

Interview with Lama Gyen Yeshe by Barbara Ratledge



Interview with Lama yGen Yeshe and Barbara Ratledge, August 8, 1985. (Translated and recorded by Sonam).

Mrs. Barbara Ratledge, a Canadian, bought her first Lhasa Apso in 1959 and bred under the "Las-A-Rab" prefix. Mrs. Ratledge assisted Mr. Gerald D'Aoust in his attempt to get the dogs registered with the Canadian Kennel Club.

BR: How tall should they be at the shoulder, 10 to 11 inches (25- 28CM) or smaller?

LGY: *If you take the height of my favorite ones: Katu (male) is 20-21 cm. at the shoulder, Sindhu (female) is 21-22 cm. at the shoulder. I am of the opinion that these dogs should be bred as small as possible which mainly depends on the breeders and the feeding. You and Gerry can decide on this accordingly.*

BR: Do you like the skull narrow or wide?

LGY: *I prefer the middle size, neither narrow nor wide skull.*

BR: What about the length of coat? Really long or just long enough to cover the body?

LGY: *The length of coat depends on the climatic condition of a particular region. My personal preference is for longer coats, but in a place like Kathmandu, I get the coat of the dogs cut, keeping only an inch long in summertime for two reasons:*

(a) to get free from too much sun and,

(b) to avoid the nesting of fleas.

In winter, I let the coats grow longer for warmer protection from cold.

BR: If a dog has a brown coat, would a brown nose be acceptable?

LGY: *All mine up to the present stock have a black nose, but I personally do not give any disparity on the color of nose. On this also, you two consult each other and decide accordingly.*

BR: Should the coat be thick?

LGY: *Yes, the coat should be thick.*

BR: How much does he think the dog should weigh?

LGY: *Katu weighs 3 kilos and Sindhu weighs 4 kilos and 400gm. On this also, you two consult.*

BR: Does he like the eyes to be a dark brown or does he think a lighter eye is acceptable?

LGY: *Lighter eye is acceptable.*

BR: Has he any preference for colors or are all colors equal?

LGY: *My preference for colors are white, black and grey, lightish brown.*

BR: How cold does it get in Tibet?

LGY: *According to the Tibetan Calendar, the cold season starts from August till March, but it gets extreme cold and strong wind*

blowing from November till March.

BR: Do they get much snow in Tibet?

LGY: Snowfalls start, according to the Tibetan Calendar, from October till February. Lhasa gets comparatively less snow as do other places. A dog with really long coat will have problems walking on the snow but then, they were never let out of the monasteries.

BR: Were they allowed out of the monasteries?

LGY: They were not allowed out of the monasteries, but the dog would accompany the Lama to his own place which they called "Simshak". Under any conditions, the dogs were not allowed to accompany the Lama on mass-gatherings like on certain occasions when the whole monks of the monasteries were to have mass recitation together. On such occasions, the dogs were kept in his Simshak.

BR: Did the pups get any goat's milk?

LGY: Dhu, goat, zomo and cow gives the milk but the milk of goat and dhu are considered the best.

BR: What was the main diet?

LGY: Their main diet consists of milk with small balls of tsampa (made out of wheat, barley and maize). Water is always available in a bowl placed at a corner for whenever he feels like drinking. No meat at all at any stages of life. Milk with rice is also to eat.

BR: In this country, it is said that the Lhasa Apsos were in the monasteries 800 years before the birth of Christ. Can he give us any idea of how long the lamas have had the dogs in the monasteries?

LGY: It would ha hard to trace back and point out the definite period of appearance of Lhasa Apsos in the monasteries. But it had been an old tradition to breed these dogs and to have them as a companion among the very few high lamas and certain high noble and aristocratic families. Sometimes aristocratic families would come out of their houses with 3 or 4 Apsos to take around - around the Lhasa Bhakhor (circumambulating the stupa) like people taking rounds in Boudhanath Stupa.

BR: Anything else that he can think of would be greatly appreciated. I am so pleased that he is an animal lover or all the pure stock would be gone by now, I am sure.

LGY: I am an animal lover by nature. I love all kinds of Tibetan dogs and especially horses, of which I still have at least 13 in Langtaug. I am also very happy to have come into contact with you and Gerry. I wish you both every success towards the achievement of the goal in which so much of efforts, energy, time and money had been spent into this project to have this line of dogs recognized in the Occidental Kennel Club. I would be more happy above anything else to have these dogs recognized under your kind guidance.

