

HENDRIX HARPER – MY FIRST FIFTY YEARS IN DOGS

Questions provided by Richard Gray and Sara Nugent
Interview notes prepared by Frances Gray

On Wednesday, June 2, 2004, Richard Gray, Frances Gray, and Sara Nugent met with Hendrix Harper to go over his 50 year “dog” career. We met at Hendrix’s house in Bryan, Texas. It was a typical, hot late spring day, with some clouds that suggested rain, but did not deliver. We met so that we could talk about what the driving factors were that kept Hendrix involved in the dog business for 50 years. What was the fascination that kept him interested and active and loving it still after all these years?

We asked the typical questions, and some that were not so typical. The answers to our questions are pretty much in Hendrix’s words. I will have some other comments on Hendrix, the man, at the end of this piece.

What attracted you to the breed?



Harper's Gold Nuggett

I did not know anything about the breed when I got my first dog. The first dog I got was a pit bull. My brother-in-law took me with him to Houston to look at dogs. I paid \$35 for Harper’s Gold Nuggett. I began reading and learned that Stafs were AKC

registered. Anita used Nuggett as a baby sitter. Nuggett would go berry hunting with our oldest son and could pick the berries and eat them faster than Johnny could get his hands on them. She only took the ripe berries, but if Johnny wanted to go berry hunting, he had to take her, to protect him from snakes. I saw the ads for Stafs in Dog World and wrote Ormsby, Ed Ringold, and went to see Peggy, since she was close by. I was off work one day in March of 1957 and knew that there was a dog show in Austin, so I packed my family in the car and off we went. We got there only to learn that Stafs had shown at 8:00 a.m. However, we were told that there would be a show in San Antonio the next day, and that Stafs would be shown there, so the next day we went to San Antonio. Peggy was showing and we introduced ourselves to her. She was showing Dauntless Pepper Pie for Don Humes (He was in Kansas). Peggy invited us to her house. She fed us lunch and showed us her kennels. She



Tiger, the first Am Staff Hendrix bought from Peggy Harper

had Stafs, Scotties, Min Pins, and boarding dogs. Peggy showed us this 18 month old black brindle male out of Sika and Jollyscamp Blueguard. I thought that Blueguard was a good dog, a four square dog. Very impressive. She wanted \$75 for Tiger. I gave her \$25, and promised to pay the rest. Peggy had only met me that day, but with the \$25 down payment, she let me load the dog and take him home. I wanted to show, so, Peggy and I talked, and when she was going to a show, I would enter Tiger and go. I did not win any of the shows that Peggy was showing in, but I went to Houston on my own. I had the only Staf entered, and he took Best of Breed. I was real proud as I took my dog into the group. Didn’t win anything, but I finally had a Best of Breed ribbon. I learned a lot about Stafs and showing during this time period. I also realized that if I had been beating Peggy in the ring, she might not have been as friendly to me. John Henry Clark had gotten a great bitch from Peggy. He showed this bitch as a puppy at one of the shows that I was at. The judge told Peggy that John Henry’s bitch would have won if the bitch had had her ears trimmed. After that, John Henry got the ears trimmed and his bitch won the National Specialty. Peggy also seemed happy for me to win some at this point. My dog Tiger never got any points, but I had fun showing him. He lived to be about 7 or 8 years old. He was bred several times. I sold one of these pups to a woman in Hawaii, Rosalie Yano. He was a surfer dog named Cannonball. Rosalie came back and bought another dog from me after Cannonball died.

When and how did you get started in Am Stafs?

I joined the STCA in 1958 at the National Specialty which was held in Delaware, Ohio. Charlie Doyle was the Secretary/Treasurer at this time, and I was able to spend a lot of time with him at this event and thoroughly enjoyed that time. He passed away within months of this show. Pete Sparks was another old timer that was there. At this show, Doyle had Tacoma All A Blaze. One of Rayburn's brothers-in-law took the dog back to either Georgia or North Carolina. There were 22 to 23 dogs entered in this show. I only had one AKC dog at this time, Tiger. Anita and I traveled to this show with Peggy Harper. Traveling with Peggy was kind of touchy. I was 30 at the time. Peggy was driving a Chrysler station wagon, and there were 6 dogs and 3 people on the trip. The show was an all breed show at a site north of Cleveland. Anita and I went to a pizza place and had pizza for the first time. We were amazed that the kids in the café would not talk to us. We thought that college kids would have been friendlier, like they were in Texas. I wore a Stetson cowboy hat to the show and the other exhibitors got a kick out of seeing me in my hat. The hat certainly identified me as being from Texas. The bitch points at this show were won by a bitch out of Ringold's stock. It was owned by a lady in Georgia. A Jones' bitch really impressed me. It was at this show that I formed my opinion that judges didn't always look at dogs the way that I did. Tacoma All A Blaze was one of the best dogs I ever saw. One of Peggy's bitches was in season at the show, and we tried to get her bred to Tacoma All A Blaze while we were there. We got them bred, but the breeding did not take. In my opinion Pete Sparks was the most knowledgeable person at the meeting, but because of his background, no one would listen to him. Kind of like now, those in the breed now don't always listen to those that have had experience in the breed. On the way up, we stayed at Little Rock and then someplace in Tennessee or Kentucky. There were plenty of places in the South that had great food, served family style.

Who are the dog classics, some of the best you saw the first years you were in the breed?

The Gallant dogs (Knight Bomber and Knight Crusader), Tacoma All A Blaze, Sky King. They all



Hendrix showing in 1974 - Dog is Devilish Delilah of TerLyn (bred by Dick Pascoe) - Show is Baytown Kennel Club (match). Judge is Gary Doerge (prior to him becoming a licensed judge)

would have been able to win today; just at they did in their days.

Who were some of the most interesting people that you have met in Stafs?

The old crowd would include: Charlie Doyle – knowledge of the breed and of people in the breed. Peggy Harper – knowledge of the breed, and she was real good to me. Don Humes – knowledge of the breed. I was very disappointed when he left AKC and went to ADBA registered dogs.

Pete Sparks – understanding of the dogs and knowledge of the origins.

Will Brandon – did a lot for the breed and was very interesting to talk to.

Currently, I find many people interesting, as long as they have the interest of the breed at heart.

Why did you decide to show?

As a teenager I showed Duroc hogs and Jersey cattle. In 1946 at the Harris County Fair I had the Grand Champion and Reserve Grand Champion Duroc boars and, the Grand Champion sow. Two Jersey heifers that I showed placed in their classes. That is where I developed my love for showing animals. If UKC had had shows at this time, I probably would have shown UKC and had UKC dogs, but they did not. So, I got into AKC animals so I could show my dogs. I encourage everyone to show. If they say they can't do it, I say "no one was born knowing how to show. You just have to do it. Everyone has a first time in the ring."

One of Hendrix's truisms is "Show what you've got and if it is not good enough, get better the next time."

What were some of the early influences on you about the breed?

High Ace of HarWyn was one of Peggy's dogs that I really liked. This was the best dog I had seen at the time. He was great with kids and just wanted to be with people. Now, he might not seem so great. He was a small, chunky, broad across the chest, and had personality plus. He probably weighed about 55-60 pounds. I still feel that the spark of personality makes a dog. Physical characteristics may change due to "fashion", but a dog has to have

that “spark” to make them special. I also feel that even if a dog is a good show dog, if the dog can't work, it loses value.

Sarah commented that she also saw Ace at Peggy's house in 1970 or 1971 when he was 12 or 13 years old. He was just an elderly fat house dog by then, but obviously favored, since he was the only in-house dog there .

Did you have a mentor when you came into the breed?

Peggy Harper taught me everything I know. She was good to me. I would help her give shots to her dogs and otherwise help her with things she needed with the dogs.

What are some of the things you remember about the early shows?

I remember how the two Crusader dogs were shown in Texas, Knight Crusader and Knight Bomber. At that point in time, Texas had shows in March and October. I recall well when these two were on the circuit. It wasn't until after the show circuit was finished that I figured out that these two dogs were not Am Stafs, but pit bulls. (At that time UKC dogs could be shown in AKC conformation shows just like UKC dogs can be shown in AKC obedience shows currently.) They were balanced and could really move. They were not chunky dogs. They were each about 60-65 pounds.

What was one of your most memorable experiences?

I was at the group ringside with Peggy Harper and she was supposed to take Sky King in. Peggy got nervous and told me to take him in the ring. This was at a Houston show. So we went in the ring. The judge came to the time when he had made his decisions. He pointed to his first place dog, and then he pointed to me with Sky King. I looked around to see who the judge was pointing at. At that time Stafs did not usually place in groups. The judge finally said – You! second place.

How did you go from one dog to a whole kennel?

The basic thing was that I was just trying to get a good dog. I realized from what others were doing that you had to put some puppies on the ground to find a



Hendrix's son Mike with puppies from their first litter

good dog. About a year or year and a half after I had gotten my first dog from Peggy, I was at Peggy's, and there was a litter of puppies on the ground. All of them had kennel cough. She offered me a little black bitch, Tonka. I bred her to Tiger and got a litter of 10. I took them to the vet when they were 8 weeks old and had all of their ears trimmed for \$20 a pup. When they were 12-13 weeks old, they started going undershot. 7 out of the 10 went undershot. My pit bull Nuggett was undershot, and had undershot puppies, but show



Black Girl (sire: Ruffian Tiger of Har-wyn x dam: Ruffian Tonkawa)

dogs were not supposed to do that - have undershot puppies. I did not know what to make of it. I kept one of the females that was not undershot, Tonkawa Black Girl, and she was my first champion. I was not able to get a breeding out of her and when she was 5, I found her dead in her crate. I took her to a vet to see if he could tell why she died, and the vet told me that there was liver involvement. Now what did that mean?

When did Tonkawa Kennels and your breeding program start?

Probably the one that started me on this breeding program was Smokey. I got him from Peggy the last week that she was in San Antonio. I preferred male dogs. They seemed to stand up to my personality better than the girl dogs do. Chief Red Cloud was a Concho dog that I got from Bill Harber, who got his dogs from O.L.Hill, whose dogs came from Peggy. Chief Red Cloud was bred a lot and produced a lot of good puppies.

What were some of the best dogs that you owned?

In 1985, my bitch Mary Lou won winners bitch at the National Specialty. She was out of Maggie Mae and El Tigre Jose. She was one of the best I have had, but she did not produce puppies of her quality. The best male, conformation wise, which I had, was Bubba Yellow Hawk. My favorite though, was

Chicken George. He was a good dog for me. I could keep him out of trouble. He was very obedient to me. No one else could control him.

Who were some of your favorite dogs and why?

Chicken George was one of my favorites because of his temperament.

Chief Yellow Hawk was a favorite because of his conformation.

Maggie Mae was a favorite because of her breeding capabilities and the puppies she produced.

Grey Fox was one of the most memorable. I still have people calling me about him.

What changes have you seen in your own line?

I don't know. I don't think that the two dogs that I currently have are as good as some of my previous show dogs, but they have great temperaments.

Who has influenced you and your breeding program?

Roy Fanguy – a geneticist from Texas A & M and Mick Robinson a local vet who taught me a lot about medical issues in the breed. Fanguy's genetic studies were real interesting to me.

You have had an impact with the breed by being one of the first to OFA your dogs. Why did you start this practice?



**Ch. Tonkawa Chief Joseph
- OFA #12 of the breed -
first dog Hendrix
OFA'ed**

I had some dogs that had problems and it is a pet peeve of mine that some folks want to just bury their heads in the sand and pretend it does not exist. If someone wants to breed a bitch to one of my studs, I want to know the status of the bitch's hips. If they have been x-rayed, even if they do not pass, at least that shows that the owner is interested

and aware of the issue. I would be more apt to breed to that bitch than to one that has not been x-rayed for lack of interest.

Hendrix has helped improve the hip dysphasia situation in our breed by the number of his OFA'd dogs that appear in other breeders pedigrees.

When did you get started in obedience?

39 years ago I got started in obedience when I lived



***This is Ruffian Smoky of Tonkawa, CD
The last dog he got from Peggy Harper and one of his
early obedience dogs. This was in the early 1970's.***

in Alvin. Then when we moved back to Bryan, I continued to take Black Girl to Houston once a week for obedience classes. She won the competition at the end of the class, but there were not many other competitors that showed that night. It was sleeting and the South Texas folks and dogs were not used to that cold weather. Smokey was the first dog that I trained that got an obedience title, and I got titles on several more over the years, probably 10-12. I helped to organize an obedience club in Bryan in 1968.

Which of your dogs did the best job for you in the obedience ring?

Chicken George was the dog that I enjoyed showing the most in obedience. Julio got a score of 172 and improved to a 196. He also busted numerous times.

Were you in on the beginning of the Texas Am Staff club?

Dick Pascoe, Wilson Ellison, Ralph Davis were some of the charter members with myself. I served at most offices in the Texas club. I served the National Club as a Board member in the late 70's and in 1978. When Richard was also elected to the

National Board, Ed Ringold said, "this isn't the Texas Club." I also served on the National Board in the early 80's.

What dog clubs have you been a member of?

STCA, Brazos Valley Kennel Club, Staffordshire Terrier Club of Texas, American Staffordshire Terrier Club of San Antonio. Staff folks should get involved with all breed dog clubs. It is important to be a part of an all breed club.

How has the Texas crowd been able to co-exist so well for so long?

Our Texas club is loose enough so that we aren't always getting in each others way. We have done a lot of cross breeding with our lines. We respect the knowledge that each of us has. We respect each others opinions. We can agree to disagree.

How have you managed to keep good relations with breeders across the country?

Because I don't gossip. I don't say bad things about other people or their dogs.

Hendrix's daughter, Luanna, related that he had always told his children not to participate in gossip or saying ugly things about others.

What did you think about the name change (Staffordshire Terrier to American Staffordshire Terrier)?

At the time, I thought it was just fine. However, now I think we might have gotten a lot of good out of merging the two breeds and all being Staffordshire Terriers. (originally AKC's plan) One of the things we would have gotten is smaller dogs and better natural ears.

What is your position on the current standard?

I do not favor changing the standard. If the standard were changed it would be to reflect the views of those making the changes. Then each time a different dog type came into style, someone would want to change the standard again. We sure don't want them to all look alike like some breeds do.

What do you think judges in general look for in the conformation ring?

Basically how the dog gets around the ring and how the handler floats. Dudley McMillan liked bull-doggy dogs like I do. The new STCA judges' education program needs to be presented earlier in a judge's career. I also think that a judge should have to live with a breed before judging it.



**Hendrix showing Ch. Tonkawa Estrellita
(finishing photo)
sire: Ch. Tonkawa Chief Joseph
dam: Ch. Rounder's Diamond Lil**

Name some of the judges that you liked to see judge.

Dudley McMillan, Florice Hogan, J. W. Cummings. I like these judges not because I have always won under them, but have enjoyed talking with them as people. I don't "chase" judges. I have shown to judges who people said would not like my dogs, and we have won anyway. .

What can we do about the scrutiny that our dogs are getting now?

Owners of pit bulls are the cause for much of the scrutiny that we are now getting. They are not watching their dogs and the dogs are getting into trouble. I believe, "If you can't keep your dog in, you shouldn't have it."

Do you think the breed will last another 40 years?

Yes, and for many years after that, past our lifetimes.

What can we do to help the breed?

Get the dogs out in public and show their good sides. Make sure our dogs are socialized and trained and let the public see them at their best. Breeders need to pay more attention to temperament when breeding. Temperaments are better now than they used to be. Early dogs were more dog aggressive. Training dogs to be good citizens will help as much as anything.

What is the main thing that you look for in a dog?

Winning in the show ring is not the main thing. I look for a dog that can get along with other animals

and, of course, with people. The dogs need to be under control. They are a terrier, and terriers can be terrors. They need to be controlled.

Would you do it over again?

Yes.

Would you change anything?

No, I would probably do it the same way.

What advise would you give someone wanting to get into Am Stafs?

Being in the breed now is an uphill battle because of the breeds' reputation. To get into the breed, you have to be aware of this issue. To stay in the breed you have to be very determined.

Is there another breed that you might have considered?

Can't think of any other breed that I could love as much as this one. I am disgruntled with the people problems that are reflected on the breed. Breeders need to take care of dogs that are trouble makers.

Any other comments for the "press"?

It has been fun. I have had a great time. I have owned, seen, and known a lot of wonderful dogs

and I have made a lot of great friends. It has been fun.

Authors Note:

I have known Hendrix for almost 36 years. He is a true gentleman and a staunch defender of the American Staffordshire Terrier. He is also a man that has very strong convictions about faith and family loyalty. His priorities in life are his faith, family, and the dogs.

His faith means a great deal to him. The last 20 or so years that I have known him, he has determined that he would not miss going to church on Sunday. If he was at a dog show, he found a church. The last 10 years or so, he makes sure he is at his home church on Sunday. He doesn't pressure others to accept his religious beliefs, but he maintains obedience to his faith.

His family is also very important to him. Anita has been his wife of 54 years. They have 4 living children – Kathy, Johnny, Mike, and Luanna. They lost a daughter, Denise at age 7 to Cerebral Palsy. They have 6 grandchildren and 1 great grandchild.



Brazos Valley kennel club (Hendrix's local all-breed club) honoring him and Anita at their show in March 2004 for 50 years in pure-bred dogs.