**Becoming A Preservationist Breeder of Shih Tzu**

*by P. Susan Cheney
Su Chen Shih Tzu
Quality is Our Essence*

Recently, I told someone, “I am a Preservationist Breeder.” They asked me to define what I meant by that, and describe my journey in dogs to accomplish that goal. As I thought about the questions, I thought about what it really means. This was something that did not happen to me overnight; it is the accumulation of many years of breeding, learning and experimenting with genetics, successes and failures. So many people breed to get a better dog to show, period. I have a definite goal.

A preservationist by definition is a supporter or advocate of the safeguarding of something from demolition or degradation. How does one become a Preservationist Breeder? One must study or be employed in the field. Many people who know me don’t know I am a retired Art Teacher and an artist, a painter of Rembrandt style 16th to 17th century, still life portraits and landscapes, a perfectionist in recovery, with a strong competitive drive and a strong work ethic. I believe these traits have served me well in this journey to eventually becoming a preservationist breeder of Shih Tzu. I made a commitment to a vision of high standards, to sustain and continue to advance purebred Shih Tzu, to exhibit consistency in size, appearance, temperament and instincts, to being committed to the health and the well-being of Shih Tzu and to preserve their unique breed standard.

Ronni Chouinard sold me a male puppy who became my first Champion “Ronni’s & Su Chen Dandi Lion”. In our many conversations with one another, the one thing she told me that is and has been my mantra since I started this magnificent obsession was, “you can't out groom or out handle the handlers, so you must out dog them to win.”

I decided on Shih Tzu accidentally. My sister Joan in Massachusetts had Shih Tzu when I visited her in the 1980’s. She explained her purchasing of a Shih Tzu male, planning to show him and eventually breed him......I thought she was nuts and then it happened...I got hooked.

After retiring later that year and expressing my boredom to her, she suggested I try showing a dog and helped me find a class in conformation. With a puppy from the union of the two dogs I purchased from her, I embarked on the adventure of the lifetime. It didn't take me long (with a good eye for esthetics) to realize that the dog I took to conformation class and later to dog shows, was not of the same cut of cloth that I was competing against in the show ring. I decided like so many of my fellow Shih Tzu fanciers, that I needed a “better dog,” more like the ones I saw in the show rings.

I had several fortuitous meetings early on. One of the most important was Cookie Nanni of “August Moon”. I met her at an outdoor dog show in Arizona. She and I were the only ones showing that day. After Cookie watched me struggle with a top knot, she assisted me with putting it up...and I won that day for the first time. It was the beginning of a long friendship between us. While in the pursuit of a good show dog, I met Elaine Meltzer and Barbara Pennington. Elaine encouraged me to read and study many books, “Canine Anatomy” being number one. Barbara Pennington encouraged me many times when I was overwhelmed with care and maintenance; she was a wealth of knowledge. Ronni Chouinard sold me a sturdy male that was destined to be my first Champion. Bonnie Prato and Wagner Fernandez co-bred my true foundation bitch, CH Hana N Su Chen Bonni Belle, a typy bitch with an incredibly beautiful face, front and rear idyllic, perfect mouth and attitude. Attitude... she showed herself.

I spent more time studying to see what I really liked and was moving towards an exquisite face like my Bonni Belle and a rounder bigger bone like Dandi Lion, both traits within our standard. But, at this point, I really didn't realize the importance. I was lost in the winning and showing game and only desired to breed another Show dog. Time passed, I took my Bonni Belle to studs from August Moon, Hallmark Jolei, and Wenrick that I liked. Each time I bred, I bred as close to the standard as I could get. I needed to offset her two less than perfect qualities: flatter tail and bone size.

Learning to interpret the standard, as I finished champion after champion, I bred to see what they produced and sometimes I was pleased, sometimes disappointed...I learned that first generations are good but by the second generation, the get was not as good as first generation. I also spent a lot of time reading, and picking the brains of experienced breeders about line breeding, outcrossing, and inbreeding, all of which helped me to better understand the Breed Standard.

I noticed that some breedings produced beautiful faces but smaller heads and a slighter bone, more oval not round or well...
boned, just smaller dogs. Many dogs in our rings were high stationed, some had less leg, sort of dumpy; many had too long of neck and loin. All of these things are basically descriptions or definitions of styles that can become popular because of well known kennel names and handlers promoting these traits because of the dogs they specialized.

I started to look at the dogs I had produced and finished with a more objective view and compared them closely to our standard. I came to the conclusion that the first breeding I did with CH August Moon Stealer of the Heart ROM produced the best bitch (only one) CH Su Chen Steal Magnolia. I bred her a couple of times and finished two pups from her first litter with a Wenrick dog (CH Wenrick Man of Distinction), and one from her 2nd litter (CH Su Chen Martini on the Rockies) which was a line breeding. There was a noticeable difference in this line of dogs from the others that I had bred. I always have kept a bitch and dog from each outcross; so, as I reviewed my past dogs and breedings, both CH Su Chen Its a Steal (Itsy) a female [X chromosome] and CH Su Chen Man of Steal ROM, [Y chromosome] (pictured right) were superior littermates. At that realization and at their age, they were precious. In the past I had had several other dogs that were wonderful, but because I was so involved with the show game, they were underused and I wasted their DNA. So as NOT to let that happen with this line, I placed most all the descendants from these other lines and took my good bitches to this male and started a breeding program on him and his GET. I knew I had a very limited time as he was getting older, and his sister could no longer produce. He produced some dark faces in his daughters but they were conformacionly correct and met all aspects of our Breed Standard...and I knew many would have sold these girls because of not having perfect face markings. I realized that cosmetics are not as important as a correct, sound dog. So, I began a search for a tightly linebred dog with no dark faces in his three (3) generation pedigree. I bought a Tu Chu male (Shooter) CH Tu Chu Marja Wish Upon a Shooting Star @ Su Chen [ROM]. I finished him and bred him to my dark-faced girls and he produced two National Specialty Best of Winners and one Best of Opposite Sex, all with beautiful white faces, bone and substance that meets our standard, proud of bearing, with a distinctively arrogant carriage, heads well up and tails curved over their backs, and not flat.

This pursuit has lead me to believe that I am a Preservationist Breeder of Shih Tzu. Because, now it’s not about breeding a show dog, it’s about preserving the breed as it was and is intended to be. I also avoid breeding to a male just because they were conformationly correct and met all aspects of our Breed Standard...and I knew many would have sold these girls because of not having perfect face markings. I realized that cosmetics are not as important as a correct, sound dog. So, I began a search for a tightly linebred dog with no dark faces in his three (3) generation pedigree. I bought a Tu Chu male (Shooter) CH Tu Chu Marja Wish Upon a Shooting Star @ Su Chen [ROM]. I finished him and bred him to my dark-faced girls and he produced two National Specialty Best of Winners and one Best of Opposite Sex, all with beautiful white faces, bone and substance that meets our standard, proud of bearing, with a distinctively arrogant carriage, heads well up and tails curved over their backs, and not flat.

Where do I want this to take me? I really enjoy helping people get started in this magnificent obsession, but I want to help people understand our breed and I firmly believe no one can learn all there is to know in a year, five years, or 20+, there is always something to learn. I know preservation is a necessity, I have seen a change in our dogs in the show ring, and not for the betterment of our breed. We need to all strive to be Preservationist Breeders to keep our toy dogs with long flowing coats in the state befitting these noble dogs of Chinese ancestry. After all, showing dogs is to evaluate breeding stock to contribute and improve the next generation and this cannot be done in one or two breedings or generations. It takes patience, time (lots of time) and a true passion for Shih Tzu...so if one is in a hurry this endeavor may not be for you.

How can we go about beginning to be Preservationist Breeders?

• understand our standard
• careful breeding, understanding pedigrees
• educate yourself
• help others understand breed type and difference between style and type
• buy wisely
• share genetics & be truthful
• “sharing is caring” Thank you, Wendy Paquette.

So in closing, I’ll repeat what Ronni Chouinards advice to me...so many years ago. “You can’t out groom the handlers and you can’t out handle them...so you must out dog them”. Her words are ever present in my ears and my minds eye.

To breed the very best Shih Tzu requires a mind set for keeping, maintaining, and improving our standard for Shih Tzu ever present in our hearts and minds. This is my goal for now and for the future.