

Interview conducted by Barbara J. Andrews on the occasion of Hall's 80th Birthday celebration July 15, 2000

TDP Profiles: Mr. Hall Keyes, Nanhall Kennels

TheDogPlace exclusive interviews with the people who shape our sport

Hall, how did you and Fran meet? "We met at a dog show, at the German Shepherd Dog ring, when we were both going through a divorce. At a friend's house one evening we found out that Fran sang and I played the piano --- it was, and still is, truly great fun!!!



Back in 1961 you had the youngest German Shepherd to become Champion and Grand Victrix. Is that what "hooked" you into becoming a full time Handler and Trainer?" "Not really. I had been 'hooked' since the '30s but stayed in the department store business except for WWII. By the sixties, having completely relocated eleven times in nine years, I really got tired of trying to be the 'richest man in the graveyard' so I quit and went completely to the dogs. I have but one regret - I should have done it sooner."

Didn't you also have the Highest Titled German Shepherd Bitch in 1962 (UDT, ROM, Grand Victrix)? "Yes For those that are not in Shepherds, what is a Victrix?? "Grand Victor and Grand Victrix are the highest conformation awards at a National Specialty show - (obviously, either one can be Best of Breed or Best of Opposite Sex)"

What did you do before you turned full time and became AKC All Breed licensed? "Prior to WWII I was learning the dept store business and also belonged to the oldest National Guard unit in the country known as the 7th Regiment in New York City (West Point copied their uniforms from our unit). We were inducted into federal service prior to Pearl Harbor. Not long after Pearl Harbor I transferred to the Army Air Corps and was discharged in 1946. I then returned to the dept store business, but continued with dogs as an important hobby - primarily obedience training. It was not until the Fifties that I got really serious about confirmation and breeding."

I understand that you have been in Greensboro about 20 years. Even knowing you and Fran, it is hard to believe that two people could build such an "empire" in only twenty years. Did you plan to expand into such a large operation or did it just happen? "We moved to Greensboro in early 1969 and, as you can understand, heavily in debt. However, I think we have 'paid our dues'. You're very flattering when you say we have an 'empire', but we both did learn our lessons well (Fran, with her jewelry designing and mfg. background and me with my dept store background). We tried to open a 2nd kennel on the opposite side of town but were unable to get zoning, so we opened a 'branch store' instead. Dogs may be dropped off for boarding at our 2nd location and we, then, taxi them to the main kennel and back. It works great."

Our daughter, Hayley Keyes, grooms and runs a grooming school at this location as well. She has had students from as far away as Belgium and Japan. The thing that surprises us is that in our original game plan, we were going to give up showing within 5 years. However, this business is addictive, as you well know. We have tried very hard, over the years, to offer everything we are capable of, and permitted to, for the dogs.

Because we talk girl stuff, I know that Fran is a graduate of the New York Fashion Academy. She could easily be voted Best Dressed Female Handler but you are equally as well groomed. How important do you

think it is for guys to be well dressed in the show ring? "Extremely important. A Handler is painting a picture!!! My objection is that the "Dog Game" is supposed to be a sport. Therefore, I see no need to dress like an Executive at a Board Meeting. One should dress respectably to compete in the Sport. Would Jack Nicholas or Tiger Woods wear a suit and tie while competing in a Golf Tournament?"

Ha! Good point. So "neat and appropriate" is the key. Your daughter Hayley is proof that genetics work in people too. I believe Fran graduated from Rutgers University and you are certainly a man everyone looks up to in the sport. It appears that Hayley inherited the combined talents of both you and your wife. You must be very proud of her. "Of course we are very, very proud of her. In fact, for her last birthday, I gave her a pillow, nicely gift wrapped, nice card, the works. She has never thanked me, never acknowledged it, nothing. It said 'Mirror, mirror on the wall, I'm just like my Mother after all'."

What a great gift! And a great compliment to two lovely ladies. Obviously Hayley grew up in dogs. I understand that she was an Assistant Executive Director of the Professional Groomers Association of the Carolinas, and is a Certified Master Groomer What I don't understand - what the heck is a Licensed Pesticide Applicator?? "To apply any 'Chemical' on a dog not owned by you, you must be licensed."

That's interesting. So owners should be careful and make sure that the groomers are in fact certified and well trained. Hall, you and Fran have done countless seminars on training and presentation, and I've heard Hayley is also a gifted speaker. Didn't she do an obedience seminar on how to deal with an Aggressive Dog? "Yes she did. She spoke at a grooming seminar, called Groom Expo in Hershey, PA. If she was standing here I would comment 'that's the result of good coaching, Ha Ha!!!"

Handlers come to you for help in training difficult dogs for the ring. You developed something called the Soft Touch or Special Touch that has become the basis for most really successful "methods" that other trainers now call their own. Can you tell us briefly what are the two things that most characterize your training method? "The Soft Touch'. You should never be a threat to your dog. A dog should do what you tell him to do because he wants to - not because he has to."

You and Fran drove that monster motor home all the way down to Mexico for the World Show in 1999. Did you have any idea when you hit the road that Fran would take an Akita to Best In Show there? Would you rank that as one of your most thrilling accomplishments? "Of course not. To answer the second question - BJ you guys have been in the game a long time too. So you both know that a good win beats s_ _ every time!!!"

Hall, as a team, you two have had many achievements. You are Certified in Dog Behavior at Cornell University and you earned the Delta Society and Gaines Award for the #1 Service Dog in (1988) but isn't it also true that Nanhall has just become the first State Approved Grooming School in North Carolina? "We are approved for teaching by the Dept. of Human Resources, and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Approval by the Dept of Education is in the process at this time."

Nanhall has won a lot of awards as Best Kennel, in Grooming competitions and in every field of training. You have much to be proud of so I wonder, where does having bred over a hundred AKC Champions, including the Youngest Schipperke to go Best In Show (in what? 1998), well, how would you rank your accomplishments as a breeder compared to your success as builder of Nanhall? "This most probably is not a question for me to answer but perhaps you'll allow this liberty. I've never been one to push my name. Consequently, I've never owned a dog with my name as owner --- it's always been the kennel name. But, since we no longer have a registered kennel name [see, we are cutting back], we thought that since I am not getting any younger, I should at least have one dog registered in my own name and he is our Ch. Akita "Geronimo". OK?"

Well that explains the Nanhall ownership. Always wondered about that. Hall, you turned 86 in July of 2000. Why do you keep handling instead of taking the judge's license for which you are so very qualified? "First off I did not turn 86 in July of 2000, as you said. Please, 80 is old enough, thank you. Now, to answer your question ---- I used to give a long explanations to this question but I have found it much easier and better to cut it short. At nearly every show someone asks why I don't judge dogs after all of these years. My answer is quite simple --- I have no problem judging dogs, but how do I get my second assignment? You don't have to print this --- and I won't tell anyone about Bill's "No Headache" vodka."

Well, this will be printed because unfortunately, a lot of other highly qualified people feel the same way. So ok, what do you plan to do the next twenty years? Exactly what Fran tells me to do. I learned late in life that when you are married, you should shift into neutral. Then, you can handle everything your wife says with no pressure.

Hall Keyes, you are a great dog man, and possibly an even greater success as a husband and father! Thank you for granting us this ProFile.

Interview conducted by BJ Andrews