

My Introduction to the Cat Fancy

By Louise Sample

Many of my earliest memories are concerned with cats, barn cats, house cats and strays taken in for one good meal and who stayed on for the rest of their lives. Through all the years, and wherever we lived, we have had one or more cats of undefined origin. But when Darrell and I were married in 1932 we had a Blue Cream whose dam was one of Miss Hydon's "Lavendar" Blues. I could not know then what significance the name of Miss Hydon would have for me in later years. We had often spoken of acquiring a pedigreed Siamese, and when the Blue Cream died we wrote to every breeder of Siamese listed in *Cat World*. Some did not answer, some sent postcards saying little except the asking price so we were understandably impressed by a long letter from Mrs. R. H. Hecht of the Vee-Roi cattery in St. Louis giving us the prices on kittens, both show and pet, and the good advice that if we were interested in breeding Siamese the best way to start was with a bred female. After some further correspondence we settled on the bred queen who turned out to be Vee-Roi's China Girl . . . the foundation for our Siamese breeding and formal entry into the cat fancy, for it was with a male and female kit from China Girl's first litter that we took Best and Best Opposite Siamese kitten in an ACA show in St. Louis the following fall. What a never-to-be-forgotten thrill it was for a totally novice breeder. We have a yellowed Post-Dispatch news clipping showing Kay Shy Ralston, then only six years old, holding the two winning kittens but we don't need the picture to recall the elation of that moment. No subsequent win could ever equal it. Because we were entering these kits, Mrs. Hecht refrained from entering any of her kittens. Vee-Roi Siamese were indisputably the winners across the board in all other classes, as they were in most shows of that late-30's-and-early-40's era. This was before the days of the moratorium on Burmese, but the days of the point system of computing Championships when, in order to be certain of the required number of competing cats, we all brought everything we could carry, show-type or not. Mrs. Boehlow, the Manx breeder, Vee Hecht and I went to many shows together and it was through Mrs. Hecht that I met some of the judges and fanciers of those early days when a "show" meant simply an All Breed — no specialties as we now know them; Anna B. Revington from whom I learned much of what I know about Longhairs, Winne Porter, that "character" with character, Anna Pardee, Miss Goodwin, Mrs. Stanley Gibson, Crystal Small and many others.

Train travel was the order of the day or even bus travel if one could find a line that would allow animals in carriers. I remember one trip well. I was determined to make the Pittsburgh show as Vee Hecht, Alice Boehlow, Winnie Porter and Charles Kenny (then editor of *CATS*) were all to be there. Plus that, it was a chance to meet Virginia Cobb, whose Wah-Chu-Mei of Newton we had recently purchased. I rode a bus night and day to arrive for the opening of the show — was pressed into service as a clerk for Claire O'Bryon who



Photo by Bachrach

MRS. L. DARRELL SAMPLE

President of C.F.A., Inc.

1818 State Avenue

Anoka, Minnesota

612 — HA 1-5844

55303

was judging the Siamese Specialty — visited with friends after the Saturday night closing and up early to begin another busy day and back onto the bus Sunday eve for another two day ride home. While money was in short supply, my stamina quotient was evidently above average.

Little by little and show by show I began to absorb some of the great mass of knowledge one gradually assimilates by association with breeders who are willing to share that knowledge with a raw beginner, and who kindly guide and advise the novice.

My main interest lay with the Siamese. Our first two Siamese queens were simply SIAMESE — no prefix as to color for there were only the Seal Pointed Siamese when we began. Later on the Blue Point Siamese was recognized. I neglected to mention the diverse breeds we have raised. We leased Kerry-Lu Marigold, a Red Tabby Shorthair from Vee Hecht and from her we raised some fine R. T.'s. One, Samdur's Spice, went All American, the first time for any R. T. We also raised Black and Blue Persians, Abyssinians and Burmese. We still have Abys and Burmese . . . none others.

About the time the Blue Points were recognized, I first began to judge. Winnie Porter invited me to judge the Siamese Specialty at the Audubon Park Tea Room in New Orleans on Easter Saturday and Sunday in March of 1948. There were 98 Siamese entered, something of a record. Mr. Charles Kleim of Memphis was the All Breed judge and an old pro, and Dr. E. L. Ackerman was the show manager. Sunday night as Winnie Porter was "carrying" Alice Boehlow, Vee Hecht, their many carriers, and me, to the depot in her old Pierce-Arrow hearse (which Win had christened "Betsy") still equipped with elegant crystal flower vases and tear-drop headlights mounted on top of the fenders, we hit a bad bump in the park road. Winnie shifted gears but only an agonized growl came from Betsy and she refused to budge for her gears were stripped. Win put her head on the wheel and moaned, "Betsy, you old buzzard, you failed me when I needed you most." We were country miles from the depot and only minutes away from departure time. But Win was not without resources and friends. She got out and hailed every passing car and piece-mealed carriers out to any exhibitor who had room and a fast get-away car; Alice, Vee and I were parceled out to others and by some miracle we all arrived at the depot a minute before the train left.

It was in 1948, too, that Matil Rotter invited me to attend the CFA All Breed meeting at her home and later she encouraged me to judge for CFA. I became a charter member of the Minnesota Siamese Club, the first Siamese Specialty club to be accepted to membership in CFA. Later, the members of the Twin City Cat Fanciers formed the Twin City Solid Color club. All three of these clubs have a more or less interlocking membership and work together to put on the Twin City shows.

Each year in the fancy one finds he becomes more and more involved. "Involvement" is the operative word, whether one is a breeder, exhibitor, judge or office holder. Lillias Bloem once asked me if I had ever thought what my life might have been if I had never become involved in the cat fancy. I can't bear to think about it.