

INTERVIEWING MRS JENKINS – EAGLESCREAG IRISH WOLFHOUND
by Daniela Iori

It was 1994 and it was my first time in a Show Championship in the United Kingdom. The show took place in Wales, it was a hot and wet day in August and it was there where I met Mrs. Ruth Jenkins, the important and famous Irish Wolfhound breeder, showing her Ch. Eaglescreag Kapitan in the “open class” and winning the third placement. I felt such a great emotion! I could see the famous lady placing her huge hound by the judge. I still keep the shot in my memory and the huge size of Kapitan who seemed much larger if compared to the thin lady. Anytime I catch the book “The Irish Wolfhound – A collection of Photographs and Pedigrees” my memories run to that day, since on the front cover I can see Mrs. Jenkins with her huge Ch. Eaglescreag Jake. I am feeling very happy and proud to share her breeding experience with us.

Why the Irish Wolfhound?

There was a collection of canine pets in our household when I was young. When I was about 10 an Irish Wolfhound joined our family of dogs. She was a lovely companion, going everywhere with us children – on the bus into town, into shops and cafes etc., and camping in Devon with my sister and myself. When it became suitable for the Jenkins family to own a dog, fond memories of Droonagh made the choice of a Wolfhound a ‘must’. She was Develin Molly, born in 1950.

Which are the kennel you mainly cooperated with, especially during the first years?

Kilfenora of Ouborough was our foundation bitch. She came to us through the generosity of Mesdames Harrison and Atfield of the Sanctuary prefix. She had a sound pedigree, mainly Ouborough, Sulhamstead and Felixstowe, all well established and successful bloodlines. The Ouborough hounds were very strong for type and quality (beauty) whereas the Sulhamstead were sound and workmanlike – such important characteristics. All three kennels produced good size. We were indeed lucky.

Champion Rory of Kihone also featured strongly in our breeding plans.

Which are the breed features you have been firmly looking for during your breeding?

Surely the answer has to be to try to breed an Irish Wolfhound as near as possible to the requirements of the Irish Wolfhound Club Breed Standard. To do this we found a reasonable amount of showing was necessary, where placement in classes was an indication of how well or badly we were doing in this respect. We tried to look at the whole animal, not just one or two favorite points. However, you could say we watched temperament. This was because during the War the

dogs became somewhat inbred, and some were reserved. We were able to introduce new blood from the excellent Ch. Sanctuary Rory of Kihone. He was an excellent outcross for all the English bloodlines.

The first things coming to my mind when I think about your hounds are, large size, good and balanced temperament. Am I wrong?

We like large Wolfhounds as do most Wolfhounds fanciers, but in addition from a breeder point of view a hound must also be sound and healthy If it is to be used in a breeding programme. In addition it stands to reason that a Wolfhound with a nice temperament gives a lot more pleasure to its owner, Bad temperament, whether shyness or aggression, should be avoided in the breeding programme.

I firmly think that your hounds show the most interesting life span. I also know that you do not seem too much satisfied about your results regarding to this and that in the history of your kennel you decided to start anything from the beginning in order to look for health and temperament. Can you tell us why?

The lifespan of our dogs was on average much the same as others and it would have been nice if we could have been able to improve it. However, giant breeds do seem to age earlier. This I think matters more to today's breeders as the dogs are kept in smaller numbers in more of a pet situation. The owners of the great kennels of yesteryear were in the main keen exhibitors, the dogs living in greater numbers in a remote kennel environment. Replacements ready for the showing were usually at hand, so perhaps they did not consider a longer lifespan quite so important.

Perhaps todays scientific progress will come round to helping us with problem.

Thanks to your efforts you helped improving the breed, not only in your home country, but all over the world. Which are the breeders (kennels) who mainly used your bloodlines?

Elizabeth and William Deemer. Fitzarren, of the USA managed to do well with the two foundation bitches they obtained from Eaglescrag. Francis and Anne McEvoy of the Tirowen Kennel, Australia have adhered to our bloodlines quite closely, and Jurgen Papenfuss and Jurgen Rosner have made good use of the Eaglescrag blood in Germany.

As to bloodlines... I know you firmly trust a close linebreeding. Which is your experience about this?

Breeders of pedigree stock should study carefully the pedigrees and should also familiarise themselves with the animals therein, also relatives, along with show achievements if any. Don't be tempted to breed from poor quality stock. There is a saying "You cannot make a silk purse from a sow's ear"! Then under the

assumption that like begets like suitable relatives may be mated, always having regard to size, vigor and temperament.

Are there in the United Kingdom, according to your opinion, clearly defined bloodlines? And if yes, which are them?

Marumac, Ainsea and Sepleur come to mind. Today's small kennels make the achievement of clearly defined bloodlines a more difficult and longterm strategy.

A new health regulation helps importing hounds in the United Kingdom. Do you think that the English breeding can be improved by continental studs?

I do not know the Continental Irish Wolfhounds. They are, I believe, quite closely related to the Irish Wolfhounds in Britain. A good stud dog is always useful and it's nice to think that he is available to British breeders now. Indeed, we can all help each other more.

I would really appreciate if, at the end of this short interview you could be so kind to give some suggestions to young breeders.....

- 1) Do not keep more hounds than you are able to manage well.
- 2) There is a lot to learn, take your time.
- 3) There are bound to be set backs. There are always problems with livestock breeding don't be discouraged when they come your way.
- 4) Take your showing experiences calmly and learn from them.