

An Interview with Barbara Amidon/Amber Kennels

50 Years of History

A Life Time of Dogs

What created your interest in German Shepherd Dogs?

My first experience with German Shepherds was as a young girl, seeing a motion picture about a war dog, "My Pal Wolf" and later for Christmas receiving a book, "Cop Chief of Police Dogs" by the late Reginald Cleveland. From there, the German Shepherd was a last-ing love affair.

As young children, my family lived in New York and Miami. My father worked at Cape Canaveral; he was an Electrical Engineer. My mother was a Head Nurse; she later she worked in the operating room at The Polyclinic Hospital in New York. When my twin sister Jackie and I were ten years old, our mother was tragically killed on Christmas Eve. My father then chose a career in show business and traveled a great deal.

We went to live with my aunt in New Jersey and found a stray German Shepherd. We named him Fury after a comic strip character. My love of dogs began very early, I attended a War Veterans Ceremony in Atlantic City performing obedience. My hobby was studying various dog breeds. Jackie and I won contests by identifying them.



Twin sisters Barbara and Jackie

Tell us about the early years establishing Amber Kennels

While attending the University of Miami, I met and married my husband Harry. Shortly after moving to our new home, Harry gave me a gift: our first German Shepherd Dog. We called her Amber, hence our kennel name.

Amber's breeder belonged to the German Shepherd Dog Club of America and the GSDC of Greater Miami. In the early '60s we joined the GSDC of Miami, a club with well over 100 members. German imports were the choice back then. They were gorgeous black and red animals. I joined the SV and studied all the German and American bloodlines. We drove to the Nationals to study and watch the dogs and went to various dog shows. I became a student of the breed early on. Through my dedication and studying; I was very successful as a breeder

from the start.

I also became fast friends with Reginald Cleveland. Reginald would come to Miami to visit his friend David McCahill who owned 2x Grand Victor Valiant of Draheim.

We bred Amber to 1959 GV Ch. Red Rocks Gino ROM. This was a line breeding on Grafmar lines. This very first breeding resulted in three progeny having major points and highest scoring obedience winner Ambers Black Jack. We then purchased a second bitch that finished easily, winning a Working Group under Marie Meyers. She was Ch. Hessians Dark Amber. She was not a great mover, but very pretty.



Barbara and Harry



2x Sel. Ch. Amber's Lolita of Zar Zal

We also bought the great Ch. Perle Romerblut SchH 1 who won the '59 Open Bitch class at the National. I said then "I hope to breed one as good as Perle." She was a real star. Her movement and type were exceptional; I did breed one I believed was as good as Perle -- 2x Sel. Ch. Ambers **Lolita of Zar Zal**.

I continued to study bloodlines and after seeing the Arbywood Kennel F litter; I purchased a Fortune son who became Ch. Doppelt-Tay's Jerry. Jerry was handled in 1964 to his Best In Futurity by Michelle Billings. The judge was Gustave Schindler; Jerry won from the Teenage Dog class.

The Arbywood line had good muscle tone, dark eyes, and beautiful type. I did the first inbreeding on the Ch. F Boys (Fels, Fortune, Field Marshall) when I bred Jerry to a Fels daughter Amber Decloudts Crystal ROM. This produced Ambers Phillida. I then took Phillida and bred her to Ernie Loeb's import, Ch. Bar v. Weiherturchen. This breeding produced Ambers Regina ROM. Regina produced many champions including Ch. Ambers Valiant Robin ROM. Robin is the dam of one of my very best - Ch. Ambers Lolita of Zar Zal. From there, the Amber name continued!

Amber kennels has always been known for the tremendous bitch line, tell us more:

All of my dogs go back to those original dogs from the '60s. Not many can say they have established a strain like this. Today so many people buy and show; they do not study the breed or bloodlines to establish a type and kennel. I am proud to have accomplished the Amber line with little breeding, not through mass producing five to-20 litters a year. It is a business to so many; my focus was on studying and getting close to my dogs.

Our bitch line became known for beautiful style and movement. The Amber line is known for elegance, long necks, and extended side gait. I have been successful with all types of breeding combinations, inbreeding and outcross. My line has always consisted of easy breeders, you bred them and they conceived; there were few C sections or bad seasons. This seems to be a problem for many bitches today.

Ch Amber's Flair ROM was six generations of my breeding and one of our top producers She was structurally beautiful and produced eight champions and many outstanding ROMs, I believe type to type and especially knowing what is behind the lines you are breeding are very important. Flair was consistent in producing the Amber type.

I have to laugh being known for my bitch line. Many males from Amber have greatly influenced the breed: Ch. Patja's Racketeer V Amber ROM, Amber's Strider of Zar Zal ROM, Ch. Amber's **Stockbroker** ROM, Ch. Ambers Maxima ROM and Ch. Ambers Kahlua Crème ROM.



Ch Amber's Stockbroker ROM

For me it is much more enjoyable breeding my own than buying a good one. Breeding is a lot of hard work. I believe you can improve your breeding program by buying the best brood bitch available; preferably one who is already proven. Never start a kennel with a stud dog; your bitches are the backbone. From there it is imperative that you educate yourself on the heritage, genetics, structure and progeny of the dogs you choose.

Give us a history of your success in breeding.

I have bred some very good dogs, among them more than 100 Champions, 20 Register of Merits, 29 Futurity/Maturity winners, 11 Selects, a Grand Victrix, many GSDCA National Winners including Fut/Mat Victor/Victrix, a National

Best Puppy, a Canadian Grand Victrix and others. So many animals became accomplished in their own right with the Amber kennel name behind them.

Through the 50 years I have been able to keep a consistent type. The dogs all go back to taking Amber bitches to the Arbywood dogs, inbreeding on the F Arbywood line. Thinking back to Regina ROM, dam of five champions including Valiant Robin ROM who produced five champions, including Lolita who was the dam of Strider ROM who when bred to Rita ROM produced Ch. Alpha Angelina ROM. Angelina produced Ch. Stockbroker ROM, who sired Ch. Maxima ROM. Stockbroker's daughter produced Ch. Lady in Red ROM who produced Ch. Kahlua Crème ROM. It just goes on and on.

I also have been associated with wonderful co-owners over the years. One of them was Modesto Rigua from Puerto Rico. We met in Miami and became wonderful friends. He finished Ch. Amber's Valiant Robin ROM. Modesto allowed me to do all of the breedings; he could take what he wanted but it was hard keeping dogs in condition in Puerto Rico with the extreme heat. He co-owned Sel. Ch. Lolita with me. Modesto had a lot of class; it is sad we don't have more people like him in the breed today.

Ismail Shimi was another dear friend with whom I co-owned dogs. Ismail died young of a heart attack, but we finished some beautiful animals such as BIM Ch. Ambers Angelina of Issa ROM and Ch. Ambers Rita of Zar Zal. When Marilyn Smith was first starting out she bought Ch. Alpha's sister, we are a close knit group when I look back!

Rose and Tony Limpus were also great co-owners. We bred Ambers Sweet and Sassy ROM to Ch. Ambers Stockbroker ROM and we had a good number



GVX Ch Amber's Rosie of Bracewood winning the 12-18 class at the 1989 National

of champions, ROMs and selects from the breedings. One of the progeny, Ambers Surprise v Olympus ROM went Select from the Veterans Class! Surprise's daughter Ch. Scarlett Letter was awarded Canadian Grand Victrix and went US Select numerous times.

I also co-owned GVX Ch. Ambers **Rosie** of Bracewood ROM with the Lopez's. Today animals from my breeding are out finishing and many of them are co-owned.

Amber kennels was the recipient of the prestigious Lloyd Brackett Award. This was such an honor and I don't think the Parent Club should give this out every year. The award is intended not for those who have finished a lot of dogs, it is for those who have established a line, who have bred generations of quality animals, like Fran and Joan Ford did with Fran-Jo Kennels.

What dog and bitch carrying the Amber name were your favorites and why?

Ch. Amber's **Kahlua Crème** ROM certainly has influenced the breed by producing true black and red pigment. Everyone wants the solid blacks that



Ch Ambers Kahlua Creme

come from his genes. Kahlua died young of renal failure, but he sure has left his mark. The rich pigment we see today and beautiful type came from his dam BIF Ch. Ambers Lady In Red Jo Els ROM. PICTURE Ch. Amber's Kahlua Creme ROM - please be sure to get the accent mark over the first "e" in Creme - thanks

Sel Ch. Ambers Lolita was hands down pure class, a once in a lifetime bitch from my breeding program with great type and movement. She was the odds on favorite to win the National when she died tragically of bloat two weeks before. In 20 years I had never had a case of bloat and I was heartbroken.

Ch Valiant Robin ROM in her own right was a great producer. At 10 years of age she had a litter sired by Ch. Frack von Rosshaus, owned by Dan Dwier. She had six females in the litter and five progeny became champions. Lolita had a litter of all males when we bred her to Sel. Ch. Doppelt-Tay's Hawkeye ROM. I kept her first male progeny **Strider** because his mother had passed. Strider achieved his ROM easily. He was a dominant sire producing high withers, excellent correct croups, and ease of motion. At the Northern New Jersey GSDC Stud Dog class, he had 30 progeny in the class that were so beautiful, very uniform looking animals.

The 1980 Highest Living Register of Merit Dam was Ch. Amber's Flair ROM. Flair's dam was Amber's Dina, a daughter of Amber DeCloudt's Cristl ROM. Her progeny, including Sel Ch. Wellsprings Ironsides ROM, and Sel Ch. Wellsprings Howard Johnson ROM, definitely left their mark on the breed.

Do any dog shows stand out in your mind?

In the 60s the Florida Circuit was always fun. I remember seeing Bill and Ginny Collins, Mary Roberts, Sally Holcomb, Gloria Birch, Lloyd Brackett, Denny Kodner, Virginia McCoy, her husband the great handler Dick Vaughn, Tom Ballard, Eric Renner, and of course Lamar Kuhns to name just a few. The circuit drew huge entries and a lot of prominent breeders and exhibitors attended.

I remember after a judging assignment in Reno, NV driving with a caravan of dog people -- Jim Moses, Cappy Pottle, Gloria Birch, Chuck Nofflett, Tom and Vivian Brown -- to the National in Denver. We had a great time visiting the Ballards on the way, they lived in Evergreen, CO and I remember going down the mountains in their jeep.

I feel very fortunate to have met so many wonderful dog people in the past. Ernie Loeb, John Seiler, Reginald Cleveland, Lamar Kuhns and many

wonderful club members from the GSDC of Western PA and Northern NJ GSDC, who are gone now. These dog people truly educated themselves on the breed, something that is hard to find now.

What about a National event that stands out?

I always look back at the beautiful 2x Sel. Ch. Amber's Replica of Tokaye. At the Philadelphia National in 1989; Replica had gone Maturity Victrix. Betty Radzevich was judging Specials and the crowd would not stop cheering and applauding for Replica. Kathy Potter and I were so proud of Replica's performance. She was a great mover and the spectators supported her for Grand Victrix. They were so vocal; Betty had to ask them to stop! Replica went Select 2; I never had a mover like that. Her sister Sel. Ch. Amber's Onyx of Tokaye was Best Puppy at our 1986 National and went Select many times after.

What else did you and Harry do to stay active in the breed and help others?

For many years I conducted breed surveys and spoke on structure at many local clubs. Harry and I were active club members in the GSDC of Miami and we won an award for The Sunshine State Shepherd, the club newsletter. I co-authored articles in dog books, did a symposium in New York City for Westminster, and narrated a TV show on German Shepherds for "The Wide World of Dogs."

When did you become a judge?

Breeding was my first love. I judged my first match in 1961 at The GSDC of Orlando when Sam Lawrence invited me. I became an AKC licensed judge in 1966 and I judged my first National in 1971 in Detroit. I wore red, white, and blue with an American flag pin, because I was proud to be an American judging our prestigious show. Julius Due from Germany was judging in the next ring. Classes had 75-plus entries back then. We sure don't see that today. In the 1980s the GSDCA membership honored me by electing me to judge two years in a row. After that the GSDCA Board of Directors passed a rule stating that a judge must wait three years before

being eligible to judge another GSDCA show.

I have judged the American and Canadian Nationals many times since;



Amber's Strider of Zar Zal ROM



Barbara after judging the National with fellow judge Ed Barritt

this year is the ninth time I have been invited! I don't believe any woman has accomplished this and I am flattered. My judging has expanded to shows in Jamaica, Mexico, Bermuda, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. I have judged most herding and working breeds, I was honored to judge both the Portuguese Water Dog and Rottweiler nationals. Time constraints kept me from pursuing other breed judging. My family and I have done all of the breeding and work ourselves; so judging and getting licensed in other breeds took a back seat.

What other breeders do you think had a successful line with limited breeding?

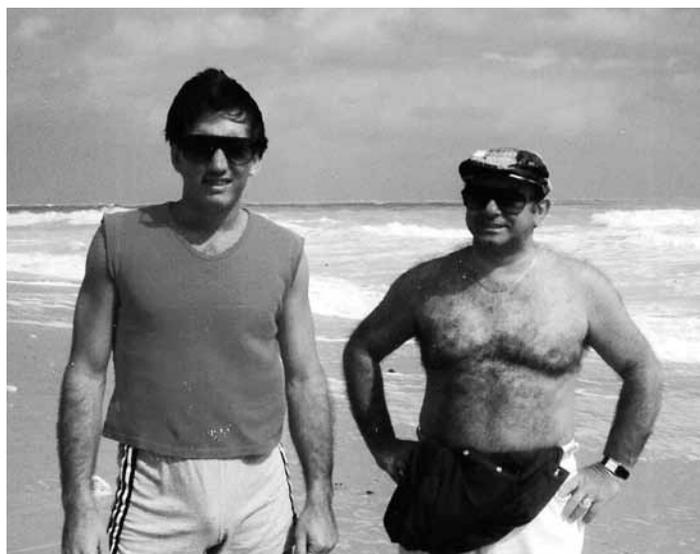
Art and Helen Hess, Hessian kennels had beautiful movers. They did not stay in the breed long term. I also loved the Waldesruh line, Bob & Phyllis Denton. Waldesruh animals had pure breed type, curvy, and extreme with the high withers, strong top lines, plush coats and floating movement. Fran-Jo Kennels always had great side movers. Fran and Joan were the nicest people ever. They bred generations of quality animals. Year after year they had top producers and winners.

Kathy Aubrey (Utopia) was very breed smart. I believe had she stayed in the breed her line would have continued to influence. She bred some outstanding animals. Ken and Delaine Thompson bred some really good ones as well under the Ken-Delaine kennel name.

Lamar Kuhns was a very dear friend and handled many top animals for Amber Kennels. Tell us more about Lamar.

Lamar was my best girlfriend. Lamar could have a cruel side at times, but he never hurt me. I adored Lamar. The biggest shock in my lifetime of dogs is when Lamar passed away. Lamar was a character who truly loved people and dogs. He loved excellent breed type!. Those that knew him knew he had a heart of gold. He was a true dog person. He had a character no one can ever replace. Lamar would not charge someone if they did not have the money to show dogs.

One time Lamar and I were driving back to a show, I told Lamar I thought he was driving in the wrong direction. He said "no darling, we are going



George Bertsler and Lamar Kuhns 1984

the right way." Hours out of the way, we ended up in Pennsylvania not our intended route to New Jersey. We laughed and ate apples during the all the extra miles.

Lamar handled many dogs for me, including Ch. Amber's Flair; owned by Frank and Rosalind Schaefer. He presented MV Sel. Ch. Patja's Racketeer V Amber ROM to many wins, including: Reserve Winners Dog at our National Specialty, US Select, and Best of Breed and Group 3 at Westminster. Lamar handled many Champions that I bred or owned, including Dan Seni's Ch. Ambers Expression; who was a real star and went Select in Canada. Lamar had a knack for posing animals like no other; he really knew how to



Ch. Amber's Flair ROM

stack a dog. You noticed when Lamar set a dog up with great breed type; he was the master. Lamar was a true showman; he made you look at a dog. If Lamar believed in a dog, nobody could out perform him. Jim Moses was the best at moving a dog. Usually at the Nationals, it was between Jimmy and Lamar for top honors.

Lamar was much too young when he passed away at 46. I have never seen so many people cry at a funeral. He was truly loved. The lights went out with his passing. I truly miss him.

What quality dogs come to mind outside of the Amber Kennel name early on and later?

In my early days I remember Sel. Ch. Lido vom Johanneshauch ROM. I lived in Miami, and he resided in a kennel in Josalie Mt. Dora owned by the Birds from England. He was a top import from the 50s and could be really tough.



Sel. Ch. Stuttgart's Sundance Kid ROM

German Imports were prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s. A large majority of the stud dogs and show dogs came from Germany. At that time, Americans went to Germany and purchased dogs to bring to the States. Many were structurally very nice animals. Others of not great quality were brought over and sold for very large money. It was a business for some. The Germany economy was very depressed back then; we could import really good dogs. Times have changed and today German breeders are not as willing to part with their good animals.

I think Sel. Ch. Stuttgart's Sundance Kid ROM could have been a Grand Victor and was a very consistent producer. He was prepotent for overall soundness, substance, bone and beautiful heads.

I thought Ch. Atlanta's Mystique had wonderful type and her overall general appearance was striking. She was very correct. Ch. Ken Delaines Avia was a beautiful long-striding mover.

And of course, Bernd and Lance.

Tell us more about Bernd and Lance

Ernie Loeb's Ch. Bernd V Kallengarten ROM was a beautiful dog who greatly influenced the breed. He was black and red and striking. However, Bernd had breed warnings when he was imported from Germany. if people



Barbara's first champion Ch Hessian's Dark Amber

would go back and educate themselves; they would see this. Germany knew what they were doing when they let the United States import him. 1967 GV Ch. Lance of Fran-Jo ROM was by far the most utilized stud dog. He was a very popular dog. He was high-withered with lighter pigment and a bit more angulation than many of the dogs of that era.

We had our share of dogs that produced blues, lighter pigment, and soft ears. Many crossed Bernd with Lance to get better pigment and heads. That left the breed with some problems such as soft pasterns and bloat. An example was GV Ch. Scorpio of Shiloh Gardens ROM. Scorpio was a beautiful male who came from a Lance/Bernd combination. Sadly, Scorpio died of bloat.

How would you describe our show dogs and dog shows in the 70s and 80s versus today?

Our dogs of yesteryear were extreme side movers with high withers. They had exceptional side gait. In the '70s and '80s many of our animals were overly extreme, but to watch them move was exciting. You don't see great movement like that today.

Our dogs today are more balanced, not the long striding animals we use to have in our rings. Our croups are incorrect and we seem to have a good number of winners who move fast and not correctly. Forehands are very lacking, we have fronts that are short in upper arm or lift from the elbow. We also have a lot of east and west standing animals.

Today the dogs are very pretty, but in motion are disappointing. To summarize; they are more all breed type: clean on both ends, and more level backed. More compact but lack the side gait and movement.

Our show entries were huge in the '70s and '80s. The competition was fierce. You would go to a dog show and see so many quality animals and top breeders who exhibited some exceptional dogs. Prominent breeders had beautiful animals to exhibit; winning a specialty major was a big accomplishment. Ringside was filled with spectators, breeders, handlers, and enthusiasts. Many of the people today have no manners. At our Nationals bench show

committees are being conducted because of fights and name calling. Dog shows today have such poor losers. This sport is not for the faint of heart; it is controlled by a few prominent names and handlers.

Speak to some of our judges and discuss dogs and you will realize some should not be judging because they do not understand our breed. We have judges who never studied bloodlines and progeny; they now listen to a handler's advice and purchase their success. We don't have guardians of the breed today; we have exhibitors who have not put in the countless hours it takes to be a top breeder.

It was a different world; dog shows used to be huge. Breeders educated themselves, studied bloodlines, whelped litters, raised puppies, evaluated youngsters, and planned breedings. Years ago the judge was highly respected; wine and dined and regarded as an authority with wisdom. Most judges were very professional and had good manners. Today judges are just a number and treated as such.

Conformation will never be large again. Like disco, it is a gone memory. We will never see that

level of interest again.

Why do you think entries and interest have diminished over the past 10 years?

We have far fewer breeders; handlers are breeding and selling their own dogs and it is hard for an average person to compete. That is why people are losing interest and leaving the sport of conformation showing. People are buying dogs for other venues such as agility, herding, and obedience that they can do themselves and have fun.

In the conformation ring you have to pay a lot of dollars to someone to condition your dog and also pay a handler. Owners no longer condition their own dog, take it to the show, and groom their own dog. Exhibitors today do not learn anything about the breed; they just write checks to handlers who manage everything. We don't seem to have the emotional pride in establishing a top bloodline/kennel line today. It takes years of experience to accomplish this, and today people just want an instant winner.

What would you tell someone new to our sport who wants to establish a kennel name?

Study the breed if you want to be a successful breeder. Buying champions rather than educating yourself is a quick fix; the real pride is in establishing a type and recognized breeding program. Research bloodlines and become a student. Study the breed, attend shows, and speak to true breeders who have had few litters but have shown great success. Raise your litters, learn, and never stop educating yourself.

Is there anything else you want to share?

I am truly lucky to have done in my life what I have loved- my dogs. It has always been about the dogs. I have done all that I have wanted. I feel I have bred the very best in my 50 year dedication and still today recent champions are carrying on the Amber name. I am very proud of my dogs. I am most proud of my wonderful children; all great human beings. I thank you for listening, ■