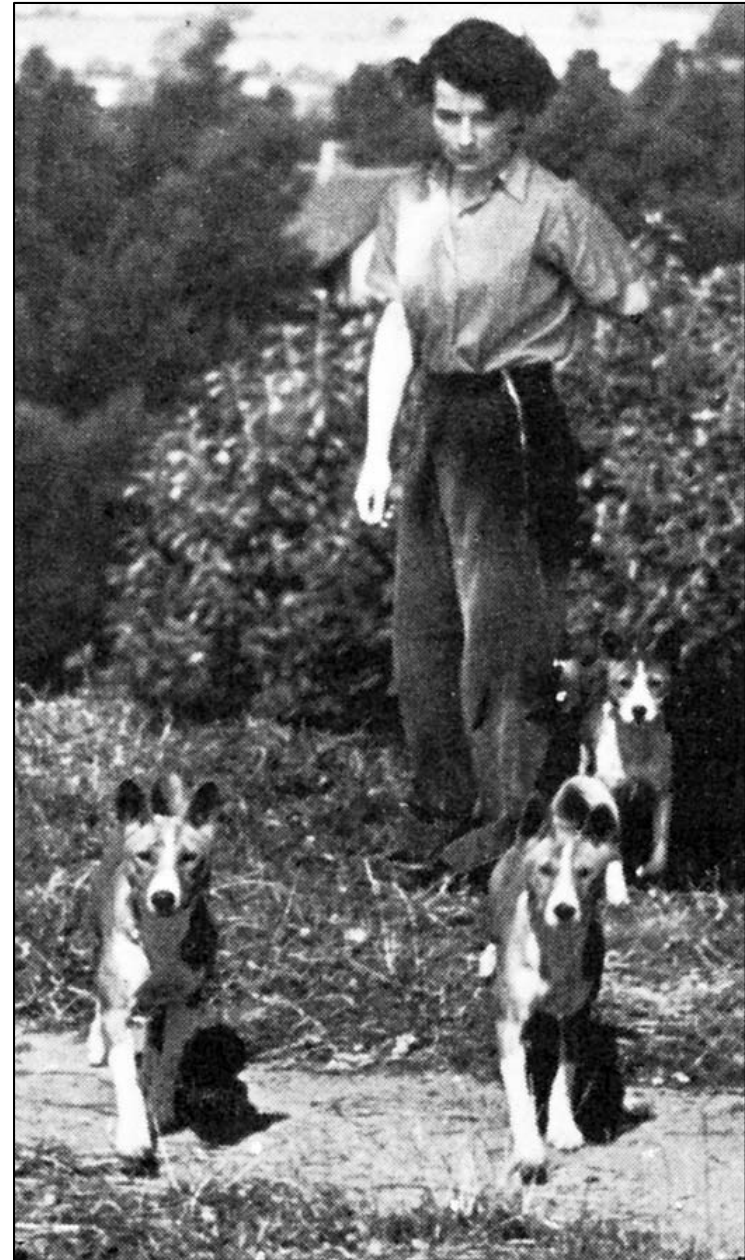


The Inside Story of *Goodbye, My Lady*

Veronica Tudor-Williams

The Basenji © April and May 1976

It was during the worst days of World War II, in June 1942, that I received a heavily censored letter which resulted in the best publicity that Basenjies have ever had. It was from Mr. James Street, of New York City, and read, "I spent last winter in the Southern part of the United States where I was born, where the Mississippi is more than a mile wide. I had written a story and a movie about a dog called, "The Biscuit Eater." One day I stepped into a bar run by a friend and he showed me a picture in a magazine of a charming lady with some dogs. 'Sell, eh?' my friend said. I thought he was talking of the very young lady and agreed she was quite swell. When I learned he was talking of the dogs I almost lost interest."



“Anyway, it was your picture and the dogs were Basenjis. I had never heard of the breed before, I am a Bird Dog, Coonhound and Foxhound man. I was looking for another dog story and began reading about Basenjis. I then wrote the story, “Weep No More, My Lady.” When the story appeared in the ‘Saturday Evening Post,’ the readers raised such a howl because I dared separate a boy from his dog, I had to write a sequel, “Please Come Home, My Lady/” And now I am doing a thread, and ‘My Lady’ is being put into a book. So you see what you have started. Good luck, and thanks for having your picture in

an American magazine.”

The book was published under the title, “Goodbye, My Lady,” and was the same as the Saturday Evening Post story, “Weep No more, My Lady,” and it rapidly became an American best-seller.

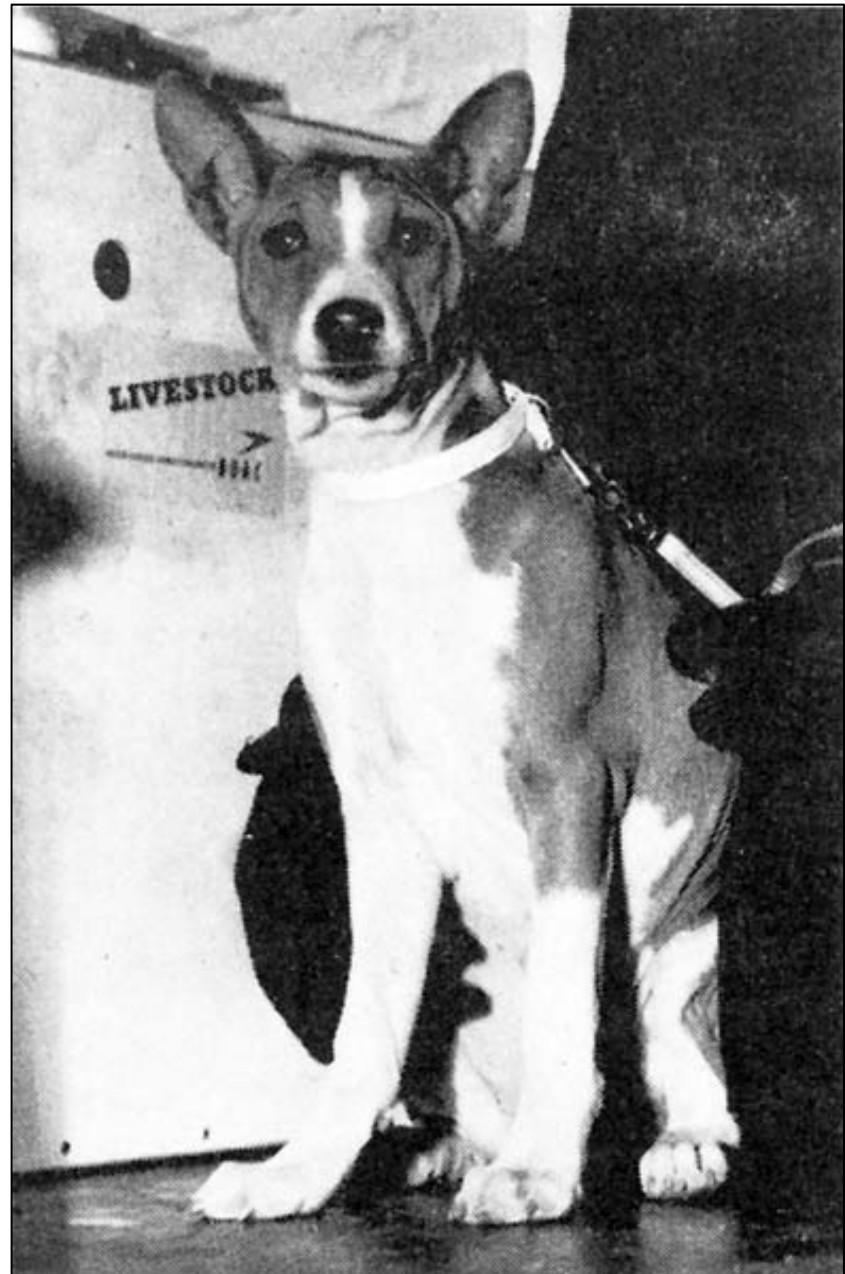
It was not until some time after the war that the film, under the same title, was commenced. James Street was going to be the principal advisor, in person, when he suddenly and tragically died of a heart attack. What a great loss this was.



The cast of the film was chosen; Brandon de Wilde, age 13, and already a famous boy star, was to take the lead. I met Brandon on Long Island when the film was finished. He had Lady with him, and I asked his father how he found his son was an actor. He told me that he had a play on Broadway when one of the actors, a golden-haired boy, was suddenly taken ill and there was no understudy, so it was suggest that Brandon should be tried, and it was then found that Brandon was a natural and took to acting like a duck to water. After that he played in *Shane*, and from memory, I think this was followed by “*Goodbye, My Lady.*” Other famous stars in the film included Walter Brennan, Phil Harris, and Sidney Poitier; all of whom were kind enough to autograph one of the photos published in this article and send it to me in appreciation of “*My Lady.*”

But we proceed too fast – their problem was the great difficulty in finding the ideal Basenji to fill the title role of the film. Finally, through the kindness of Marlise, Basenji breeders in Massachusetts, a long distance call was put through from Hollywood, California, to Molesey, England (at 2 a.m. English time) and it was arranged that my best six month-old bitch puppy, subsequently registered as my *Lady of the Congo*, should be supplied. This was a very happy choice as she proved to be most photogenic. The big question at that time was what would happen to the dog when filming was finished, and this was quickly settled when it was written into the agreement that *My Lady* should become the personal property of Brandon de Wilde. The price was not of film-star proportions, but that was a minor matter compared to the thrill of supplying her.

My Lady was duly flown to Hollywood, to Warner Bros. Studios, and was received with unstinted praise. Then another 2 a.m. call was made to Molesey, asking for four doubles for *My Lady*. No suitable bitch puppies were available, so the situation was explained and four dog



My Lady with her travelling box

puppies were offered as the only alter-native. They did not seem very suitable as a double for a lady, but it seemed to present no difficulties, so four young dogs were flown out to join My Lady, including her litter brother, My Lord of the Congo. These four dogs also had good homes later on when filming was over. One of them was allocated to Mrs.



Sandy one of the Marlise boys with My Lady in a New York hotel as Marlise met her in New York when changing planes and then sent her on to Hollywood.

Sheila Anderson of the Glenairley Basenjjs in Canada. This was Flageolet of the Congo, subsequently an international champion.

Hollywood never does anything by halves, so now the doggy, or rather, the Basenji experts, were laid on. At that time Mrs. Sheila Anderson of Glenairley Basenjjs had one of the leading kennels, and possibly the greatest knowledge of anyone on the West Coast. She was asked to go and advise on the show points, and the treatment and care of the dogs for the duration of the filming which was going to be shot in Georgia. Mr. Walter Philo, then president of the Basenji Club of America, was also invited to be present and to advise. Walter wrote me that his chief criticism was that "an exact duplicate of My Lady of the Congo had not been shipped over the president of BCOA." Mrs. Anderson was doubtful at first whether she had been wise to leave the peace and comfort of her home, but she enjoyed being with the dogs. By that time several more doubles had been laid on, and she was delighted to find that all the people handling the dogs were really kind and were great dog lovers. She wrote that the doubles were necessary because when cameras are rolling there can be no delays, but she was also very impressed with the anxiety of Mr. Wellman, and Batjac (the small film company making the film for Warner Bros.) to see that everything, down to the smallest detail, was authentic. At the start of filming it seemed that several doubles would be needed, but many parts which were originally thought would have to be done by doubles, were in fact, done by My Lady herself, due to the very sympathetic and understanding way in which she was treated and with the director very anxious that she should do as much as possible. When not filming with Brandon, she spent all her time with him and a real attachment developed between them.

In August 1955, a letter arrived from Brandon which read, "Dear Miss Tudor-Williams, I am so very sorry not to have written before, but I was just too busy. I want to thank you so much for the dog, My Lady, and for the Basenji book. The book is giving all the information about Basenjjs I will ever need. I love Lady very much, and can't wait till the film is finished so I can take her home and keep her for myself. The picture starts shooting August 18, and Lady is wonderful in it. Thanks again.

Yours truly, Brandon de Wilde."

About nine months later, in 1956, feeling that "Goodbye, My Lady" should soon be released in England, I telephoned Warner Bros, in Soho, London, to ask for information, and I was told that the film would shortly be shown in the West End. I then explained that I had supplied the dog in the film, hence my great interest. I've seldom known a telephone conversation to express such a variety of feelings, incredulity, excitement, and then obvious anticipation, followed by an invitation to call at Warner Bros. offices in Soho as soon as possible, since the dog being English, would give enormous scope for publicity in the newspaper to the benefit of all concerned. I went along to the offices and I answered numerous questions whilst being pleasantly entertained. I was then invited to the first Press Preview of the film in Warner Bros.' own little cinema on the premises – and very comfortable it was too. It was my own first viewing, and I remember being delighted with the way the whole film had been done. It was a wonderful nature-study, besides being a most touching story of a boy and his dog. And at the end I had to keep saying to myself, "Now don't be silly, there's no need to cry, you know perfectly well Brandon and My Lady were never parted from each other." Even so, I joined in with sniffs and nose-blowings which went on towards the end among the "tough" reporters, and all of us were a bit pink-eyed when the lights went up.

This preview was followed by several others, all of which I was invited to attend, and to answer questions afterwards. All were for publicity purposes and the results were quite remarkable. Practically every paper in Britain, especially the dailies and the glossies, carrying photos and stories, "The New English Lassie," and "My Lady from Britain."

Then came the big premiere at Warner Bros, Cinema in Leicester Square, London, to which 400 people, important in the film and social world, had been invited. Included among the invitations were two for Ch. Fleet of the Congo and Ch. Carnival of the Congo, to be escorted by me. There was nearly disaster over this followed by an amusing though slightly embarrassing episode. The day before the premiere, for some unknown and untraced reason, I had a phone call asking me to come to the Premiere but that Fleet and Carnival would not be required. I duly appeared in the foyer, where I was joined by Lady Helen Nutting, then president of the Basenji Club of Great Britain, and shortly afterwards, by Warner Bros. publicity manager, whose face was a study of horror as he asked in shocked tones what had happened to the dogs – why weren't they with me as they were an essential part of the publicity. I explained why they had not come, and then telephoned my Mother in Molesey (about 15 miles from London) to ask if she could help. She was quite wonderful, getting a taxi and driving straight up with the two dogs. Next came the problem that they would need a walk after the drive, and with the film and a cocktail party ahead of them. They were "curb-trained" but the roaring traffic in Leicester Square was far too dangerous for that. Finally, in desperation, I took them into the small and the perfectly kept Leicester Square Garden, with velvet green turf, and large notices "Keep off the Grass." We did not keep off the grass, and I doubt if the turf had known such sacrilege for years, if ever. We all three turned to go back to the cinema, very relieved, when the gardener working

there spot-ted what had happed. He came roaring at us, waving his rake like Mr. MacGregor chasing Peter Rabbit. He insisted on coming back to the cinema to hear if my story was true, and was quickly placated by the publicity manager who explained the situation. Actually the publicity manager told me he would not have minded a fine and the whole story coming out – “it would have been good publicity,” but I had not particularly enjoyed any of it.

Carnival and Fleet were given seats of honour in the stalls. They behaved beautifully and took a great interest in the film, not having been made blasé with television in those days. They recognized My Lady by leaning forward in their seats and watched the Basenji shots in interested silence, but when the fight took place between the Basenjis (one of the doubles) and the Coonhounds, Fleet growled quite loudly and seemed quite prepared to jump out of his seat and join in.

Afterwards they attended the big cocktail party held for the Press by Warner Bros., many of whom we already knew. The dogs behaved superbly, literally holding court from their armchair seats, and they were voted “the most attractive film stars ever interviewed,” although this was not quite correct as they were acting as stand-ins for their relative, My Lady.

Again there was wonderful publicity in nearly all the newspapers, a lovely photo page in “The Tattler” of Brandon carrying Lady through tropical foliage. Another of Lady and dogs of Ancient Egypt portrayed beside her. In fact, the English press could not have been more lavish with their praise and photos. There was one especially glowing report in “Cinema,” “I don’t feel it is too much to say that it is films like Warner Bros.’ “Goodbye, My Lady” which not only restores faith in Hollywood, but also strengthens one’s faith in the film’s triumphant future – the film is enriched by magnificent acting, and I should be doing Lady a grave injustice if I didn’t mention she is the

best behaved, most captivating Basenji who ever stole a film scene.”



*Fleet and Carnival at the premiere.
The film’s star, M’Lady is their half sister.*

Another of the film's great triumphs was that it was chosen by The Daily Telegraph as one of the world's Top Ten Best Films of the year 1956. From the Basenji owners' point of view, there were just a few things which were disappointing, most especially, the individual Basenji noises which were far from life-like. This was because they were man-made. A "noises-off" expert was employed to do them, getting, I was told, \$50 a day for this and the noises bore very little resemblance to the real thing. I suppose because the noises had to come in the right places, such as Lady yodelling a welcome to Brandon, it was quicker and easier to get someone to mimic them at the correct moment. This seems a great pity when there were so many Basenjies on the premises, and meant that the camera missed the charm of the little head going up, and the mouth forming an "O" to produce the yodel, with the whiskers curving forwards, and then the delightful sound of the yodel itself.

Another point of interest to those who saw the film was the travelling box in which Lady was taken away at the end. In 1956 there was not much long distance air travel for dogs, and travelling crates could not be picked up quickly, so as My Lady was wanted immediately, I went to work and made a box with part of the mesh from Matham Manor larder to form the door, some of this being cut away in the film, so as to see more of Lady's pathetic face peering out. Even the labels I had written, and BOAC's labels were still in place.

When I was in the States a year or so later, I was invited by the de Wildes to go and visit them, and of

course Brandon and My Lady, on Long Island. Lady was quite lovely and Brandon was a most delightfully natural and unspoilt boy. I was told his pocket money was a dollar a day, and as he had spent it that day on horse-riding, he was not allowed any more. He and Lady were devoted to each other – she slept on his bed and went almost everywhere with him. In fact, his parent's told me Brandon was so fond of her he would not go out if he had to leave her behind, so this is one dog story which has the happiest of endings.

Prelude to

Goodbye, My Lady

Veronica Tudor-Williams

The Basenji © March 1988, page 6



Every one knows that I am very patriotic and glad that Britain still leads the field for top dogs. Basenjis are one of our biggest triumphs as we supplied the world with its foundation stock. Even the book and film *Goodbye, My Lady* began in England! I had a letter from James Street of New York City in June of 1942. It was a long and friendly letter so I will only quote the relevant parts. He wrote "I had just written a story called *The Biscuit Eater* when one day I stepped into a bar and a friend showed me a picture of a charming young lady and some dogs... Anyway, it was your photo and the dogs were Basenjis. You then sent me a lot of details about these dogs, as I had never heard of them before. After reading your articles, I wrote the story *Weep No More, My Lady*, later changed to *Goodbye, My Lady*. This appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*, it later became a best selling book and a film was planned"

The problem was to find the ideal dog for the film. Warner Brothers was unable to locate a satisfactory dog in America where there were so few at that date, so they telephoned asking if I could supply what they wanted. Luckily, I had a very photogenic five-month-old bitch puppy and she was clever into the bargain. They bought her over the telephone at 2 a.m. She was to work with the film star, Brandon de Wilde, and since I was anxious about her future, I had it written into Brandon's contract that she became his property when the film was over. A couple of years later I visited Brand and his family on Long Island. He was the most charming, unspoilt boy. He and My Lady (registered as My Lady of the Congo) were devoted to each other.

My Lady was flown to Hollywood to Warner Brothers. They received her with unstinted praise and then phone me for four doubles which I duly supplied. They were only used for scenes like the fight, as My Lady was able to do nearly all the scenes herself. These four dogs also had good homes prearranged for them. One went to Mrs. Sheila Anderson, Canada, and later became Ch. Flageolet of the Congo and a top stud dog in Canada.

I finally had a letter from James Street, 'We now have My Lady in a book and a film, so you see what you started. Good luck and thank you for having the photo of you and your dogs in an American magazine.'

I think this film did more for the popularity of the Basenjis than anything else. Only a few days ago I had a delightful letter and Christmas card from Mrs. Jill Avis telling me she was out with her dogs when a man stopped her and said they were Basenjis. He said he had seen Goodbye, My Lady years ago. He thought it was wonderful and now took a great interest in Basenjis. One day he hoped to own one.

George L. Gilkey writes:

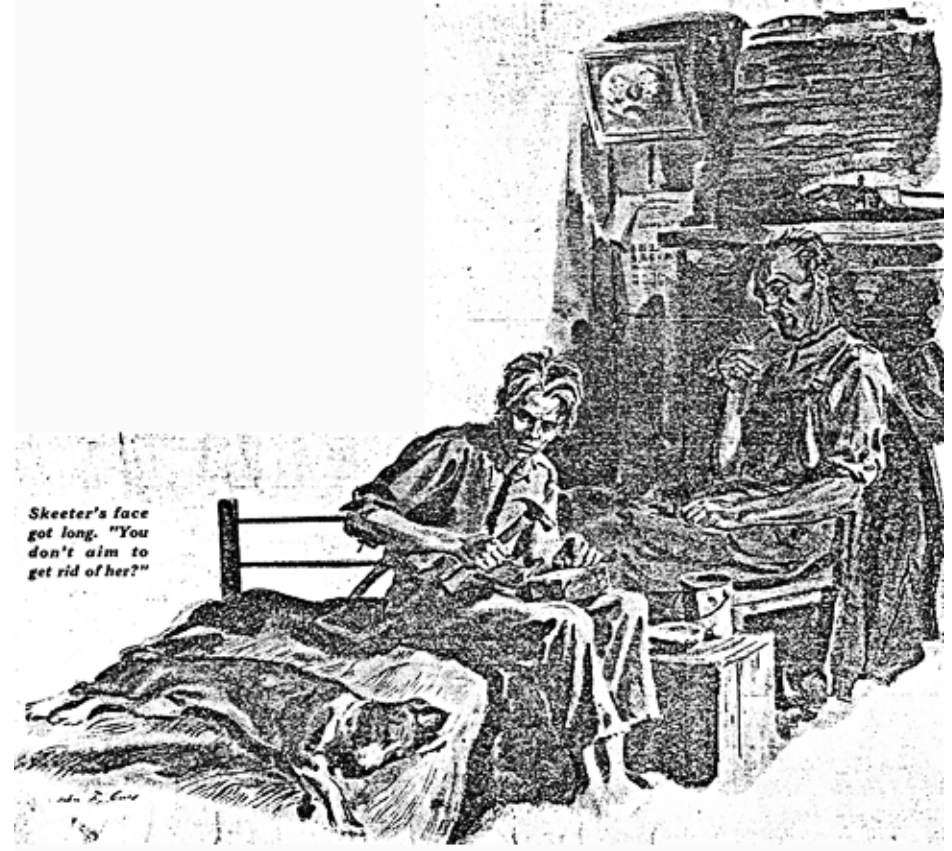
"Our First Basenjis"

The Basenji ©
Volume 1, Number 2, August 1964

"I wrote to Life inquiring (about the photo of gorillas with Basenji) where I could contact the owners." ... (They published the letter) "in their October 13, 1941 issue...The following day I received a document and



letter from James Street who wrote the story that was the basis of the movie that we all know about. He told me that he received his Life on the previous Friday and in the same mail an acceptance of his story from Saturday Evening Post. He asked me to edit the story, since he had never seen a Basenji. Later he sent me the water color painting used by the Post to illustrate the story. It is about 40" x 30" and now hangs in my office. I enclose for your use a copy of that picture (see cover). The dog shown in the insert in the lower right-hand corner was my Tanya of Windrush. This covers up a lot of pencil notations used in setting up the copy. The Post story appeared on December 3, 1941. On April 11, 1942 the Post published a sequel to that story called "Please Come Home My Lady." In the later years James Street revamped his earlier story in book form and that was the basis for the movie. I am satisfied that he fully intended to publish another book as a sequel, but he died before having the chance to do so. The photo of Tanya was used as the model by the artist."



One of the original illustrations which appeared in the Saturday Evening Post

Director:

William A. Wellman

Writers:

Albert Sidney Fleischman (writer)

James H. Street (novel)

Country Date

USA 12 May 1956

USA 2 November 1959 (re-release)

Finland 29 January 1965 (TV premiere)

Also Known As (AKA)

Addio lady! Italy

Good Bye My Lady USA (poster title)

Goodbye, My Lady USA (cable TV title)

Hyvästi, ystäväni Finland (TV title)

Biography for

James H. Street

Date of Birth

15 October 1903, Lumberton, Mississippi, USA

Date of Death

28 September 1954, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA (heart attack)

Birth Name

James Howell Street

Spouse

Lucy Nash O Briant' (1923 - ?) 3 children

Trivia

Children: James Jr., John and Ann



One of the original illustrations which appeared in the Saturday Evening Post