

LINE FROM LINDA

ROLE MODELS FOR JUNIORS

BY LINDA AYERS TURNER KNORR



Throughout the country last year, our American Kennel Club dog shows hosted 3,148 Conformation Junior Showmanship events, 228 Pee Wee events, and 14 Junior Clinics. Opportunities abound for youngsters who love dogs to step into the rings and experience the magic of AKC's endless opportunities. Inspired by role models like those you will read about here, I challenge each of you to be the bright light for an aspiring Junior's life.

GINA DINARDO AKC PRESIDENT AND CEO

"My journey with the American Kennel Club began not in its offices, but in the ring as a Junior Handler, leash in hand, heart pounding, standing beside a dog I'd trained, loved, and believed in. Those early mornings, long dog show days, and the quiet moments of connection with my dog were where I first learned the values that continue to guide me today: discipline, respect, sportsmanship, and above all, partnership.

"Being a Junior Handler taught me that success comes from consistency, humility, and a willingness to learn. I developed an appreciation for the legacy of breeds, the dedication of breeders and exhibitors, and the vital importance of mentoring the next generation. These lessons weren't abstract, they were lived experiences, deeply rooted in the traditions and people that make up the fabric of the AKC community.

"Now, as CEO of the American Kennel Club, I carry those early experiences with me into every decision we make. Whether it's advancing canine health research, expanding opportunities for Junior Handlers, promoting responsible dog ownership, or ensuring that our shows and programs evolve while staying true to our mission, I understand firsthand the transformative power of this organization because I've lived it.

"Our mission isn't just about titles and ribbons. It's about protecting the integrity of purpose-bred dogs, celebrating the human-canine bond, and ensuring that our community remains strong, inclusive, and forward-thinking. My time as a Junior Handler was the foundation. My role today is a continuation of that journey with the same passion, only now with the responsibility to lead.

"Together, we are not just honoring tradition. We are building the future of the sport, one dog and one handler at a time."



Linda and Gina DiNardo reminisce about their days in juniors.



1994 - Gina DiNardo also excelled in the conformation ring at an early age.



1980 - Our AKC President and CEO beaming as she captured 1st Place Juniors at Elm City Kennel Club

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Mari-Beth O'Neill, AKC Vice President Sports Services

MARI-BETH O'NEILL **AKC VICE PRESIDENT SPORTS SERVICES**

"This image was taken in 1969. I was 11 at the time, handling my Toy Manchester Terrier to BOV at the AMTC National Specialty. Competing in Junior Showmanship, as well as being able to handle my own dogs in Conformation, was an integral part of my life. Skills learned were not realized right away and included being able to carry on conversations with people of all ages, understanding time management, preparing myself and my dog for each competition, as well as the number of friendships that still exist today. I was a teacher for 10 years. In 1990, I was one of the very fortunate individuals who was able to make my avocation my vocation when I was hired to work at the AKC in the Judges Education Department."



2005 - Dr. Charles Garvin has the honor of judging the big event he won as a boy: Westminster Kennel Club Juniors Finals

DR. CHARLES GARVIN **AKC BOARD OF DIRECTORS** **AKC DELEGATE, DALMATIAN CLUB OF AMERICA**

"My experience in Junior Showmanship was essential to my maturation process as a teenager. Perhaps the most important lesson it taught me was how to learn, watching the successful Professional Handlers showing their dogs. It was essential to learn what techniques they were doing in the ring, how they did it, why they did it, and when they did it. It was necessary to closely follow the instructions of the judge, and to anticipate the judge's next moves."

"Fortunately, my first Dalmatian was a very good dog, and we had an incredibly close bond, which helped me earn great success both in the Conformation ring and in Junior Showmanship."

The success in my early years led to considerable confidence, which spilled into all other aspects of my life. Of course, there were also painful losses along the way, which helped tame my ego. My teenage contemporaries were not interested in my dog show exploits, so I learned to not talk much about them.

"This underlying competence with quiet confidence and the ability to listen and learn led to a multitude of early leadership positions. Ironically, my dog show successes and related achievements and accolades made excessive personal ambition unnecessary, which in turn led to more leadership roles thrust upon me."

"Being in the limelight from an early age also taught me the importance of being a role model to help the development of others who may be following similar paths. Respecting others and their opinions, listening, and learning are valuable life lessons that Junior Showmanship teaches."



1966 - Young Charles winning WB, BOW, BOB with Ch. Korcula Salona DC under Dr. Frank R. Booth



1969 - Charlie capturing Best Junior at the prestigious Westminster Kennel Club



Just before Judge Dick Cooper chooses his Westminster Juniors winner, note that Charlie has his dog already perfectly set up while the other finalists are still working.

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-Glenn Lycan

GLENN LYCAN

AKC DIRECTOR OF EVENTS OPERATIONS SUPPORT

"I began competing in Juniors in the early 1970s, at the age of 10. It was a great way to get more ring time, which turned out to be invaluable. Those early experiences helped me build a stronger connection with my dog and taught me a great deal about handling a dog—how they responded, how they felt, and how to work through moments when we weren't quite in sync. Juniors also introduced me to the basics of grooming for the ring.

"My time in Juniors played a pivotal role in opening doors—ultimately leading to an apprenticeship with Houston and Toddie Clark. The Clarks shared a wealth of knowledge that could only come from hands-on experience. My desire to pursue that path had been sparked years earlier, fueled by attending as many shows as I could.

"When the Clarks retired, Rebecca, my wife, and I launched a successful handling business, which we ran from 1984 through early 2002. That same year, after winning the Herding Group at Westminster, I started my career with the American Kennel Club. I continue to work with the AKC to support Dog Clubs and Sports.

"Dogs have been a constant throughout my life, and I can say without hesitation: I'm a better person because of that bond."



Butch Schulman judges BIS in Japan



All-Rounder Judge Roy L. Ayers (my father) awarding nine-year-old Butch Schulman Best of Variety

COL. HARRY "BUTCH" SCHULMAN

AKC JUDGE

"I started handling dogs when I was knee-high to a grasshopper, both in the Breed ring and in Junior Showmanship, and many of the judges back then truly shaped my future in this sport. I played football, I was active in Boy Scouts, and I swam competitively growing up, which ultimately paid my way through college via an athletic scholarship, but when I reflect back on my youth there was no other place I would rather be than at a Dog Show. My mother, Dorothy Schulman, a second-generation dog breeder and judge, as well as a multitude of kind judges who encouraged me to reach for the stars, were the people that influenced my passion and love for the sport of purebred dogs. I vividly remember judges like Roy Ayers, Sr., Noel Denton, Jane Youngjohns, Ada Shirley, George Horn, Virginia Holtz, and Bob Futh. Their gentle voices, smiling faces, and warm demeanor made me feel special, and the way they interacted with me taught me invaluable lessons to carry forward for how I judge Junior Showmanship in my adult life.

"Roy Ayers, Sr. always came down to my level, so I never felt intimidated or threatened in any way. He was the quintessential southern gentleman who set an example of professionalism for the kids in his ring. When an older teenage handler boxed me in the corner at the 1972 Collie Club of America National to block the judge's view of my bitch, Jane Youngjohns calmly repositioned me and firmly let the older teenage handler know that she would not tolerate unsportsmanlike conduct in her ring. She subsequently awarded my bitch Best of Opposite Sex that day, and I was the happiest 12-year-old on the planet. When I unknowingly hit Bob Futh in the head with a piece of liver at the Midwest Collie Club Specialty, he simply acted as though it never happened and then praised my handling skills with a Best of Breed win from the classes. These are the memories I cherish, far more than scoring a touchdown, qualifying first in the 50-yard butterfly event at the championship meet, or adding another merit badge to my Eagle Scout sash. **These are the types of memories that our Juniors should have today, which will lay the foundation for the future of our sport because those memories last a lifetime.**" ■