

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Interview with RITA SWENSON



Rita Swenson was born in Easthampton, Massachusetts and was educated in the state, and other New England schools. After graduation from college, she worked for two years as chemist's assistant in the laboratory of a paper manufacturing company.

She was married to John Swenson in 1932; they have one son, Christopher, 27, and a 3½ year old granddaughter, Erica.

Her interests are especially keen in psychology and the religions of the world; also she enjoys gardening, artificial flower arranging, classical music and anything which has to do with Oriental art.

The decision to have cats as pets was pretty much decided by her mother who adored cats and felt no home was complete without them. Considering the numbers that were sometimes on hand, she grew up in what was probably the most complete household on record. So, when it came time to establish her own home with John, it seemed the most natural thing in the world to select kittens for it with the same care that they selected their furniture. These kittens were of the garden variety and to this day she keeps one of this household pet variety around for sentimental reasons and in order not to break the tie with the past.

She bought her first Persian in 1939, a little four months old blue-eyed white daughter of Mrs. J. Howard McCleary's exquisite Dbl. Ch. Fairwood Pansy Ma Belle, one of the winningest blue eyed whites of her day. In September of that year Rita attended her first cat show, an all breed show sponsored by the Springfield Cat Fanciers, and held at the Eastern State Exposition, Springfield, Massachusetts. At this show, her recently acquired white female who was registered as Casa Loma Fairwood Shalimar but who became known to fanciers in the east as "Molly", was awarded Best Opposite Sex Kitten in Show by Judge Edna Doughty. This initial win was followed by many more Finals wins, including Best Cat in Show, and at a time when it was most unusual for a white cat to get beyond the "color" win. To Shalimar must go the credit for starting Rita on a course which she says "enriched my life in a way that I never dreamed possible."

In the past, she has owned up to 30 adult cats at one time, including Manx, Siamese, Abys and American Shorthairs in addition to Persians. At present, she owns 14 adults — a black ASH, a grey-and-white Garden cat, and the rest are Persian. Nine of the Persians are white, three being daughters and a son of her Ch. Vel-Vene Victoria, blue litter sister to the great Gr. Ch. Vel-Vene Voo Doo.

Also sharing the Swenson household are Casey, a four year old spayed Basset Hound, and Happy, a 14 year old Beagle. When someone from the Cat Fancy phones and one of the dogs bark while she is talking, she says, "I always explain that I am working on a new breed of cat. Cat people aren't supposed to love dogs, too, but I'm afraid my own conception of a complete household is cats AND dogs."

Mrs. Swenson is now a member of Empire C. C., Boston C. C., Solid Color Club of the East (8 years as secretary-treasurer), White Persian Society International (Honorary Member), Santa Monica C. C. (Honorary Member), and United Persian Society. Her Cattery is registered as Casa Loma, No. 932.

She has served as Board Director of CFA 1952-1954 and did not seek re-election in 1954. In 1956, she ran for the office of RVP, North Atlantic Region, served CFA continuously since that time as RVP, Board Director or Executive Vice-President. This year makes five years as Executive Vice President, and as Judging Program Chairman.

She has always been ready to support a cause or a project which she thinks will be beneficial to CFA as a whole. For instance, in 1951-52, she was one of the small minority group who agitated for permission to hold Longhair and Shorthair Specialty shows, an entirely new concept but a show breakdown which time has long since proven to be the most equitable.

To a query about present day breeders, she said it would be impossible to say if breeders are doing a better job today than formerly. To determine this it would be necessary for today's breeders to operate under the same conditions; each generation of breeders contribute their best and succeeding generations pick up the torch, cherish what was left to them by a generation as dedicated as themselves, and build to the future.

When asked about CFA progress in developing correct standards, she answered, "I think our CFA Show Standards are excellent. Any confusion no doubt results from the various interpretations which are placed on them. In certain breeds where the interpretation of the standards isn't uniform, resulting in several distinct types within the breed, the breeders do appear to be coming closer together in their thinking as to which type is "right". This represents good judgment on their part and is a healthy sign for the future of the breeds involved. When concerned breeders join forces there is no limit to what they can do. It takes time but problems of this sort have been dealt with before with complete success and will be again.

In response to a last question, she said, with her usual generosity, "Who has helped me in the Cat Fancy? Who hasn't? I think I gain a little bit from each person with whom I come in contact." This statement as well as the whole interview confirms the generally held opinion that in Rita Swenson we have the good fortune to enjoy the friendship and offices of a truly great lady of the Cat Fancy.



At Japan 1970 show, award winner exhibitor, Judge Rita Swenson, Madame Kimiko Shirane, Mrs. Albert (Connie) Bath and Baron Shirane.