

The International Pumi Association has published a series of articles, titled "A Pumiról - Subjectiven" (Subjective discussions about the Pumi). After reading the pre-WWII articles previously, this interview conducted by Dr. Dobo-Nagy Csaba is engaging, very informative and is a breath of fresh air without the old experts' tone of voice of inalienable authority and the suggestion of indisputable scholarship.

It is a solid documentation of the pioneering work about the history of the preservation of Hungarian breeds, primarily focusing on the Pumi.

I took the liberty to edit the article for brevity. I also left out some names originally part of the interview, in the same time adding the background of others whose names remained in the article.

Because of the length of the article, I divided the interview in two parts. This is the first part and will post the second part at a later time.

Thank you for the International Pumi Club for making these records available for the public.

The Birth of the Modern Pumi.

part1

By Dr. Dobó-Nagy Csaba

This article is based on the interviews with two important persons in the history of the Pumi, Mrs. Viktor Katona, Zsuzsi Bene the owner of Mocskos Kennel and Dr. Zoltan Balassy international conformation judge and the president of the now defunct Hungarian Pastoral Breeds Club.

"The story starts in 1957, when I was invited to preside over the MKOE Hungarian Dog Breeders National club's Hungarian pastoral breeds group," explains Dr Balassy.

I was invited to replace the group's leader, Dr Lajos Abonyi who could not mediate the escalating personal disagreements of the membership. My role was to be an arbiter, delegate functions and reestablishing cooperation between the members.

However, as it turned out, I also had to participate in the specific development, of breeding plans of the different pastoral breeds in the group that made my involvement much deeper than I originally expected. As it was anticipated, due to breed specific needs, the pastoral group broke up into individual breed clubs (Puli-Pumi, Komondor and Kuvasz) within a couple of years. I ended up as the president of the Kuvasz club.

My goal was to make the club's mission challenging, and the tasks engaging enough that they kept the membership motivated to show some interest and remain invested in the objectives of the organization and last but not least to prevent the personal bickerings.

The "Kuvasz-problem" was real. I developed a program that focused on the breed's reconstruction. When I explained my plan to Dr. Ocsag during an informal conversation, he straightforward, expressed his doubt in my abilities to run a successful breed specific program with my background as a mechanical engineer. He still believed in the old midwife's tale that for animal husbandry one needs a supernatural sixth sense - and he reiterated it by showing six of his fingers. My response was that in my opinion education and practice can make someone an expert in any specific field.

Subsequently, I immersed myself in studying biology, anatomy, animal husbandry, breeding and researching the history of the Kuvasz. I got lots of help from many experts of the field. Some provided access to old archival materials while others regularly consulted me. One of the most important advices that I've got came from Dr Jenő Bajza, by enlightening me that researching only one breed in isolation without parallel, comparative examination of other similar Hungarian dog breeds can lead to a false conclusion. (Dr Bajza a former high school teacher was the editor of the "Karpati Vadasz" magazine (the Carpathian Hunter). He was a vocal advocate to complete the official standards of all Hungarian breeds. Furthermore, he was a strong proponent of eliminating the Puli-Pumi combined standard and writing individual standard for both breeds. - translator's note) I arrived to the same deduction by spending time

at the Szechenyi library. While I cannot claim that I've learned more about animal husband than long time breeders, however, I am confident that I collected more materials and learned more about the history of Hungarian pastoral breeds than anyone else.

I've also had the opportunity to work with foreign experts, such as the zoologist Dr Erna Mohr who also connected me with the breeders of Klub für Ungarische Hirtelhunde (Hungarian Sheepdogs Club) in Germany where I also made some presentations.

I had the opportunity to consult the Italian Fiorenzo Fiorini to his book, "The Encyclopedia of Dogs." I've also had articles published in various dog magazines in the United States.

Did you come up with a standard for the Pumi? I asked professor Balássy. "Not only for the Pumi, but for all the Hungarian breeds." He responded. Aladar Puy, who was the president of MEOE back then, ask me to write a preliminary standard for the Pumi. During the preparation for the 1962 standard of the breed, I considered many of the available written records and consulted several kynologists.

Buzzi in 1899, at the Szeged City conformation show confirmed that there are two types of Pumi one with erect and the other with hanging ears. In the 1902 Hungarian edition of Brehm's Life of Animals by Mehely in the footnotes, the Pumi is mentioned as somewhat larger than the Puli. The note further said that this breed lives and used for herding in the Trans-Danubian region of Hungary. As early as 1910s Raitsits had already tried to separate the two varieties, the prick and hanging ears, Puli. He named the pricked variety, Pumi. Therefore, we can safely say that the Pumi name for the breed was introduced by Raitsits for a future breed to be developed from a mixed Puli stock. His efforts to develop an intermediary terrier breed did not succeed. The puppies from these breedings usually resembled Puli dogs. These early Pumis did not become popular and barely any breeder was interested in them, even though, the MEOE had a combined Puli-Pumi standard by 1932 that submitted to the FCI a year later in 1933.

Raitsits' successors, the MKTE (Breeders Coalition of Hungarian Dog Breeds) approved the Abonyi-Anghi-Müller individual Pumi standard.

The following year the MKTE submitted this new standard to UCI (Union Canine Internationaler). (UCI was a parallel international dog club with FCI in Europe translator's note.) Over the years, UCI weakened enough in Europe that from its rivalry with FCI the latter one became the leading international purebred canine organization.

By 1961 during the early stage of slowly arriving political reforms in Hungary after the post 1956 era, the MEOE had the opportunity to reestablish its relations with the FCI that was interrupted in 1948.

"I had the standards of 10 Hungarian breeds completed by this time," Dr Balassy told me.

This was the result of a complex preparation of the so-called Breed Reconstruction Program of the Hungarian breeds. We needed to study the selected breeds' past history and their current situation. It was a tedious research work. In addition to the kynological part, for the pastoral breeds, we also had to learn about their ethnographic backgrounds. None of the standards would have been complete without all these informations available.

In order to identify the objectives, of the different breeds' breeding programs, we had to survey the available breeding stocks of each breed in the country. This work needed to be coordinated with Dr Imre Ócsag.

It was in 1960 when I begun the journey to record one of the most important canine census of Hungarian breeds after the Second World War in the company of Laszlo Straskraba Kuvasz breeder. We were traveling all over the country. The stake was high. We aimed to stabilize all the domestic breeds. Therefore, we had to find and record as many of the descendants of those individual specimen who survived the war and spread all over the country with no registrations or available pedigrees as we could.

Back then only the Puli had a functioning organized group. (Sara Nagy Pusztai Pumi Kennel and conformation judge and Dr Bordacs Imre, lawyer owner of Nagykunsagi Puli Kennel. He exported several Pulis to the USA and was instrumental in the acceptance of the cording of the Puli's coat in Hungary) They had some nice dogs and large enough breeding stock.

In the same time there were only a few Komondors, in the hands of some experienced and enthusiastic breeders and breed experts such as Dr. Zsigmond Katsanyi - who was originally a linguist who researched the etymology of the Komondor. His most important contribution to the breed was his essay, "A Komondor Szarmazasanak Rejtelye" (The Mystery of the Komondor's Origin) and the Evers - Szentivani kennel among others.

The Kuvasz breed faced some serious issues. The quality of the stock was sub standard that a few breeders tried to turn around. (Laszlo Straszkraba).

The Mudi was another, breed neglected. Its last formal definition and description was the Fenyves-Anghi collaboration from 1936. (Dr Fényes, a veterinarian and Dr Marcel a zoologists separated and first time described the Mudi as an independent herding breed, a driver type.) Neither the Mudi nor the Pumi was on the agenda of the umbrella club for the Hungarian breeds, MKTE, they were unofficially non-existent (Balassy refers to the 1945-1960 period - translator's note.) The Pumi was still considered a breed of different varieties, one with hanging and the other with pricked ears. It was considered as sort of an intermediary breed in transition. It seemed a surmountable task to establish an independent breed to be separated from the Puli, therefore, I temporarily put the plan on the side because of lack of financial support and capacity to experiment with breeding to get a solid, stable independent breed. During my travels, I focused primarily on the Kuvasz, however, I never turned a blind eye when I ran into mix breeds expressing either Pumi or Mudi features. These encounters while on the road, further convinced me that without a much larger budget it will remain a futile effort trying to recreate the Pumi.

Balassy's opinion about the Pumi's unfinished stage seemed to be supported by Ocsag's memo to the club's membership in 1971 in which he states that the Pumi as a breed is incomplete/unfinished. Fortunately, however, it is present in the hands of shepherd as a working herding dog. The wide variety of available specimen offers plenty of room for experimenting with selection. The type is easy to train, it is agile, and has such a "modern look" that with a coordinated breeding program we can develop an internationally popular breed.

"The Puli type was present in the relatively small available stock of the Pumi in the 1950s and 60s," Balassy continued. When I was preparing the Pumi standard, I tried to ignore the Puli look with the hanging ears. I concentrated on mentally recalling the different type of dogs that I saw with the shepherd during my travels, and disregard the various breed descriptions in the origin story. Because of the lack of interest of the low number of breeders, it was unrealistic that a foundation stock can be developed within a reasonable time.

I think only Victor Katona and his wife, Zsuzsa Bene believed that a stable independent new breed can be developed. From the Katona's mix breed stock that they worked with and called it Pumi, I was predicting more of a Mudi type dog than the Pumi they hoped for. However, their effort paid off after all. From the ugly, however well tempered mix breeds a rear pumi type litter was born in 1971. The same year, later in the fall, the Katonas brought the litter to the breed inspection to Budapest. When I saw the litter it was a Eureka moment, I thought. We had the first real foundation stock for the Pumi - or at least something very close to it. The subsequent work to further develop the Pumi, became the independent Pumi club's work building on the Katona's foundation stock.

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For a while I was also in contact with the Hungarian Pumi Club and with the Längers in particular. In short, what I can say is that the Pumi's look have gone through significant changes over the years. From the lean rough coated terrier type dog, a rather teddy bear like soft coated version of the breed that became popular. This type was also more practical in the

Scandinavian countries. The coat conundrum started when different colors were accepted. I personally, would limit to the grey color because black might lead back to the Mudi and the brown can lead to who knows to what... non solid colors with shades of various patches might create further problems, even though the color combination appears flashy. I've known the Katonas a long time. I've visited them at their old location in Budapest and later after they moved, also in Nagymaros. When I saw their dogs I did not like them they had no character, with long legs and odd ears. I think only the Katonas saw them valuable. I thought that their commitment to these dogs was more of a kennel blindness. In my opinion it was a huge gamble that after all paid off at the end and the combination of these dogs gave us the Pumi's prototype.

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