

FROM JUNIOR TO JUDGE

ERIC RINGLE LIVED HIS DREAMS

BY LINDA AYERS TURNER KNORR



When Robin and Cindy Stansell called to tell me the sad news that our friend Eric Ringle had passed away, my mind was flooded with happy memories of him. Eric was one man who was blessed to live his dream of rising to the top in our dog world. From being a Junior at Westminster to judging there, Eric did it all.

The *SHOWSIGHT* article that follows was written about Eric when our friendship was beginning. It tells his story and was one of his favorites. I know he would be happy for me to share it again.

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE FIRST APPEARED IN THE JANUARY 2005 ISSUE OF SHOWSIGHT:

For decades, Eric Ringle and I have traveled the same paths. We have “been there, done that” at the same places with shared friends. But somehow, the pace surrounding our sport has kept us from getting to know each other on a personal level.

Bob Maxwell was a very dear friend to our entire Roy Ayers family. When he was “Top Dog” at the American Kennel Club, I was delighted to be invited to spend the day at our New York headquarters. Wayne Cavanaugh guided me through each department, and I marveled at being “Inside the Ivory Tower.” (*ShowSight* Series 1994).

The pride and joy at that time was the new video production of each AKC breed. Heading up the enormous project was Eric Ringle who updated me on the latest technology. To my delight, they presented me with a complete set of the newly completed productions.

One of my favorite show weekends is that of The Clemson Kennel Club’s back-to-back shows in June. Known for its true Southern Hospitality, I love the club members! When President Gene Hinson and Show Chairman Alan Ream told me that Eric Ringle would be on their judging panel this past June, I jumped at the opportunity to



Eric was one man who was blessed to live his dream of rising to the top in our dog world. From being a Junior at Westminster to judging there, Eric did it all.



Eric and “Higgs”.

LINE FROM LINDA: FROM JUNIOR TO JUDGE, ERIC RINGLE LIVED HIS DREAMS

learn as an in-ring observer under Eric. He would draw large entries, especially in Great Danes, and I wanted to learn!

After sending my written request to Judge Ringle and Show Chairman Ream, I was delighted when Al Ream sent me a copy of a response he'd received from Eric Ringle. "I won my first Group under Mr. Ayers, back when the Working Group was undivided and all the "big guns" were in there—he loved the Dane I was showing at the time—it was at the big Eastern D.C., and I remember how nervous I was walking in for Best in Show. He was a fine gentleman and I enjoyed showing under him for many years after that." Always a Daddy's Girl, I read it and cried. Those kinds of shared memories always make my day!

Last May, my husband, Jim, was four weeks into therapy following a torn rotator cuff surgery. He was losing weight, running fevers, and getting sicker every day. Tests were done for a staph infection, and he was rushed in for emergency surgery on the day of The Clemson Kennel Show! Eric and I would have to wait to continue our friendship.

As Jim recuperated, Eric and I began to reminisce through telephone conversations, faxes, and emails. We shared tale after tale and remembered the "old days" with emotion and gratitude.

We have kept our cell phones busy with regular visits. I asked a million questions of this man who, like me, grew up with a passion for "man's best friend." From our many communications, I have managed to record the following story for you to enjoy.

In 1970, I recall driving over the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge with my parents to attend my first dog show, The Staten Island Kennel Club. The tenting was visible from the bridge, and what a beautiful sight it was! We were to meet with a Dane breeder, for reasons beyond the understanding of my family, when our household pet of thirteen years passed away. I'd decided that I wanted a Great Dane. At that show, I remember holding one of Pat Morris' champion dogs as he was waiting for his class, as well as one of Hank Thunhorst's beautiful bitches. Hank pointed out the top handlers in the nation, Bob and Jane Forsyth, who created quite an impression on me.

The following weekend, we were to take the drive upstate to meet Hank at Rosemarie Robert's Dinro Kennels. "Going to the mountain" is what Dane people called this, as Rose lived up an unpaved road atop a mountain surrounded by a state park. I thought I wanted a fawn bitch; however, I ended up with a brindle dog. We were to pick up the puppy a few weeks later, after he had grown a bit. The morning when we were to leave, I was sitting on our front porch and a kind of Beagle/Basset mix trotted from across the street, from a park. The dog climbed up the steps to the porch and sat down, all nice and comfortable, as if he belonged there. My dad said, "Well, Eric, would you like to keep this dog or go today to pick up the Great Dane?" Little did I know what a turn my life would take by my answer to that question.



Ch. Bodane Tourister, owned by Harvey and Gay Bomes.
Shown winning Breed at The Garden in 1981 under Judge Ken Peterson.

This shy, yet precocious kid from Brooklyn proceeded to show his Great Dane. I was able to put several points on "Royal" in competition with some of the top pros of the day, and qualified for the Junior Showmanship finals at the Garden—twice.

I had wanted for some time to gain experience by working for Mrs. Robert, but she was so intimidating that I was always too frightened to ask. One afternoon, when I got home from school, I decided (no matter how nervous I was) that I was going to call her and ask for a job. I got home, immediately went to the phone, dialed the number, and... she answered. I asked if she needed some help at the kennel for the summer. The ten seconds of dead silence that followed seemed like an eternity. Finally, she said, "You don't expect to get paid, do you?" When I reassured her that it was the good, solid experience that I was after, she said that it would be OK.

Several weekends later, my parents dropped me off at Dinro. Rose was away at a show. There was a part-time kennel person (gender not readily discernible, but since her name was "Eleanor" I took a guess at "she") who handed me a glove-brush and mumbled that I should start brushing the Danes. As Eleanor warmed up to me, she informed me that the main kennel person and handler had gone on a "bender" the previous week and was fired because she had left a gate open allowing two of Rose's favorite males to get together in a wicked fight. Several hours later, Rose returned from the show with several breeders and judges in tow. She introduced me to the group by announcing, "Meet my new handler." Well, I think my heart sank into my stomach. The next duty for this 14-year-old was to act as bartender and serve cocktails to the guests.

Every other day at Dinro was like a dog show. People would come from all over to make the "pilgrimage" to Dinro. Rose would let people leave their puppies loose in her living room. She was disappointed when they left, even if it was at 2:00 in the morning. As intimidating as she could be, if she saw that a person had a sincere interest in the breed, she would open up and the knowledge would start to flow. She was a Cooper Union graduate. Above the mantle of her fireplace were three Dane heads that she had sketched. You would swear they were photographs.

LINEs FROM LINDA:
FROM JUNIOR TO JUDGE, ERIC RINGLE LIVED HIS DREAMS



Judge Roy Ayers (author's father) delighted young Ringle with Eric's first Group One win at Eastern D.C. in 1978. "Barnaby," owned by Tilly and Berenson. Ch. Tilpadane Baranby Neustadt is presented his trophy by Bob Thomas.

I wish people today had the opportunity to avail themselves to old-time breeders. Every breed had them. This was the best learning experience. I'm afraid it's gone by the wayside, and commercialism and mediocrity, to some degree, have taken its place. Fortunately, there are breeders today who do have an eye and a knack for breeding dogs, or we would not be seeing the quality that we are seeing. The days of the big kennels are gone. I feel so very fortunate that I was able to catch the tail-end of that era.

During this period, I also showed a dog for Poppy and Al Feldman. I believe they are two of the nicest people that I have ever known, in or out of dogs. Mr. Feldman, at that time, was Chairman of the Board of the American Kennel Club. His unparalleled ethics, integrity, and calm, gentlemanly manner are seldom seen in our society today.

I began handling professionally when I graduated from college, and I was quite passionate about it. I was waiting until I turned twenty-one as in those days, you were considered an "out-law handler" if you showed dogs for others and accepted any type of payment. Just three months before I turned twenty-one, the AKC stopped the licensing of handlers, so I started a bit early. I completed championships on about one hundred Danes, including some Number One Danes and some influential producers. I had some successes in other breeds as well. My first special, Ch. Tilpadane Barnaby Neustadt, won the breed at The Garden and went on to many wins. He had true Dane temperament and was a pleasure to show. My next one, Ch. Bodane Tourister, would prefer to be at home, having fun, and lying on the couch. "Tory" also won the breed at The Garden and became the Top Male Dane in

the Country, as did "Barnaby." He produced thirty to forty champions. When reading through a Top Twenty catalog a few years ago, I realized the profound effect that "Tory" had on the breed. Almost every top Dane in the country goes back to him, most of them several times.

I moved from New York to California, and showed there through the 1980s. During this time, Dane activities were becoming progressively more national in scope. Our National was formerly always held at Westchester in Tarrytown, New York. With entries going up every year, we eventually outgrew the one-day National and began to alternate to various regions nationwide. The annual Dinner/Dance used to be the Saturday prior to Westminster. Now, it is one of the many events during a week-long National.

My handling activities continued in California, and it was a good life. I met many people and showed a lot of dogs. My favorite was "Higgins," Ch. Reann's No Jacket Required, who was a nice combination of East and West Coast lines. His intelligence and temperament really got to me. It was as if he could read my mind. Californians were a fun group of people. I still enjoy going out for a visit from time to time.

I was beginning to get a bit tired of the traveling as well as the vagaries of the profession, when, in 1990, I was offered a position with the American Kennel Club as Administrator of Judge's Education. This gave me the opportunity to return to New York and live in Manhattan. I worked during the Bob Maxwell administration and directly under Terry Stacey. This was a good time, in my opinion, for the AKC. I was also allowed to focus on my tasks, and

LINEs FROM LINDA:
FROM JUNIOR TO JUDGE, ERIC RINGLE LIVED HIS DREAMS



Ch. Reann's No Jacket Required takes the Group at K.C. of Beverly Hills under Mr. Tom Stevenson. "Higgins" is handled by Eric Ringle.

I never had to become involved with politics. Fortunately, both Jim Crowley and Dennis Sprung are still there, so, I think things should stay in relatively good shape.

My main function at AKC was to produce the Breed Standard Video Series. I produced about half of all the breeds; Midge Martin was my predecessor and she did the other half. It was a great experience. Just think of the top breeders in each breed and the dogs assembled from throughout the country. We did eight breeds every six months, so the work on each video was about three weeks long. It was a unique education. Working with the committees was always interesting. On more than one occasion, a committee member would call to inform me that he could not possibly work with "so-and-so" on the same committee. By the time they got through the script meeting or an editing session, they would come to realize that most had the common interest of their breed at heart, and how much they were of the same opinion after all. After a meeting, some of these people (who had not spoken in twenty years) would be off together to a New York City restaurant or to see a Broadway play.

When I decided to leave the AKC, a few of my co-workers took me to lunch and brought up the prospect of judging. It made sense, as my position at AKC was sort of like having my own private college for the job. The following morning, there was a FedEx package with nine breed applications on my doorstep. I applied for eight breeds. After almost ten years now, I do the Working and Herding Groups, and about one-third of the Sporting.

I really enjoy judging. The other judges are very helpful and supportive. I worry about the sport's future, as some of our most beloved judges are getting up there in years. There are many good, new, dedicated judges, but I'm afraid there are also those who

attend seminars and participate in the in-ring observing just to check off the right boxes on the application, and who have no real talent for judging. I suppose, however, that there have always been all levels of quality in judging, just like anything else.

I consider my approach to judging as being basically scientific, with a touch of art added in the equation. It is a challenge to apply the breed standards to the living animals that you see before you on a given day. I try to imagine a couple of old-timers in the breed that I'm judging, watching me to see whether or not I'm doing justice to their breed.

My friends who show under me in my own breed understand that I am just evaluating the dogs on the day. Sometimes, a friend whose dog does not win may cop a bit of an attitude, but it is soon forgotten. I have to remind myself that I was sometimes fairly intense when I was showing. People in other breeds, who do not yet know me, appear to settle down a bit when they realize that I am just trying to do an honest job, with the points of the breed standard in mind.

All in all, it's been a fun ride. I've met a lot of good people and have many fond memories. I do wonder from time to time where I would be and what I would be doing if I had chosen the other option presented to me at age thirteen, when the Beagle/Basset made its way onto our front porch.

I hope many more youngsters will follow in Eric Ringle's footsteps by deciding to begin a lifelong journey in our wonderful sport of purebred dogs. ■