

Esenjo

Margaret Sommer tells how she became involved with Esenjo

These notes were taken at a 2007 BCOA National Specialty Breeders Forum and were published in the BCOA Bulletin, Jan/Feb./March 2008.

June 6th 1983 – Telephone Notes:

On the sixth of June 1983, I received a phone call from Louis Clark, whose veterinarian had referred him to me. He wanted to breed his female, and said it had been a longtime dream of his to breed her. She was from the Ituri Forest in the Belgian Congo, and had been bred by the pygmies of the Lumbashi tribe. He had imported her in 1978 when she was ten weeks old. He had photos and papers and she had been "certified" by the President of Zaire where he had worked for Morrison-Knudsen on the Inga-Shaba transmission line from Boma to Kaizi, and he had received her from the pygmies.

The pygmies were hired as laborers on the line, and Louis had wanted to get a Basenji from them, but they refused him. They had many, but didn't give them away. They used them for hunting and carried them on their shoulders.

During a drought, Louis killed two buffaloes, and gave them to the pygmies who gave him the puppy in appreciation. She was gold with white points, and he had clocked her at 40 mph as an adult.

I told Luis I would think about it and call him back



Esenjo

(Louis' wife, Cathy, later told me the pygmies weren't allowed to kill animals, and they had worked with Louis on the road crew. She called it "a political scenario." The natives had been under the dictatorship of President Mambuto Sese Seko since 1965. When the pygmies offered the pup to Louis they had to say it was from the president rather than from themselves.)

June 7th 1963 – Telephone Notes:

I returned Louis' call, and made an appointment to meet him and Esenjo with her papers the next day.

June 8th 1983 – Meeting with Louis Clark and Esenjo:

Accompanied by Herbert Holloway, an elderly gentleman friend, Louis brought Esenjo to meet us. Also in attendance were Sandra Bridges, Penny Inan, and my mother, Edith Anderson, whom I invited to attend. We were all in agreement that Esenjo was purebred. Her "papers" were an export veterinary certificate from the



Rameses Tut-Ankhamen – "Friend"

Republic du Zaire.

I agreed to breed Esenjo to Rameses Tut-Ankhamen (call name: "Friend") in exchange for second pick of the litter, and I would help him place the puppies in pet homes. Friend was heavily bred on Fula of the Congo and was sired by Ch. Pero Krugerrand out of Shetari Peppermint Patty (Eng. Am. Can. Ch. Fulafriend of the Congo x Ch. Fula Nefertiti of the Congo, CD). The pups were due August 11.

June 8th 1983

Interview with Louis Clark by Margaret Sommer, Penny Inan and Sandra Bridges from notes taken by Sandra Bridges:

Hunting and feeding – the dogs get the best of the kill first, and also the bones for their teeth. Pygmies eat the meat raw, and drink the blood. The dogs do, too. Kwanga root (tapioca) is the main diet during the dry season. The pygmies make breads and all eat, including the dogs.

Color – all tan, none darker.

Markings – a little white on feet, chest, tail tip.

Dogs have their own huts. No other confinement.

Size – approximately 18" tall, 18" long and 25-26 pounds.

Dark eyes, solid black nose (no pink tinge.)

It is cold in the mountains. They migrate from Lumbashi to Kolwezi to Kasongo (upriver) to Kuba to Kinshasa to Cabinda to Matadi back to Kinshasa and retrace. Temperature is 65-70 degrees in the dry season, but the humidity is high. The dogs just follow. They keep 12 or 13. No fights amongst them. They love children, hate strangers, and can fight a lion. They do as they please. Eat grass. Climb trees! Clocked at 40 mph. There are no European dogs. They don't like other breeds. The

dogs don't like black Americans. The pygmies don't like other breeds of dogs. The pygmies do bury dogs.

Louis Clark was given a puppy for a couple of buffaloes he gave them during a drought. Clark took the pygmies, Endo and Elotato, with him to Kinshasa to witness that the puppy was a gift so he could get her out of the country. Asengo is Lingala (which has a thousand words) for happiness. Asenjo is Esenjo.

The women nurse the puppies if there are too many. There are 8 or 9 puppies in a litter, and all live. There are 150 pygmies to a clan. Clark has seen dogs of fourteen years with teeth still as good as ivory. All tails are a single loop – none any curlier. No drop ears. Eyes are LIGHT. All eyes are light. Feet are between a cat and a hare foot. Eyes are hazel, a yellowish brown.

The dogs obey the pygmies, but are not pets. They can jump eight feet. No fleas, ticks or mosquitoes. Esenjo paces when she walks.

They hunt as a pack – ahead of the men, and the dog comes back to tell and lead them to where the game is. Actually take down game by the neck. A 35-50 pound gazelle.

In Southeast Asia, the dogs reassemble Basenjjs, but are NOT Basenjjs. Phu Quoc? They are patchy, all colors, stocky with a short muzzle.

The pygmies have no other domestic animals. No other natives have Basenjjs. Eat monkey. A Basenji, one on one, can kill a fully mature baboon. The bitches are kept separate when they come in season, and the matings are supervised. (Bitches are not held.) The Basenjjs have round, hooded ears.

August 5th 1983 – Esenjo's pups are whelped:

Five red females and one red male.

Mid-August 1983 – I called to ask about litter:

There had been no word from Louis, so I called to inquire about the pups. Herbert Holloway answered, and told me he had delivered the pups on August 5 but Louis, who was only in his mid-forties, was in the hospital dying.

August 25th 1983 – Louis was buried:

The pups were now owned by the widow, Cathy. They had been married less than a year.

September 3rd 1983 – Saw the pups:

My husband, John, and I saw the pups for the first time.

September 22nd, 23rd and 24th 1983 – BCOA National Specialty:

The BCOA National Specialty was being held in San Francisco. The pups were seven weeks old so I invited Elspet Ford, Doreen Duffin, who was judging the BCONC Specialty, and Irene Terry to see Esenjo and the pups. They approved them as purebred, and Elspet suggested that they document their approval with a letter which she and Doreen signed.



September 27th 1983 – Purchased pups:

We purchased five of the pups, and Cathy kept one of the females. Chris and Wally Harley were in

attendance, and Wally notarized Herbert Holloway's statement of whelping the litter.

February 1984 – The pups are six months old:

We raised the pups as a group until they were six months old when we separated Efé from her sisters to avoid conflict. We let them develop naturally without any formal training and with me as their primary human contact. Their early non-training may have made them slower to acquire a working vocabulary of words. Physically, they were stronger than our American Basenjis, and more vigorous, especially the male, who was the only one as large as his mother.

At six months, I boarded Cathy's pup, Ebebba, for four months, but didn't reintroduce her to the litter. From us she went to Cathy's cousin where she was attacked in her run by a lab-sized dog. She did not have the confidence and ebullience of her littermates.

August 5th 1984 – Evergreen Specialty

We introduced the pups at the Evergreen Specialty to celebrate their first birthday. I wrote the following in my Christmas letter that year: "Everyone was their friend. None of them had ever worn a lead or a collar yet we exercised them on lead as easily as any of ours we had worked with from puppyhood. They behaved equally well the next month when we took them to the BCOSC Specialty."

November 23rd, 24th and 25th 1984 – Jean-Pierre Hallet:

Jean-Pierre Hallet, author of Congo Kitabu and Pygmy Kitabu, was in the Bay Area promoting the Pygmy Fund, so I showed him the picture of the pups that had been featured on the BCOA Bulletin cover, and asked him if he thought they were purebred. He replied with one word, "Absolutely."

Litter by Ebo out of Efé whelped two red males and three red females.



Margaret Sommer with one year old pup in 1984s — Top: Ebo and Bottom Row: Edea, Endo, Ebibyin, Efé

January 28th 1988 – Two pups go to Virginia:

Nancy Sullivan of Outrek Basenjjs offered to participate with us so I sent her a male and female from the breeding.

June 22nd 1990 – Esenjo registered:

After the AKC stud book was opened, Esenjo was registered with the other imports.

December 10th 1990 – Virginia litter whelped:

Litter by E'Mara out of E'Meli whelped four red males and one red female.

Comments on all Esenjo progeny, including the parent generation through the fourth generation:

There have been a total of fifteen litters whelped; twelve inbred and three outcross. The twelve inbred litters produced:

46 pups with 23 males and 23 females

Color: all red, 1 with sabbling, 2 over-marked with 1 miss-marked

Testes: 17 complete, 1 monorchid, 5 unknown

Eyes: 1/3 tested clear, 2/3 untested, 2 cataracts

Other: 1 with external intestines, 2 with prolapsed rectums, 2 x-rayed diagnosed with discopondylosis (2 others suspect)

Temperament: all excellent

Type: all typical of the breed with uniform litters

Movement: all functionally sound

Size: the weight differences between the smallest female and the largest male was 10-12 pounds and a height difference of 4 inches, most likely due to the disparity of size between Esenjo and the paternal grandmother who was small.

Note: all the litters were inbred to maintain the 50-50 genetic ratio of the parent generation in order to assure breed purity and to identify the absence or presence of any lethal or seriously detrimental genes in the progeny.

Three outcross litters have been produced with 13 pups: 2 males and 10 females.

Comments:

Of the 46 inbred Basenjjs 29 have been registered, 17 are unregistered and 12 have been bred from. Of the 14 outcross Basenjjs, 8 have been registered and 5 are unregistered. Two have been bred from.

The Esenjo bloodline has been introduced into the gene pool through Elija of Esenjo who is owned by Rita and Tom Pontes. Through their discreet breeding, Esenjo has made her contribution to Basenjjs on four continents where she has been included but wisely not line-bred upon. To the best of my knowledge, none of her direct descendants have carried Fanconi.