

## THIS PEN PORTRAIT, UPDATED, APPEARED IN THE BGV CLUB NEWSLETTER, WINTER 2004.

### **Linda Skerritt (Monkhams)**

PEN PORTRAITS MAKE INTERESTING READING not for the known connection with dogs but the insight into a person's private life. Dogs entered my life at an early stage in Southend, where I was born. My mother tired of me returning from funfairs with countless goldfish in plastic bags full of water, finally relented and bought me a Dachshund. A few exemptions shows followed. How was I to know this was to pave the way for the rest of my life?

At grammar school, having gained the required number of O levels and conquered English, A levels saw me as the only person rolling from one language lesson to another: French, German, Spanish, Italian and the dreaded Latin. Then came Dutch and a smattering of Russian.

My working career began as a supernumerary at the junior school I had attended. Big mistake. It was a surreal life, working alongside old teachers who had taught me. I escaped as fast as I could. My mother promptly arranged for me to have typing lessons so I could get a "proper" job. I have thanked her so many times for her foresight.

In March 1965 I joined HM Customs, worked for a year in London, then transferred to Southend when the big new HQ opened. I ran the Sports & Social Club, which included organising trips to Belgium and France, and produced a quarterly newsletter. With our parents being old friends, in 1968 I married Ian Winchester, ex-Army Air Corps/ REME. Soon after, two Bassets joined us, one from Mildred Seiffert, who later pointed me towards the newly formed Thames Estuary Branch of the Basset Hound Club. With Ian and I having drifted apart over the years, our amicable divorce left me looking for other interests and, before I knew it, the Chairman of the TEB, Bernie Skerritt, had me on the committee and producing their newsletter. They were happy days of walks, fun days, hunts, picnics and other get-togethers. My two Bassets turned into five, when Bernie came to live with me. In 1982 Jenna was born. The following year, with losing our old Bassets, we got our first BGV, Jomil Sirene, from Nick Frost. We also acquired Wakelyns Willow from Anne and Sandy Mackenzie. These became the foundation of Monkhams PBGVs. Meantime, Bernie chaired the East Anglian Branch of the BHC, with me a committee member. In 1985 we moved to near Basildon - remote and more land. A year later, Bernie died of a heart attack. I carried on in his place, became Chairman of the EAB and a long friendship developed with American Valerie Link, who had bought her first PBGV from us. In late 1986, on return to the States, Valerie set up her dog journal *On The Circuit*. I was the UK correspondent.

By this time I had been working in the Customs Training Division for some years, writing guided learning packages and assessment exercises for senior management development programmes. My thesis on the latter earned me Membership of the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development. But, deciding there was more to life than Essex, in 1989 I transferred to Heathrow Airport, where I became Senior Officer Admin in Terminal 3, a job ranging from ensuring cells were clean for prisoners to ordering drugs testing kits. Having worked at home for years, the sudden change to being at the world's busiest airport was colossal. However, more change was to come.

With the introduction of Charter Standards, I was asked to set up a complaints handling system for Customs at all the major airports. This was later adopted nationwide and my guided learning package won a Plain English Campaign award. For many years I dealt with complaints for London's airports and other areas - correspondence referred from, eg, the Prime Minister, the Queen, Ministers and MPs. I also reviewed unresolved complaints and referred cases to the Adjudicator, Ombudsman and Crown Prosecution Service.

On moving to Buckinghamshire I became Secretary of a local Basset Hound Club branch and subsequently a member of the BGV Club committee, taking over as Secretary from 2007-2010. In the late 90s, with Valerie Link I co-authored "Petit Basset Griffon Vendéen, A Definitive Study", then independently produced two editions of the successful *Meet the Basset Breeds*, a combination of historical and current information on all basset breeds, with worldwide breeder ads. Other work has since included revision of both Grand Basset & Petit Basset breed standards which were accepted by the Kennel Club, production of training material on both breeds, extended breed standards and a historical compilation of BGVC championship show winners from 1988 onwards.

Jenna and I judge all the *basset* breeds both in England and overseas and are keen exhibitors. Some exciting PBGVs have come from a combination of our lines and the Danish Chouan, including top Danish and Dutch PBGVs. Other Monkhams stock has been shown outside the UK, including in Australia and South Africa but notably in America. With our own PBGVs winning well and frozen semen from our latest champion dog siring winning pups overseas, the PBGVs remain the love of my life, they are great company at home and I am sure Bernie would have been proud of how Jenna and I have kept the Monkhams flag flying for him.

