match when he was about two months old. He gaited around that ring, and we couldn't believe it. He stood stacked and everybody was just shocked. The first time on a lead! He should have won Breed, but only won BOS.

Loren:

He was our best show dog already.

Cristina:

We sold him, because we can't keep them all.

Loren:

Michael Sclafani got him, and he has as good or better home with him so we are all happy about that.

Cristina:

It is very important to us who gets our dogs, because we want them to have a wonderful home as well as a show home.

Loren:

Yes, if you are just interested in the money end of it, you are better off not getting into dogs, period. It is a big drain. There is no money in it if you do it right. People are in dogs for different reasons, some really enjoy the showing part and not so much the breeding. Other people just like the companionship of the Akita. That is probably the best way to be, just to have your one or two Akitas as pets. Other people really like to create something outstanding, and it is their interest and challenge and desire to look at it from the artistic point of view. So breeding is their thing.

Cristina:

One of our males had won the specialty, and had won that whole weekend, and I was telling a lady acquaintance of mine about it. She asked how much we got for it, and I told her, "We got the blue ribbon!" It is a beautiful ribbon, actually, because one was a specialty. And we got several little prizes, and she was wondering why we didn't get money for that. I told her WE had to pay to enter, to go to the shows and she couldn't believe it. Everybody always wants to know how much we make or sell our puppies for, but believe me, all the work one puts into this, and all the things you do, you certainly aren't in it for money.

Loren:

Yes. Buying the dog is the cheap part. It is taking care of them, the food and veterinary bills, and the damage they do to your place, that is what costs the money after all the years

*Who or what has influenced your breeding?*

Loren:

I didn't have an actual mentor like some people talk about today. I was always in contact with all different kinds of breeders, and I have listened to what they had to say. You run along for a year or two and go this way and that way,

depending upon what this person thinks is important or that person thinks, but then you sift through it all, and you realize that some of it is a little bit of crap.

Other things are important, and you sort it out. If you spend time reading the standard at all, and really pay attention to what those words mean, rather than just what you are used to seeing in the show ring, you come to some responsible conclusions on your own. I read several books about breeding. You keep growing as you are in it. The first National I attended was in 1978, and the first National they ever had was in 1976. Joan Linderman was judging the Sweepstakes at that time, and I probably paid a little more attention to her overall. We eventually placed a couple of pups we bred with Joan, and she once kept Arctic for awhile. But again, there is no one person I could say influenced me. Just looking at the dogs and studying the dogs and the standard, and listening a little bit to everyone.

Cristina:

But then later, when Loren got me involved and we started breeding dogs together, the biggest influence on me was Loren. He taught me everything I know, but I sometimes have different ideas than he has. Right now, in our breeding program, I feel that the combination of the Japanese type and the American type is the way to breed. You can get the best of both worlds if you can give it a chance and go for it. You'll end up with a beautiful Akita.

Loren:

We have had some success. The first five champions that were bred by breeding American to Japanese lines were ours. Some people say they tried it and it didn't work. Well, they maybe tried it once and when you look at the dogs they used, of course it didn't work. You can't ignore good basic breeding principles and then expect to have success. You can have successes, but just because we produced good dogs doesn't mean they were the ultimate animals or they are the conclusion of our breeding program. It was just the beginning, and it has to go on. As far as influences, sometimes you look at people who have been in the breed a long time, and think they must really be knowledgeable, and after a while, you realize that is not always the case. It is almost incredible that you can have people in the breed for twenty years or more and not even have a real understanding of what the standard actually says. Or they don't know much about the true history of the breed, so obviously they don't care enough to spend the time to study a lot of what's important on the breed.

There is information out there that they could be reading, Tatsuo Kimura, in Akita World, always has articles on the history of these dogs. Some people don't even care, and if you ask them what the standard says, well, one person was judging Sweeps at the National awhile back, who had been in the breed 30 or 40 years, and when asked what the standard said about size, the answer was that there is no upper size limit. It is incredible that people don't understand the standard better when they are breeding Akitas, especially when they have been at it that long.

*What do you feed your dogs?*

Loren:

Right now, Canidae. We supplement with Nupro. We have had different things over the past. When I first started I was feeding Purina. Then I moved up to lams, and then Nutro. We went to Robert Abady after that. We used that for about three years. We went to Innova for awhile, and then to Solid Gold. Then we used Eukanuba. Now we're on the Canidae. We have been on Canidae for quite awhile. It has about four meats in it, and digestive enzymes, good omegas and all those kinds of things. The dogs seem to like it, and it is small kernels. Plus it is made here in California, so it is a little easier to get. Price-wise, it is good.

Cristina:

We are in a club because we buy so much of it. It is a buying plan. Buy so many bags, get one free. The place where we buy it is only a mile away, so it is handy and it works out very well for us. The dogs do well on it and that is the important thing. A lot of people have different ideas on eating concepts. Whatever works.

*When showing this breed, how much grooming should be done?*

Loren:

You want to make them look good when they are at the show, so basically you need to wash them and fluff them up as you are drying them, whether you use air drying or a blow-dryer. That sometimes speeds it along and helps out. All I do is wash them and groom them up. Occasionally, I spray a little something on them to make them look a little better. I have never been a really good groomer. My dogs are shown pretty naturally. I never do the legs up with all that paste and powder or that kind of stuff. I probably should, but I just don't. I have never done it, so I don't know how to do it. With

Arctic, being a white dog, somebody asked one time what I did to keep him so white, and I said I washed him. That didn't go over well, I guess.

Cristina:

Somebody later said that Loren was being really sarcastic, because so-and-so asked how we kept our dog so white and he said we wash them. She wanted something more, some medical secret or ingredient or something. But he was pure white. There was no need to put anything on him, because he was beautiful.

Loren:

You have to clip the nails. You have to shorten them up a little bit. A lot of people clip whiskers, but that is something that I have never done and I don't believe in it. A lot of times professional handlers think they have to clip them to make them look more professional. But you know, the old standards used to refer to the whiskered region being full, or the whiskers being permanent. They are there for a reason, and for our dogs I think it gives them more character. We leave the whiskers intact. If a judge puts you down or doesn't let you win for that, then that is a crazy judge. I don't think that could even happen. There are so many other things they are looking at and for, I doubt they have the time to even notice whiskers.

*Should the dog be scissored ?*

Loren:

I don't do any scissoring. Some people do. You can tell on some of them. They are supposed to have a nice, high tail set, for instance, and the coat a little shorn behind the tail and a little shape there. You can tell they have been clipping that out, and making that form a little more like they want them to look.

Cristina:

Or if the dog has hair that is too shaggy and long, sometimes you can tell it has been clipped.

Loren:

I saw one handler clipping along the side where the colors come together to make it look better. Stuff like that, I don't do. Maybe in between their toes or something, if the hair gets too long. That's okay. I don't even do that.

Cristina:

What you see is what you get with us.

Loren:

Especially since we got into the Japanese imports, the coats have improved immensely. We get more harshness and standoffishness to the coat, and proper coat is very rare when you have a lot of guard hairs all the way through the coat over the body. They are standing out and prickling up, and a really good coat will also stand right up off the back. You are going to find that in very rare instances. In fact, talking to John Newland one time, he was talking about a dog he saw that was a Shere Khan son named Tracker. He was admiring its coat, and he said his coat stands right up off his back and withers, and he had never seen that before. But that is a proper coat.

There is a lot of detail in the standard, yet the standard doesn't explain them all. There are things that add to the beauty of the dog, and coat is one of them. You probably don't need a great coat to win; that is probably one of the last things a lot of judges look for. But after you have been in the breed awhile it becomes important to you. It is probably one of the first things you notice, and you see soft coats, short coats, flat coats. and all kinds of things. It could be a really good dog otherwise, but a poor coat just detracts. It is just not a magnificent animal like it could have been with a proper coat to finish it off.

*What advice would you give to breeders who are just starting out?*

Loren:

The way I started out, researching before you buy. You are probably going to make a mistake your first dog. Even though ours became a champion and all the research and people I talked to and dogs we visited, looking at the Akita

journals and all the pictures, and reading as much as I could, it was probably a couple of years before I actually bought one. We ended up with a dog that was just so-so. It was easier to finish them back then because majors were easier, four dogs and you have a major.

So that wasn't so hard. People who were breeding a lot back in those days, could really pump out a lot of champions.

I would say start out with a male and then learn with that male. Then after you have had him for awhile and shown him a bit, you will pick up a lot. Then you can go out and find a bitch. The bitch is the most important thing. You really don't even need a male to start a breeding program. All you need is a good bitch, and that is the most important thing. You can control the breeding with a bitch, but with a male you have no control over breeding whatsoever. You can choose from hundreds of males throughout the country to breed to, and you don't have to own them to do so. No kennel is better than its bitches. It is usually best not to take a puppy bitch back in exchange for your stud's service. You need a better plan than that.

I used to read books about dog breeding, too, and sometimes you come to different conclusions about inbreeding, linebreeding and outcrossing. One of the main books is a little booklet called Planned Breeding, which is a series of articles done by Lloyd Brackett in Dog World.

Some of it may be outdated, but most of it is timeless. They made a publication out of it, and he talked about how he started with three different bitches, and they were all related to a certain animal and he chose each for different characteristics which they had that were good. He did a lot of inbreeding and linebreeding, but what he was able to accomplish when his kennel had up to 90 dogs at a time is something that most people cannot do because they just can't do that much breeding. They can't have that many dogs and watch them grow and really develop a line through inbreeding.

On the other hand, I have come to a new conclusion about outcrossings since the Japanese dogs have come in. That has its place, as well. So learn about that, and get the best bitch you can. The ideal way to get a bitch is to find the best bitch out there and go try to buy her from somebody, rather than take a chance on a puppy. But that is very hard to do. People with really good bitches don't want to part with them. You have to know what a good bitch is, too. The other thing is to look at the line, and both parents. Put your money down ahead of time when you find a breeding that is what you are looking for, and try to get the pick of the litter. Then wait. If it is a year later fine, be patient enough to wait. It is hard when you are first getting started. You really want get things going.

Cristina:

Remember when you are breeding that you want dogs that compliment your dogs, not just winning. If you get that beautiful bitch, you want to make sure that it has physical compensations there.

Loren:

That is what Lloyd Brackett always stressed. He repeatedly said that over and over again. that the "physical compensation is the foundation rock upon which all enduring work is built." It doesn't matter if you are outcrossing, inbreeding, or linebreeding, always look at the dogs not just the pedigrees. It doesn't always mean they will produce as well as they appear, or maybe as well as one that didn't look as good. But if you are going to have a enduring worth, or anything build on, you must choose dogs not just by the lines but by actual quality of the dog itself. Selection and breeding is an art.

Cristina:

I have heard some people, if we asked why they got that dog in particular or this one, they would say the I goes back to blah blah. But look at it! It may be awful.

Loren:

That is a recipe failure; breeding paper trails rather than dogs.

Cristina:

I look at the dog, and then I look to see what is behind it. If it is both good, the line and the dog, then I may breed to it. But why would you get a dog just because it has a fabulous lineage?

Loren:

It is the cheap way, sometimes. They can get it for little or nothing. It will cost them more in the long run than just spending the money to get something good to begin with, and it will save years of frustration.

Cristina:

I hear old-time breeders who say they want to get this because it is going back to that, or going back to their stock, and I am thinking, "But LOOK at it!"

Loren:

That is another problem with breeders, they have to get over that sentimental attachment to their own old stock. This is a new time, and these are new dogs. This is a time to be looking forward rather than backward. If you can get away from thinking like that, then it opens up opportunities that you don't realize exist. We went through the same thing when we got the Japanese dogs. We always wanted this line or that line, our old stock or whatever, But it opened up the mentality that we realize that we are going to have to outcross anyway. So we could look at any line we want to that complements that dog. We shed our bias that had built up over the years. We had rare Sachmo free lines. Then we bred to Kash who went back to Sachmo 26 times.

Cristina:

Remember when we were at Jeri Lagus' house looking at movies of the old dogs?

Loren:

Pete and Jeri Lagus had a movie of the first National, and all the old people in the breed today were young back then.

Cristina:

Looking at the dogs, you can't believe it. They weren't that great. There were some that were all right, but when you look at them, you can see they have improved. Of course, we have lost a lot of things too. But there is always a way of improving your dogs. When you stop and think about it, the old stock was beautiful, but if you can make them even more beautiful, why not?

Loren:

If you can't improve on the old dogs, then what is the point? You also have people who will look at a dog, and they will say they want to produce something like this. It is totally different than anything they have but that is what they want. That is what they are looking for in their breeding, so when they do a breeding, they breed to dogs totally different in looks and expect to get it That is just insane. There is no rhyme or reason to why people do things sometimes.

Cristina:

I have heard that said about Lion. He is beautiful, and he is a 75 percent import. He is big and tall, and is just a lovely animal. He looks very Japanese, and we hear that so-and-so's dog looks like him or whatever. Well, it looked nothing like him! How do you think we got that look? We got that look because of his unique breeding.

Loren:

We advertised him once as the most unique Akita in America. He is big. People think if they go with Japanese stock, they are going to lose size and then they will lose bone. Well, sometimes you get bigger dogs because they have a bit more leg under them. Some of the American stock are short legged. It is true that some dogs may not have as much size or bone, but you only need one dog out of a litter to continue on with. You are not going to breed every dog produced in every breeding. You only match up one male and one female at a time when you are doing a breeding. So you pick out who you have selected just as you would with any breeding, you select dogs that have bone and size and structure and you go on from there. You build on that, rather than thinking along those lines. It is not necessarily true, and we have proven that over and over again. Some of the biggest dogs out there with excellent bone and body and leg length are 50-50 crosses.

Cristina:

Or 75 percent.

Loren:

In that case, Lion is kind of an aberration to be that size, but he is the biggest dog in the ring usually, and he is 75 percent Japanese. We saw the JKC translator at a Sacramento show in 1998. We were showing Lion and Mr. Awashima told us he was Japanese type and should be placed as a Japanese Akita. He thought Lion would win Best in Show in Japan.

Cristina:

There is a misconception that you lose bone and size, and that is another point. When we did go to a Japanese import, a full import male, we went and looked at the features and looked at the size. We looked at the bone before we even bred to him, and I have to admit, the ones that we have bred to ours are beautiful. They were beautiful dogs, bone and size-wise and everything. They had beautiful muzzles, and that is another thing you have to be careful of. The Japanese have a lesser muzzle than a lot of the American dogs, but if you get these nice, chunky beautiful headpieces, that is good. One of them named Hank, a dog that we bred to, has what I consider an ideal headpiece. He had a very nice muzzle.

Loren:

A lot of the Japanese stock have gotten too foxy and pointy, and you want to stay away from that. But there is some Japanese stock that doesn't have that snipey look. I don't think I have ever seen a perfect head.

Cristina:

But I am saying if you look at his head, you know that is an Akita. Shadow is beautiful, too.

Loren:

They need muzzles that look Akita. That aren't too heavy or overdone, but that are not pointy or slender either. That is something that even the Japanese standard says, a broad, full muzzle that is not pointed. It should taper some, of course, but not be pointy. If they are breeding to their standard, then they wouldn't be doing that. But again, some of that is open to interpretation. Some people think the muzzles are longer on Japanese dogs, and that is just not true. They are probably shorter than the Americans. The Americans are so large and full that when they get long, they don't look snipey, but they are definitely longer in relationship to the skull. Thus, it is common to have Akitas that resemble German Shepherds.

Cristina:

When you are breeding to an imported male, that is one of the things that you really look at.

Loren:

Yes, and you want to make sure you can compensate for the rears. Another thing about size is that you don't always have to breed to size to produce it. With Japan, no matter what she was bred to, she produced size. Full Japanese stud or not, she would always produce larger than herself. There are some very good all Japanese dogs, just like there are some very good all American dogs.

Cristina:

There are less all Japanese dogs, and that is the problem.

Loren:

It doesn't matter what their breeding is, it is the standard and how they match up to that. Now, there is more than one way to get to where you are going. If pedigrees were how you judge dogs, you could just bring their pedigrees to the show and leave the dogs home.

Cristina:

That is a problem today. There are not enough of the 100 percent Japanese dogs, and bringing back the split issue, I can't even see any point in it.

*What are some problems in the breed today ?*

Loren:

The main thing is that a lot of the American dogs have just become too short legged. The length of leg, compared to the depth of chest, when the depth of chest is 50 percent of the height of the dog, you are going to have a certain amount of daylight underneath the dog if you have the proper amount of leg length. The problem you see a lot of times is when these young dogs come into the ring, and they already look mature and balanced. It doesn't take but a couple of years later, when you look at them, they look like they are on peg legs. Structure may be fine otherwise, but they are so short legged that it just ruins their balance. It affects the dignity of the dog. Anything that takes away from the dignity, in the standard, is not good. That is something that should be avoided or compensated for in a breeding program.

Japanese stock generally has enough leg under it that they can improve that. Not that there aren't other dogs who are all-American who have the proper length of leg, but it is important. Again, it doesn't really matter what the pedigree is as much as good physical compensation.

There was a really pretty picture in the last Akita World of a white bitch. She was eight months old, and she was just beautiful. I hope she stays together and doesn't get too short-legged. I thought she was so nice, and I rarely mention anybody else's dogs to them, but I wrote the owners an email, the Akita's name was Wynter, and I told them I thought their white bitch puppy was just beautiful. Unfortunately, we didn't go to the National for the first time in sixteen years this year, and guess who won the National She won the National. Carol Foti was showing her, which was kind of nice for her too. I think Nancy Bowen was also showing her too, so you have to give everybody credit there.

Cristina:

Both Carol and Nancy showed one of our dogs, Shere Khan. He is owned by Suzette Morettini, but he is our breeding.

Loren:

Fran Wasserman showed Shere Khan at the National when he was nine months old. That was in Chicago in 1995.

Cristina:

As far as features on a dog the leg could be improved. Not only by bringing in the Japanese dog because they usually have a longer leg, but there are a lot of American dogs, too, that have the longer leg, and that is what should be watched.

Loren:

I think it was Pete Lagus who said one time that was one of the reasons he got out of these dogs, because they were getting so short-legged. That was years ago! Pete would answer the question, "How do you like my puppy?" by saying, "Bring him back when he is four years old, and I will tell you!"

Cristina:

Big bodies, no legs.

Loren:

They look more mature that way, and they finish quicker. Then they look like veterans when they are only two years old. That is not good for this breed, but everyone wants to finish their dog as a puppy. The Akiho way is better. Their dogs cannot win the top award until they reach mature age.

**What are some of the kennels that you would consider the best today ?**

Loren:

Now we are going to name names and leave out some people and get in trouble, and make people mad at us.

Cristina:

Nancy Fisk has a pretty good kennel.

Loren:

She just did a breeding to a full Japanese dog that Josh Popkin imported. She has good dogs. She will have a really nice litter out of that. You have to give her credit for doing something like that, because it is not an easy thing for some people to do. She has some nice, typey dogs. She has been successful. Some of the dogs out. East I don't see, but I see pictures of them in Akita World. Carol Laubscher has had really good success. Recently, I saw some pictures in Akita World of Cindy Smith's dogs, and they look pretty nice. They are pretty much American type, those folks. Pam Deming bred Cash, Ch. T'Stone's The Hustler. We were the first ones to have a litter out of him, when we bred Japan to him and produced Ember. Pam has dogs that have come down through Kash that have been doing very well. Judy Dunn's ads show some nice, typey dogs. We saw a really nice puppy at the Las Vegas specialty I judged at. I gave Best Opposite in Sweeps to a black and white puppy of Colleen Sullivan's. Laurie Ottow has bred a lovely puppy named Diva. Carol Howton bred Mitsu, who I a tried to buy as a puppy. Bev Wilkinson up in Canada has had some good success. She has used Shere Khan in some of her breedings. She has done very well. Bill Bobrow and Carol Parker have some really nice things going on right now. Camille Kam Wong co-owns some dogs with Carol and Bill. I don't know who we are leaving out, they are going to kill us. Bill Burland is starting to get some things going, and Cornelius Campbell has some good dogs. He has good dogs coming out of Meow. Michael Sclafani is going to do very well with Crystal, and the little puppy we were talking about, Northland's Realm Of The Tiger, the one we liked so well. He is going to do really well. There are some others, too, but some of them I am not as familiar with and some I just have to look at pictures, so it is hard to say. I am probably leaving out somebody that is very good. When it comes to the imports, Josh Popkin is becoming the man. Look for him to do some things in the future that no one else has accomplished.

Cristina:

For those whom we left out, we like your kennels, too. (laughter)

Loren:

Not all of them think like us, but I can appreciate a good dog, whether it is American or Japanese. It doesn't necessarily have to be what I would do or what I think they should do. I would do some different things with what they have. To bring things up a notch and not worry so much about showing as some people do. But they have to win to be taken seriously. Also, to become an AKC judge, you must be twelve years in the breed, bred five litters, and four champions. Once someone has these credentials, they may be taken more seriously.

*Do you have any funny or interesting stories about any of your dogs? Which one was the biggest character ?*

Cristina:

Well, there was that time that those people came to pick up their puppy. It was so funny.

Loren:

These people came over, a gal from New Mexico, to get a puppy to take back with her. She had a friend with her who had a little Yorkie, and the puppies were all playing. The Yorkie was about as big as the puppies, and I thought the buyer might want to meet the mother, Ember. So we let Ember out so she could meet the people, and the first thing she did when we let her out was she went after that Yorkie. I grabbed her quick, so it didn't really harm the Yorkie, but it was something. I had forgotten all about that Yorkie, and she was just protecting her puppies.

Cristina:

She did nearly kill a small dog that came from over two blocks away, it got loose and got over in the yard. That was terrible! I looked outside and I thought it was our dog, and it wasn't.

Loren:

Years ago, when I lived in Minnesota, I had a short fence, and they got out. We had Arctic, who was a white male puppy, and Alaska. They both got out, and we were on the edge of town. They ran toward the creek, and only one of them came back. Fortunately, there was a fresh layer of snowfall, so I could follow the tracks. I kept calling but Arctic wouldn't come, and finally I followed the tracks all the way up to where he was, and he was holding on to ledge of ice in the creek. All he had to do was turn around and he could have walked right out of the creek, but he was just holding on. He looked like a little polar bear sticking his head out. He must have been freezing. It was awful. I got him out of there, and he just didn't know what to do. He was holding on to the ice ledge because it was too deep right there, I guess. I was glad I found him.

Cristina:



I have a funny story, we had just moved here and we still had Glacier. There was a board that was missing out of the fence. I was looking all over for Glacier but I couldn't find her anywhere. Then I heard her. The people next door had a little dog door, and they had three little Dachshunds. I was calling and calling her, and I thought maybe she went in the next door neighbor's yard. So I went into their yard, and she had somehow gotten into that dog door, and she was sitting in their house. She wouldn't come out, and I was screaming at her. They were at work, and my dog was in their house! Their dogs of course were probably petrified, they probably ran and hid somewhere in the house, and she was laying in the house. I finally got her out. Akitas are very dominant, independent dogs. Sometimes they don't listen to you. That is another thing with Akitas, they are stubborn. But I love them. They are big and sweet and cuddly, and usually they are wonderfully tempered. But there have been some Akitas who are not. I think it is the way they are brought up. There might be something to the point that they are bred to be bad-tempered dogs. I think all they need is love and attention and they will usually be well-tempered dogs. I feel that way about almost any dog, but if a dog is teased a lot or something like that, it is going to have a bad temperament.

*How long have you lived in your present location?*

Loren:

Seventeen years ago we moved to California, to a smaller house than this one. Then about three and one-half years later we moved to this house, which was new when we bought it. We have lived here about fourteen years in the spring. I have lived here longer than I've lived anywhere.

Cristina:

I love it. I love California. We had come to visit before we moved here, and I wanted to move out here. We came out here on our honeymoon and bought a house. We went to San Francisco and we liked San Francisco, we still love it there, but we wanted to move somewhere inland and still be able to be close to San Francisco and Lake Tahoe and Yosemite. We are centrally located here, so it is wonderful. And we are close to dog shows.

Loren:

We wanted a place, too, that was big enough to support a carpet and upholstery cleaning business, which we were going to start. That is what we did back in Minnesota, so we needed enough population without too much. Antioch is a little less expensive, although it is still high-priced. I'm glad we moved here then, I don't know how we would afford it now.

Cristina:

Things have gone sky-high in California, but we have done very well, and our business has done well. It is a wonderful business; all of our business is repeat and referral. It is all word of mouth, and I've never run an ad or anything. We try to exude quality, just like our dogs. So that is what we are. I love it here!

*What have been some of the benefits and drawbacks of being in dogs?*

Cristina:

The benefits are the satisfaction of what you can accomplish in trying to better the breed in the way you are breeding. If you want to be in it for the betterment of the breed, people should realize that in order to do that, you have to get rid of some of your old feelings. You have to throw away old feelings, that was then and this is now. Try to better the breed by breeding good animals, and not how many you breed but how you breed them. Don't worry about if one is going to be the top act out there. We do it for ourselves, to get that perfect Akita which will probably not happen. Probably, nobody will ever have it but there are some beautiful dogs out there. The drawbacks would be the money. We would have had a lot more money saved and we could have had a lot more if we didn't spend it all on dogs.

Loren:

Yes, it is expensive being in dogs, unless you are running the kind of operation that is geared to make money, but that is probably less desirable for the breed. There is certainly nothing wrong with making a little money back on your investment, but if your primary motive is just to make money, then it wouldn't be a very good thing for the breed.

The enjoyment of it is in the breeding, for us. I like winning, and that is always a thrill, but winning and breeding are two different things. You can win in the show ring, but it can have nothing to do with the animal itself or how it matches the standard or how you should be breeding. You have to separate those two things, and keep an eye on both of them. Sounds kind of contradictory, but it is important to understand the difference. If you have success and you enjoy putting

two dogs together and seeing if you can accomplish something, and it turns out well, you get a lot of enjoyment and satisfaction out of it. You have something to be proud of, and it is always a kick to be good at something. You also have to be a little lucky, because there is a lot of chance. Basically when you are breeding, you are trying to put the odds more in your favor to succeed by chance. Chance is part of it.

Drawbacks, yes, it does tie you down a little bit sometimes. You can't just take off without someone watching the dogs, on the other hand, sometimes it gets us out of the house and we go to Nationals; I have attended twenty Nationals. We take a week there or so, but we try not to overdo it with dogs, it is a big part of our lives but we don't want it to become all of our lives. We try to maintain a life outside of dogs. We are probably going to be winding down in our breeding and showing activities, we are not getting any younger, and dogs take awhile to grow old, too. We hope to contribute something, and we hope that the breed does better because we have bred well.

Cristina:

I agree. We hope that we could have put a dent into helping the breed in any way we could. It is a big satisfaction if you bring something nice in.

Loren:

You go out and look at your dogs, and if you look at them and they kind of tug at your heartstrings, make your heart skip a beat, then you feel like you've done something good. If you go out there and they are pretty but they don't quite do that for you, then maybe you should move those dogs to good homes and keep the better ones. Don't worry whether you're the breeder or someone else is, just keep the best. That is the hard part about breeding dogs, if you have a small operation. You do want to do right by the dogs, so you sometimes have to part with dogs that you love. You have to think of the dogs. If you get too many dogs, you have to find a better home for them where they will be happier. They will be better off and you can do some other things. There are always those dogs you will never part with. You keep them forever no matter what, but you have to make some hard choices.

Cristina:

We are just people who love Akitas, and want to improve them, and hopefully we have.

*Thank you so much.*

Loren:

Thank you.