



SUSAN FARRER-SHEPHARD

DÉJÀ VU PEKINGESE ROM-S

BREEDER INTERVIEW BY ALLAN REZNIK



Where did you grow up?

I grew up in a cattle-ranching community in western Nebraska, in a town of 750 people. My parents owned and published the local newspaper.

Do you come from a doggy family? And if not, how did the interest in breeding and showing purebred dogs begin?

Growing up in the Sandhills of Nebraska, everyone hunted, and if you hunt you will have dogs. My dad, and eventually my brothers, hunted pheasant and quail with dogs. So, our gundogs also doubled as family pets. My dad had visions of the gundogs living in proper kennels, but his idea of a proper kennel and mine were different. So, the dogs spent most of their leisure time in the house with us. All I ever knew were gundogs until we took a train to Mansfield, Missouri, to visit my mother's parents. And what did I see there but the most exquisite, the most perfect dog in all of dogdom, the PEKINGESE. I was in love, the Pekingese

not so much. I had to love "Footsie" in vain for many years as there was not going to be a Pekingese in our home. Perhaps if Footsie had not bitten everyone in sight, my dad would have been more understanding. Fast forward, after 20-some years, I had some pet store Peks that I loved dearly but wanted to do better. I did a little research and bought a cute bitch puppy from Wendy Moore who said, as I was walking out the door, that I could show her if I wanted. I took the puppy to a B match several weeks later where we won with good competition, and that's all it took. We were off to the races.

Who were your mentors in the sport? Please elaborate on their influence.

I have been blessed with three mentors. First was Eva Matheny of Matheny's Pekingese in Casselberry, Florida. Eva taught me some of the best animal husbandry, specific to Pekingese, which anyone could ever learn. She hasn't bred dogs in about 25 years but she also has not forgotten a thing.

above top: MBISS GCHB Déjà vu Kiss
Me Like You Mean It: CH Déjà vu Pleiku
Brace Yourself x CH Klerkshof Tamanika

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One of the things that Eva told me was to focus on the breed ring, not the specials ring. She said your breeding success will be proven in the breed ring and not in the specials ring. I have pretty much done that and have found that it suits my temperament just fine. Eva and I have lunch together every week and we are still talking Pekingese. At 95 years old, Eva is one of the greatest blessings in my life. I added her to the ownership of a nice chunky girl that incidentally is named Eva, bred her, and now it looks like Eva will be breeding one more litter!

Next is Michael Hill of Akarana Pekingese from Canada. Michael was the owner of Ch. Knolland Red Rover who is the breed record holder for number of champions produced. Michael was the one who really taught me how to dig into a pedigree. I like to bounce prospective breedings off Michael as he has had his hands on most of the dogs in my pedigrees, even 15 generations back. He saw a photo of one of my girls and said, "Bring her to Rover!" I did and got one bright red bitch puppy. She was Déjà vu Niagara Falls Honeymoon and, bred to her half-brother, Ch. Akarana Excalibur, produced Ch. Déjà vu Travelin' Man who is behind every single dog in my kennel even today.

The person with the biggest influence on me has been Winifred Mee of Pekehuis. In spite of living in England, we manage to see each other regularly and chat on the phone weekly. Winnie worked and worked hard on me to make me able to define which style and type I liked, to be able to prioritize virtues, and to understand what I could live with and what I could not. One of her best pieces of advice was when evaluating a puppy, ask yourself what can this dog do for my breeding program, what can it offer that I need? She sent me a stunning bitch, Ch. Pekehuis Gift of Gold, who was one of my foundation bitches. Later, she and Michael sent me the best birthday gift ever, Akarana Allure of Pekehuis, who produced Am. GCh./UK Ch. Déjà vu Stand By Me, the first and only American-bred Pekingese dog to attain his UK title. In ownership with Mr. John Shaw, Winnie, and myself, Winnie showed "Stanley" to his UK title.

Your Pekes are widely known, highly successful, and well respected. What breeding philosophies do you adhere to?

I normally linebreed and when I go out, it's still a related dog for the most part. I feel that emotional soundness is as important as physical soundness. I won't keep or breed from a shy dog. I want a dog with a big head, short neck and back, loads of bone and rib, a correct front that contributes to the distinctive rolling gait, and a big, dark eye. I preach "make and shape" as essential to being Pekingese. There are just a few things that are a hard no for me; breathing issues and a wry mouth. Both are insidious faults that have no place in a Preservation Breeder's program regardless of the quality of the rest of the dog. You have to be your own harshest critic. There is no shame in breeding a mediocre dog; there is shame in incorporating a mediocre dog in your breeding program and/or showing it.

How many Pekes do you typically house? Tell us about your current facilities and how the dogs are maintained.

Typically, we keep only 10 to 12 dogs and that includes our retirees. Occasionally I will place a young adult, but for the most part, we keep our dogs.

When we bought our home, it had a 12'x25' sunroom that was under truss. The first thing we did was to call a contractor and have him install good windows, flooring, and air-conditioning. And then we had a dog room. My husband was highly amused as the dog room was built out before any flooring or inside painting was done. Priorities! I use Central Metal 2x3 and/or 3x3 raised floor pens. The dog yard is river rock and pavers, with a patio roof over about half of it. For the most part, the dogs are loose all day, but crated to eat and sleep. Living in Florida with the heat, it is hard to give the dogs the exercise they need, so we do a lot of ball toss and chase in the kennel room. If it cools down in the evening, we toss balls so that the dogs can run on the river rock and chase the balls. I think running on the river rock not only builds muscle, it builds and tightens fronts as there is some "up and down" movement because of rock. Heat permitting, show dogs are road worked three times a week; we walk at a good pace for four to six blocks.



BISS CH Déjà vu Travelin' Man. BISA CH Akarana Excalibur x Déjà vu Niagara Falls Honeymoon. 'Travis' was the result of a half-brother/sister mating on the legendary CH Knolland Red Rover. Travis was a big-headed dog, loaded with bone, substance, and rib. Using Travis with CH Pekehuis Dream of Gold was a little bit of magic for me. Travis was a dog I should have used far more than I did as looking back I don't think he ever produced a bad puppy. Travis is still behind every Déjà vu today.



CH Pekehuis Gift of Gold. UK CH Pekehuis Pure Gold x Pekehuis Verrity. After a couple of false starts, Gena came to me as a foundation bitch. And what a foundation she provided. I bred her to her uncle CH Kushan Gold Ransom and got a litter of two puppies. Both finished easily and the bitch, CH Déjà vu True Gold, was CH Déjà vu True Grit for Shambala's dam. She was bred twice to CH Déjà vu Travelin Man resulting in four champions. She was amazing to go over, her virtues were many, and lucky for me, she passed many of them to her offspring.

Who were/are some of your most significant dogs, both in the whelping box and in the show ring?

Ch. Déjà vu Travelin' Man was a very influential sire for me. He was the result of a half-brother/sister mating on Ch. Knolland Red Rover. He was a dark red dog, big head with a stunning eye. I definitely should have used him far more than I did as, in looking back, I don't think he ever produced a bad puppy. He was bred to Ch. Pekehuis Gift of Gold twice, and produced Ch. Déjà vu Sir Gold for Pekehuis, Ch. Déjà vu Still Gold, and Ch. Déjà vu Pekehuis Gold Fusion, who all went on to produce champion offspring. "Travis" is behind every Déjà vu dog today.

My foundation bitch, Ch. Pekehuis Gift of Gold, gave me such a good start with her Déjà vu contribution of head size,

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CH Déjà vu Sir Gold for Pekehuis. CH Déjà vu Travelin' Man x CH Pekehuis Dream of Gold. 'Niles' was such a fun dog, he never had a bad day. He was dependable in the show ring, easy to live with at home, and generally a sweet dog. He is recognized as a Register of Merit-Bronze sire by the Pekingese Club of America, having sired 12-plus champions.



CH Déjà vu Pekehuis Gold Fusion. Bradley was sired by CH Déjà vu Travelin' Man out of CH Pekehuis Gift of Gold. He was an easy Champion and spent a year in England. He won the Ventura open show, defeating more than 90 Pekingese. He was the sire of Ireland's Top Pekingese for several years. Photo credit: Lisa Croft Elliott



CH Déjà vu Keeping the Faith. MBISS GCHS Briar-Mar American Gigolo for Vannjty x Akarana Allure at Pekehuis. Faith is 'Stan's' littermate. She was always fun to show. She is pictured winning BOS at a Specialty after several years out of the ring.

make and shape, rib, and bone. She was absolutely invaluable to me and I am still seeing her influence today.

Akarana Allure from Pekehuis produced only one litter for me; Ch. Déjà vu Keeping the Faith and Am. GCh./UK Ch. Déjà vu Stand By Me, sired by GCHS Briar-Mar American Gigolo for Vannjty whose dam was Déjà vu bred. Both puppies finished easily by defeating champions. The dog, "Stan," was playing in the

dog yard at about nine months old when Winifred Mee saw him. She put him on a table and groomed him, and that was that. Once she got home, she mentioned Stan to her partner, John Shaw. John asked for photos and then they asked if Stan could come to England for a year to be shown and sire some puppies. I was thrilled and, of course, said yes. After a few months of Winnie's training and conditioning, Stan was shown and won his first ticket at his first show. He was shown sparingly as there were other dogs in the queue, but he finished quickly with all tickets coming from breeder-judges and his final ticket from one of the UK's top breeder-judges, Geoffrey Davies, who said in his critique: "The more I went over him, the words 'Take the dog as a complete whole' rang in my head. His outstanding features are: size, build, balance, conformation, his fantastic body and overall shape, and his total and unquestionable soundness, and consequently his excellent movement. In fact there is much more to admire than there is to criticize about this exhibit. It would be remiss of me not to mention the exemplary manner in which this dog was presented and handled. His rich, glowing, clear red coat was presented to perfection, and he showed magnificently—free-standing, without being propped up, displaying the true dignity one associates with the breed. I was delighted to award this dog the Dog CC, which makes him a most worthy U.K. Champion."

Ch. Déjà vu True Grit for Shambala, aka "John Wayne," was a great sire for me. He was able to pass on his virtues of head size, no neck, bone and substance, good legs, and a level topline to his offspring and his grandchildren. He was a fast champion with Jackie Breazeale showing him for his new owner. Several years later, due to a change in his owner's circumstances, John Wayne came home to me. He quickly became a Sire of Merit and was the Pekingese Club of America's Top Sire for two years. I have his 11-month-old grandson that is the image of him, with the same bigger-than-life personality.

My girl "Katy," GCHB Déjà vu Kiss Me Like You Mean It, was so much fun to show. She won her first specialty (Pekingese Association of New York) at six months



UK CH/AM GCH Déjà vu Stand By Me. MBISS Briar-Mar American Gigolo for Vannjty x Akarana Allure for Pekehuis. 'Stan's' sire was bred by Omar Gonzalez whose dam was a Déjà vu bitch. I never think newborn puppies are pretty but when I saw Stanley I gasped out loud and said, "OMG, this is gorgeous!" I thought so much of him that I named him for my father. Stan finished his championship as a puppy with multiple wins over specials. At about 15 months, Stan went to England with Winifred Mee and John Shaw and became the only American-bred Pekingese dog to achieve a UK title. He came home a year later and has sired some lovely puppies for me. He seems to pass on his body type and beautiful eye. He has an outstanding temperament and is a great dog to live with.



CH Déjà vu True Grit for Shambala. CH Déjà vu Travelin' Man x CH Déjà vu True Gold. 'John Wayne' was a joy to live with and a wonderful sire in spite of only being used a few times. He sired more than 12 Champions, becoming a PCA Bronze Register of Merit sire. He was able to consistently pass on his virtues and, fortunately, I am seeing it in his grandchildren.

old from the classes, going over several of Canada's top dogs. She then went on to be Pekingese Club of America's Best of Breed winner in 2019. Much to my shock and amazement, I thought I was out there pushing for BOS! Breed expert Hiram Stewart was judging. It was a great win; it still seems a bit surreal at times. Katy finished the year with another specialty and was No. 1 bitch in the breed, No. 3 Pekingese in the breed.

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MBISS GCHB Déjà vu Kiss Me Like You Mean It. CH Déjà vu Pleiku Brace Yourself x CH Klerkshof Tamanika. 'Katy' was a joy from the minute she was born. Bossy, headstrong, and pushy, all making for a perfect showdog! Her first dog show at six months old resulted in a Pekingese Association of New York Specialty Best of Breed under UK Breed authority Sean Corrigan, winning over several of Canada's top dogs. She went on to win several more specialties, including Best of Breed at Pekingese Club of America under Judge Hiram Stewart. She is currently Housedog in Charge.



CH Déjà vu Reckless Abandon. CH Déjà vu Sire Gold for Pekehuis x CH Kawai Winning Ribbons. 'Dora' was my heart for just more than 13 years.

While not a "significant" dog in the showing or whelping box, I have to mention Ch. Déjà vu Reckless Abandon, aka "Dora." She was a beautifully built girl who finished in a flash. Six years after she finished she came back out to a specialty and, without being on a lead in six years, acted like she had been in the ring every day and won BOS. Five or six years later, she was Best Veteran at the National. Dora went to nearly every show with me and supervised from her double trolley berth. More than anything else, she was my heartbeat. She exemplified the breed's purpose, that of companion.

Please comment positively on your breed's present condition and what trends might bear watching.

Overall, Pekes are a healthy breed. We have no genetic conditions that we are able to track. Being a dwarf breed, Pekes could have challenges with early onset arthritis and IVDD. Proper management of the

dogs will reduce the incidence of IVDD. Dental disease is not unexpected in Pekes, so that is something you really need to stay on top of. Overall, I think the dogs are better than they were five years ago and I hope the trend continues. I feel that breeders and exhibitors need to not lose sight of substance, bone, and "make and shape."

The sport has changed greatly since you first began as a breeder-exhibitor. What are your thoughts on the state of the fancy and the declining number of breeders? How do we encourage newcomers to join us and remain in the sport?

The area of biggest concern to me is the lack of breeders and exhibitors. We are losing them faster than we can replace them. We need to start back at the basics and begin attracting new people to the breed. People who own Pekes are passionate about the breed; it's time to show them that becoming a Preservation Breeder is a way to ensure the breed will survive far beyond our own lifetimes.

Dog shows used to be about judging breeding stock. You'd get to the show early and leave late, even if you were only showing one breed. You'd have all-day conversations about pedigrees, puppies, proposed breedings, and more. I'd like us to be able to get back to that.

With the decline in entries, it only takes four to make a major and that is concerning. When I started, it was 12 bitches for a 3-point major, and finishing a champion was an accomplishment. With majors relatively easy to build and find, I can't think that is good for the breed. I hope we can see an increase in entries that will result in majors requiring more than four, as that means the breed will be in a better place.

I would encourage everyone, in any breed, to be a mentor. Your first several protégés will probably be disappointments, but you could be the breeder who finds the next great one. We owe it to the sport and to our breeds.

Where do you see your breeding program in the next decade or two?

I want to continue breeding a typey, sound dog that has that Déjà vu look. I am sure I will continue to play in the breed ring as I do believe that is where you prove your breeding stock. I want to leave the breed at least as good as I found it, if not a

little better. More than anything, I'd love to find a protégé, someone who is passionate about the breed and the sport who can carry on after me.

Finally, tell us a little about Susan outside of dogs... your profession, your hobbies.

I worked for *TRIBUNE* my entire career. I was fortunate enough to work for a newspaper when newspaper was king and it was an amazing ride. I was a Senior Account Manager/Automotive Specialist working with major account franchise dealers. As newspapers started to decline, I switched over to the *cars.com* part of the business. It truly was the greatest job on the planet; I made great money doing what I loved and had plenty of time off!

I decided a couple of years ago that I wanted to stay home with the dogs, so I did. I enjoy my leisure time and use it to brush a couple of dogs, grow a few orchids, make some gemstone bracelets, and attend dog shows. Occasionally, I still do a little consulting for a couple of franchise dealers.

I have an amazing daughter, Kellie, who is an ER Nurse in DeLand, Florida, and I have two wonderful grandkids. Mason, at 20 years old, just graduated from UCF with honors, with a degree in Criminal Justice, and Ali, 19, who is in her second year of college at Daytona State, is also performing with honors. My husband, Ken, is a CPA and takes his Pekingese, my "sister wife," to work every day.

I am on the Board of the West Volusia Kennel Club and am the Show Chair for our three-day show in late September. I am also the Secretary for the Citrus Capital Pekingese Club and the Vice President, Judges Education Chair, and Publications Chair for the Pekingese Club of America. And, yes, there's more... I was the Pekingese Club of America's Show Chair for our July 6-7, 2022 National held in Dallas and, next year, I will be judging the Pekingese Club of America's National Specialty.

The words "*What a long, strange trip it's been*" always come to mind when people ask about my time in purebred dogs. I am blessed to have my dogs and my extended doggy family. My life has been so much better for all of the two- and four-legged friends in it. These amazing friends and my little dogs have enriched my life beyond measure. ■