

## **Bernice Mair “Meadowpark” (1933 – 2016)**



Bernice Hemthorne was a true Lancashire lass, she loved dogs all her life, growing up with them as her father ran a small boarding kennels next to the family home in Bentmeadows, Rochdale. She left school in 1948 to become a kennel maid and worked for the Greyhound Racing Association at their track in Rochdale. Subsequently and without telling her parents, this attractive, determined young lady, joined the WRAF. (Womans Royal Air Force). It was during this time, she met John Mair, they fell in love, eventually married and she became Mrs Mair - much to the disappointment of her commanding officers who had predicted a high-flying career in the service for the talented Miss Hemthorne! In time, two sons, John and Euan and a daughter Carole completed the family. Despite being a wife and mother, Bernice's interest in matters canine never dwindled and in those early days, she enjoyed and owned many breeds, including Shetland Sheepdogs, Rough Collies, Pembroke Corgis, Cavaliers, American Cocker Spaniels and Poodles.

In 1958, when looking to register a kennel name she chose the name “Meadowpark” derived from the family's association with Bentmeadows which was near a park. She supported the local canine societies, showing her different breeds of dogs with success at local Match meetings, Sanction, Limit and Open shows. Carole had shown an interest in the dogs from an early age and had been encouraged to do so, accompanied her mum and dad to the shows. Bernice joined the local canine society - Rochdale and District Canine Society – serving as secretary for over a decade. The then Chairman, Mr Foizey, was looking to retire and sell his business/ property in Trows Lane, Castleton. Bernice heard about it and in 1977 the Mair family purchased Lawn Cottage Boarding Kennels and Cattery - Carole joining John and Bernice in the venture, working together on a daily basis.

However, prior to that move, some years previously Carole had asked the family for a special breed of dog for her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday gift. She wanted a Bernese Mountain Dog puppy and as there were not that many breeders around at the time, Bernice did some research before the purchase. She wanted to buy from a reputable kennel that hip scored their breeding stock and openly discussed the faults and virtues of their dogs. She contacted Diana Cochrane of "Duntiblae" fame and the Duntiblae Nalle grandson, "Clint" - Duntiblae Dark and Handsome was purchased for Carole. Bernice and Carole decided they wanted to breed and show Bernese so the next step was to purchase a female. This they did in the form of Clint's dam, Helga" - Duntiblae Dark and Endearing (Duntiblae Nalle ex Duntiblae Eva). Both "Clint" and his dam had BVA/KC clear certificates. Bernice said of "Helga" that although she was not typical of bitches, she was well bred, had excellent orthopaedic results and a lovely temperament and put to the right dog she would produce something better than herself. The stud they chose for Helga was Ch Duntiblae Forgeman Fusilier (a Duntiblae Nalle son). A singleton puppy resulted from the union and in 1985, he became the kennel's first home bred title holder, Ch Meadowpark The Brigadier and John's constant companion. They then purchased Mixbury Modern Millie (born 1979) and she became the first female champion for the kennel. She was sired by Ch Tarncred Tarquin of Temeraire, also a Nalle son ex a Nalle daughter, Duntiblae Dark Ember of Mixbury. When looking to breed Millie, they decided on an outcross and chose Brian and Jude Simonds' Swiss import, Ch Jumbo v Waldacker at Coliburn. This mating produced Ch Meadowpark Captivation, who made up in 1986. From Don and Brenda Griffiths they purchased Forgeman Freelance, (1982 – 1989) – whose dam Ch Folkdance at Forgeman had not only won the Working Group at Crufts in 1980, but also went on to produce the first Breed Record Holder – Ch Forgeman Footpad. "Baxter" became a champion in 1984, and really put the kennel on the map, since not only was he successful in the ring, he was also a top producer, siring 7 champions in total and numerous other ch show winners. In 1998 he was Top Stud Dog all breeds in the Working Group and to commemorate this Bernice was presented with a memorial shield- the names of all his champions children engraved on it. She treasured this. It was a bitter disappointment when he was found to be a carrier of the rare inherited disease Hypomyelinogenesis (Trembler). Once this status had been confirmed, Bernice acted accordingly. He was withdrawn from stud and subsequently castrated, living the remainder of his life as a house dog at Lawn Cottage. Bernice was extremely proud of the fact that his son, Ch Meadowpark Lancelot, born 1984 and owned by Kate McDuff, was chosen to represent the breed in the Kennel Club's Illustrated Breed Standard book.

With the family taking an increasingly more active interest in BMD, Carole and Bernice joined The Bernese Mountain Dog Club of GB, Bernice being elected to committee in 1982. Through the club she was actively involved in getting the breed incorporated in the BVA/KC hip scoring scheme, alongside GSD and other breeds. She talked at length to Dr Malcolm Willis about hip scoring and the genetic aspects of dog breeding. She became club secretary in 1984, was diligent during her time in office, only retiring in 1989 in order to spend more time with her family. They had been dealt a devastating blow when Carole and Richard's second son, Ben, was diagnosed with congenital Cerebral Palsy. For many years Bernice and John were to play a major supporting role, in Ben's life, alongside his parents. Bernice was delighted to be made an Hon Life member of the GB club in 2015. In 1985 she was a founder member of the Northern BMD Club and eventual Patron. In that role, for a time she regularly attended committee meetings and was financially /generously supportive of the club's annual "SuperLeague Finals", from its inception in 1999.

Bernice mentored a goodly number of successful people in the breed including Julie Baldwin whose "Fortonpark" foundations were built on Meadowpark lines and who continues to this day to work

closely with the kennel. Bernice also had a great relationship with Lyn Brand of the “Branbern” kennels in Sydney, Australia. By working together they exchanged dogs/bloodlines successfully to mutual benefit and breed improvement. Bernice visited the USA for the Bernese National Speciality on a number of occasions and enjoyed her time “over the pond” talking dogs, Bernese Mountain Dogs in particular. The last time she flew the Atlantic was with Carole and their family friend Beryl, in fact there was a crowd of us – 13 in total, to Gettysberg in 2009. We had a great time that week!

Bernice always had an interest in dog books, bloodlines and breeding stock. She kept up to date with her contemporaries’ activities overseas before the advent of the Internet or Face Book! Always looking to improve her canine knowledge, she embarked upon a couple of correspondence courses run by David Cavill under the umbrella of The Animal Care College – The “Dog Judging Certificate” and “Dog Breeding Certificate” attaining a Distinction in both! But, you would never have known from her as she never bragged about it or any of her achievements, in or out of the show ring.

She awarded Challenge Certificates in both Shetland Sheepdogs and Bernese, judging the latter at Crufts in 1993. In recent years, Bernice and Carole, became interested in Japanese Spitz, through the family's long lasting friendship with Mary and the late Gerry Fallas, (staunch supporters of The Ben Hartley Trust). Although they have not “pushed” this breed as such, a champion, bred by Dalsetter, handled by Carole, was Best of Breed at Crufts in 2013.

To date there have been over thirty Bernese Mountain Dog champions, (more than any other BMD kennel in the history of the breed in the UK), bred from a combination of the kennel's established UK bloodlines and imported bloodstock. Bernice shared her bounty and many other people had Meadowpark champions. There have been many others, bred at Lawn Cottage, who had never seen the inside of the show ring who gave and continue to give, endless pleasure to their owners. Her maximum was, “Enjoy your dog for his own sake, whether he wins or not, living with him is more important than showing him.”

She was extremely skilled at stud work, even with most reticent of canine males; this attribute she has passed on to Carole. So, too the art of grooming and coat presentation. Running a busy grooming parlour from the kennels, mother and daughter perfected this art and the Meadowparks are renowned for their expertise in this area. As the years have rolled on, John and Bernice started to take more of a back seat approach. They “retired” - in that they moved out of Lawn Cottage to a little house around the corner from the kennels, whilst Carole not only took over the business, but also came more to the helm with the show team. John still went to Lawn Cottage every morning continuing in the way he had done all those years previously. In recent years the Meadowpark kennel has gone from strength to strength, attaining the highest accolades in the show ring, for example, at Working and Pastoral Breeds of Wales in April this year, Ch Meadowpark High Class - “Milo” piloted by Carole won Best in Show. Only the third time a Bernese has won this accolade.

Fifteen years ago, a “dog mad” school boy by the name of Gary Dybdall went to Lawn Cottage, eager to learn the rudiments of dogs, went for work experience to learn about showing, breeding etc. Immediately treated as one of the family, Bernice took him under her wing, he was mentored well and a mutual long lasting respect developed between the two of them. A few years ago, this same young man, graduated as a Veterinary Surgeon from Edinburgh University (We can only imagine her pride in Gary when MRCVS was added to his name!). It is he who piloted Ch Meadowpark Whisper's Breeze to her Group win at Crufts in 2013 (they also won the Breeders Group – same show – same year!) and who now works solidly alongside Carole in team “Meadowpark”. This combination has proved to be a phenomenal partnership, breaking records

and making breed history. The spade work that Bernice (and John) did all those years ago, with the Swiss breed the family took to their heart, has paid dividends, the evidence of which is in the continued success over recent years. She was a true “dyed in the wool” dog woman; she always believes the success of any kennel lay in the strength and quality of its bitches. She was good natured both in success and failure and always congratulated fellow exhibitors on their achievements. On occasion, she could be a little “frosty” on first meeting, but once you got to know her she was easy to be with and excellent company. You could always be sure of a warm welcome, a “cuppa”, and a good dog natter whenever you called at Lawn Cottage. Despite running a business, it was a family home, visitors were always welcome. She was generous with her time and thoughtful too; any correspondence received from her was always clearly recognisable because of her beautiful handwriting.

Bernice celebrated her 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday on 16<sup>th</sup> November with her family. (She enjoyed the company of “Breeze” as a house dog sleeping on the bed). Sadly, soon afterwards she was admitted to Fairfield Hospital in Bury, where after a short illness, she passed away, peacefully on 7<sup>th</sup> December. Sincere condolences to her family, husband John, her children and grandchildren. She is quite irreplaceable. However, she will never be forgotten, since she was one of those rare individuals who made a true impact during their lifetime and her legacy will serve to inspire us all, as well as the many more individuals and breeders in the years to come.

Her funeral service was held at 1.40pm - Rochdale Crematorium. **OL11 4DG**,

On Monday 19<sup>th</sup> December and afterwards at Rochdale Rugby Club. **OL11 5LU**.

Donations in memory of Bernice can be made to Scope and/or Bernese Welfare UK. Cheques can be sent to Carole Hartley-Mair, Lawn Cottage Kennels and Cattery, Trows Lane, Castleton, Rochdale, Lancashire. OL11 2UD.

Helen Davenport-Willis