

What the National Specialty Means to Me

1985 National Specialty Essay Contest Winners
Judged by Maxwell Riddle

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First Prize

Anne L. Graves

Houston, Texas

A curled tail whisking around the corner, springy legs prancing down the hall, a yodel behind a room door...and everywhere you look, Basenjjs, Basenjjs, Basenjjs. When an entry of 27 makes a good show for the breed, ten times that number makes a feast! And that is especially so for someone with her first (but not last) Basenji, someone trying to educate her eyes in the breed. The opportunity to be within looking, touching, living distance of so many good dogs, the opportunity to see in the flesh the ones who have been just outlines in a picture, to see them stretch and wrinkle and run...well, golly it's fun.

I love the specialties off the Specialty; the teams and braces (what a delight in 1984!), the veterans and studs and brood bitches, the BIG sweepstakes. Lure coursing with all

Basenjjs...no need to wait through endless Afghans and Salukis...our dogs, following their inborn bent to chase full out. But the most special sight of the Specialty is the ring full of Basenjjs...so many to satisfy the eye.

However, not only the dogs are interesting: Basenji people also interest the newcomer. Again, names turn into real people; the opportunity to meet those who have long experience and wide knowledge of our very special breed, to agree and disagree, to listen and learn, is an opportunity rarely found. Furthermore, these witty dogs seem to attract witty people. Surely, no humorless clod could stand the intelligent twinkle of a Basenji's eyes for long!

Those are the high points of the National Specialty to me, a newcomer. For the experienced people the joys must be keener, the low points lower. The hurry, the bustle, the long waits, the strain: all these balance against the chance of a win at the Specialty, a mountain-top experience for even the most consistent winner. And we mustn't forget the pleasure of

renewing long-time friendships and enmities, and of seeing the results of your own special breeding or planning a new one.

Most of all, all of us, newcomers and old hands, should welcome the opportunity to show our concern for the well-being of the breed: the more open the communication among Basenji fanciers all over the country, the more efficient we will be in combating threats to the health and in strengthening the vigor and beauty of this most delightful of dogs: the Basenji.

Second Prize

Margaret Sommer

San Jose, California

Aside from the grand adventure of the trip itself which has been months in the planning, the national specialty is an opportunity to see Basenjis, young and old, from all over the country which represent every breeder's "cream of the crop". Old acquaintances are renewed and new friendships begun. Set in an atmosphere charged with energy and enthusiasm, the national offers up a cross-section of the breed with its best profile. It is a week-end of meetings, discussions of panels and individuals, symposiums and forums, in an atmosphere of enlightenment where breeders and exhibitors come together to exchange ideas and gain fresh perspective from the sharing of knowledge and mutual experience. It is a time to become aware of what we have to offer one another as breeders. The national is a coming together of Basenjis and Basenji people who may only know one another by photo or reputation, but where we all hope to see the great dogs emerge – each year better than before.

More specifically, there is the opportunity to attend the B.C.O.A. annual meeting which is held in conjunction with the national specialty, and where members may consider the current state of the fancy, and address issues of concern to all.

Such issues, perhaps, as a review of the breed standard, or questions pertaining to health and research, or an update of specialty guidelines, or the selection of judges to name just a few topics.

What better time than during the week-end of the national specialty to schedule symposiums by professionals, breeders or judges? Ethics, and its divisions of opinions, should always be a topic for discussion where we are able to review our attitudes and values to be sure we stay on the right track – where we can take a good, long look at the current nature of our competition. Are we still breeding for the betterment of the breed – always aiming to produce the good dog that reproduces better than itself? Or are we breeding to produce winners just for the sake of winning?

And let's talk about politics! We certainly hear enough about them all year long at every show. Do we still place great value on good sportsmanship in and out of the Basenji show ring? Do we practice truth in advertising? Do we select judges for their ability and experience?

The serious questions of euthanasia or the donation of dogs for research are rarely discussed in open forum, and need to be. Breeders need to be emotionally prepared for the trauma of either eventuality, and the peer pressure or secret vilification that may accompany the breeder's decision to examine either of those options.

Along with assessing the state of the fancy, we want to ask ourselves about the current state of the breed. Is the Basenjis, as a breed, better in conformation, temperament and health than it was last year, or the years before? If the answer is "yes" to all three then we are on the right track, but if the answer is "no" to any of the three, then we had better stop! take a long look, and begin to make some right decisions.

So the national is more than just a dog show. To me, it is a happening of fellowship and mutual respect among those of us who share a common love for the Basenji where the novice

and the amateur, and the professional and the pioneer, come together to review the past, weigh the present, and project the future of our beloved breed. At the national, there is time to publicly recognize the outstanding achievements of our fellow breeders and exhibitors and their Basenjis – a chance to say, “Job well done”. At the national, we can truthfully applaud the good and the great dogs that come along. Most of all, we can take honest pride in every good Basenji where we see each and every one for its virtues, and be genuinely grateful when the good ones come along for they are the betterment of the breed.

Third Prize

Joe Hill

San Francisco, California

Christmas in 1985 comes in October for me. Why, one asks? The Basenji National Specialty is occurring then and I am so excited I could yodel! Being almost a novice at showing dogs, I am really excited to be exhibiting my first puppy offspring in conformation at a national gathering of Basenji fanciers. I have only attended one regional Basenji specialty since I seriously entered the dog fanciers’ society. While my bitch didn’t come away a winner, I was not disappointed with the day or the placings that were made.

Attending the National Specialty will be a lot like Christmas as gifts will be given as well as received. The event itself has a gift for everyone attending – an education. The education one can receive through observation of the entries and conversation with experienced breeders is invaluable and a very important gift for all of us. I am looking forward to the opportunity to observe a large entry of dogs from across the

nation. I want to see the types of dogs that are winning from the different areas of the U.S. and how my dogs measure up to them. We will also have the opportunity to enrich our gift of humanity for our beloved Basenjis by sharing information on the illnesses particular to them and feasible methods to deter the progression of those illnesses.

One lasting gift that we can take home from the National is friendships with fellow Basenji fanciers. Being in attendance at the National will allow me to match faced with voices that I have spoken to in phone conversations over the last year. Without a network of contacts and monitored breeding programs, we will move backward instead of forward with improving the breed of dog that has become dear to all of us.

The ever pleasing, graceful, and elegant Basenji stole my heart many years ago. It wasn’t until I purchased my first bitch that I became aware of the many facets of Basenji competition – lure coursing, conformation, obedience. The opportunity now comes to attend a show offering all areas of competition and I want to be ringside for all events. Yes, I’ll be there! Winning the class or even placing in the class would put the crowing touch on my trip, however not winning or placing will not tarnish my October Christmas.

Honorable Mention

Marilyn M. Thyges

New Franken, Wisconsin

What makes the National special to me? Seeing over 100 Basenjis, travel, fun, excitement are the extra things that make my National special to me, my frosting on the cake. The heart of it is the friendships made, knowledge gained, and the strides made for the betterment of the breed. Each intricate part meshing into making the National very special to me.

I couldn't believe the feeling of camaraderie at my first National. I've experienced this feeling at every National I have attended. People go out of their way to introduce themselves to you. There may be the usual cliques in attendance but they even open to include you. I was in total awe at the numbers of invitations I received for room parties, pool parties, dining, cluster show, regional specialties and places to stay. It is inconceivable that a person can feel like a total stranger at a National. With all the new found friends, the conversations are likely start with the question, "What lies behind your dogs." This is where the novice can gain knowledge and insight on the old dogs in their pedigrees.

Gaining knowledge can be two-fold, not only learning about your dogs but also related health problems and their solutions. What better way to learn about dogs of the past than from the breeders that produced them or competed against them. If we want to go forward, we have to know where we've been. It is important to know if they have had health problems – major or otherwise. Sharing experiences often reaps simple solutions.

By offering health symposiums, the majority of the breeders are reached with the latest innovations being made toward correcting or avoiding problems. It offers the chance to ask questions and get the right answers from professionals who know.

The seed of knowledge gained from friendships, and symposiums, can be nurtured and put to the test by the breeders. Are we breeding better dogs? I believe we are. The strides toward overall quality and uniformity of the breed are very much in evidence at each progressing National. If shallow or shelly are evident one year, they're gone the next. We are making conscientious efforts to better the breed.

These conscientious efforts are the combination of friends united for a single cause, sharing their knowledge, and providing their proof in outstanding puppies very representative of the breed standard. This is the heart, symbol of love, of what the National means to me. I firmly believe everyone should attend at least one National. I'm sure it wouldn't be their last.