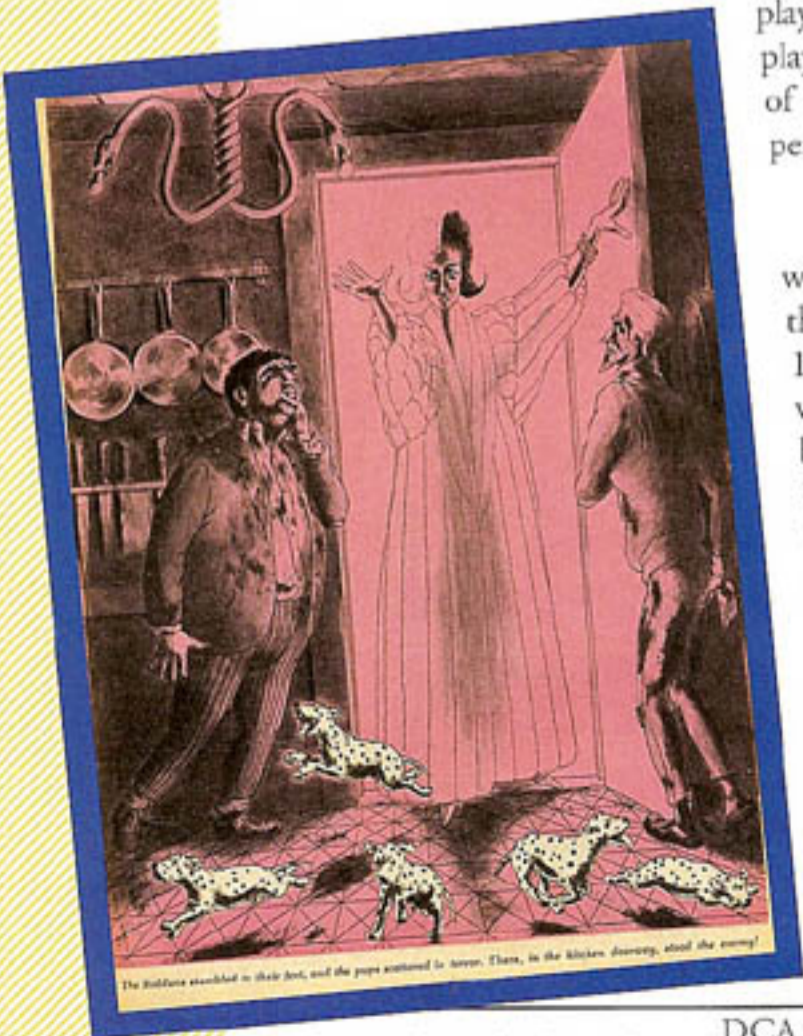


# "101 Dalmatians" and Breed Popularity in the U.S.

By Cheryl Steinmetz

In 1960 AKC registered 1,785 Dalmatians. That placed them 30<sup>th</sup> in breed popularity. Ten years earlier, in 1950, 2,132 Dalmatians had been registered, placing them 21<sup>st</sup> in breed popularity.

In 1956 a story called "The Great Dog Robbery" was published in serial form from June through September in *Woman's Day* magazine. The story was by English author Dodie Smith.

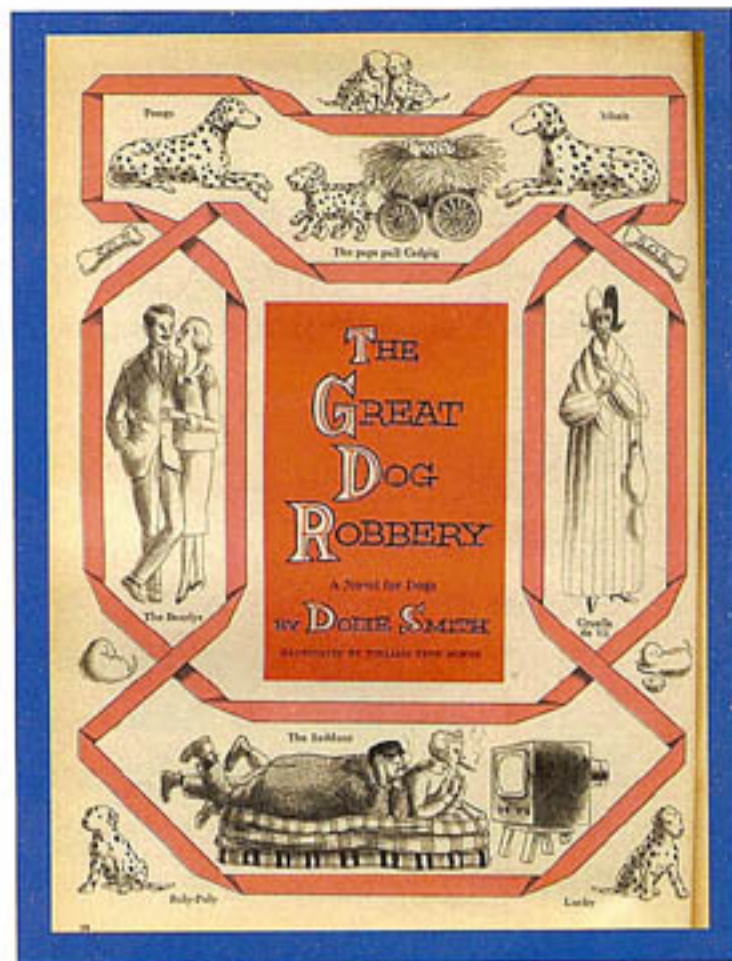


A second illustration from the *Great Dog Robbery*.

Viking Press published the children's book in 1957 as *The Hundred and One Dalmatians*. Shortly thereafter the story was purchased by Disney.

Author Dorothy Gladys Smith was born in Lancashire, England on May 3, 1896. She attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London and when Dodie's acting career proved unsuccessful she began writing plays and movie scripts. Her first successful play, *Autumn Crocus* (1931) began a string of five successful plays in seven years performed on the London stage.

Smith moved to the U.S. in 1938 with her companion Alec Beesley and their Dalmatians. They were married in 1939. According to the Dodie Smith website, "Sadly, in 1940, the Beesleys' beloved Dalmatian Pongo died. Knowing that only another dog could help them get over the loss, they acquired two more Dalmatians, Folly and Buzz. In 1943, Folly and Buzz became the proud parents of 15 pups, one of which appeared to be stillborn but was revived by Alec...a scene that would feature in *The Hundred and One Dalmatians*." Dodie returned to England alone in 1951 to oversee a production of one of her plays. Alec remained in the U.S. with the dogs



*The Great Dog Robbery* first appeared as a series in *Woman's Day* magazine (June through September, 1956). Illustrations were by William Pene DuBois.

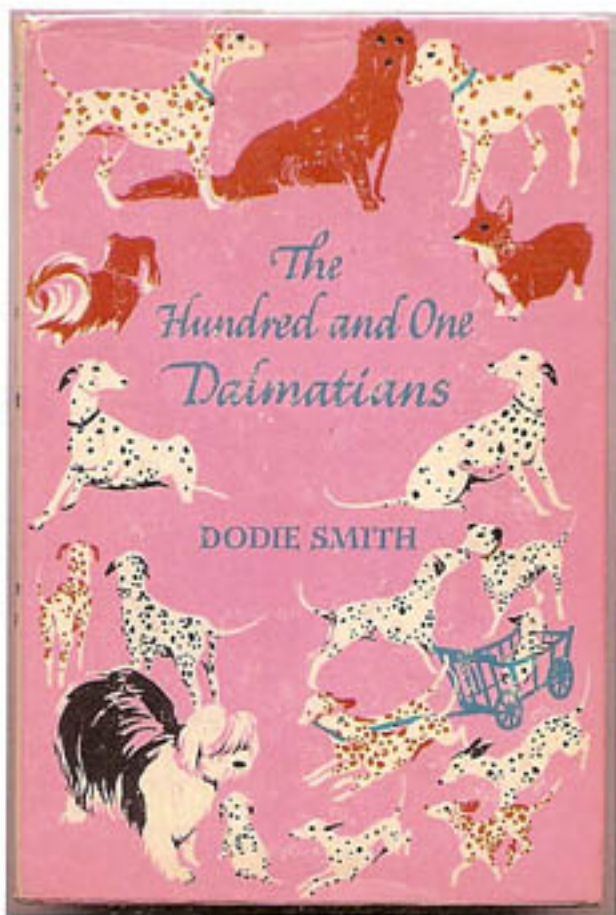
because English law required a six-months' quarantine for the dogs, and it wasn't until 1953 that Dodie, Alec and the dogs returned to England for good. Again, according to the website, "She was asked many times why she had stayed away from England for so long, and found that people did not seem to believe the reason was her reluctance to quarantine the dogs!"

Walt Disney Company released their animated full length feature film based on



Every pup had his revenge on Cruella, the dog robber. How the fur did fly!

Another illustration from the *Great Dog Robbery*. Images courtesy Rebecca Loader.



Viking Press, New York 1957 edition, illustrated by Janet & Anne Grahame-Johnstone. Copyright page inside states © 1956 by Dodie Smith. Published in 1957. From the author's collection.

Smith's book in 1961. It was titled *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*. Disney advertised the 1961 release as a story of, "BOY meets GIRL! DOG meets DOG!...and then the FUN begins!!! Walt Disney fills the screen with delightful Dalmatians and hilarious humans in one of the most ONEderful of all his cartoon comedies!" After the initial release, Disney

occasionally re-released the cartoon feature to movie theaters.

Between 1960 and 1970 Dalmatian AKC ranking changed little. In 1960 Dals were 30<sup>th</sup> in popularity and in 1970 they were 29<sup>th</sup>; although individual registrations increased to 6,961. By 1980 Dals dropped down to 41<sup>st</sup> with 5,585 individuals registered.

The movie was released to theaters in December of 1986 and again in July 1991. As is shown in the material in the DCA archives, it was during these years that extensive advertising and promotion accompanied the releases. Many cartoon-character children's coloring books, sticker books and story books were printed in 1986 or 1991. Most of the Disney-licensed blankets, children's clothing and stuffed animals are also from this time period.

In April 1992 Blockbuster's *News & Preview* announced the upcoming home-edition video release. "Walt Disney's classic *101 Dalmatians* is finally out of the vaults and into video...", says the story, "Now celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, this beloved tale of a dramatic diabolical dognapping, and the ensuing chase across the winter English countryside, is considered one of Disney's greatest works."



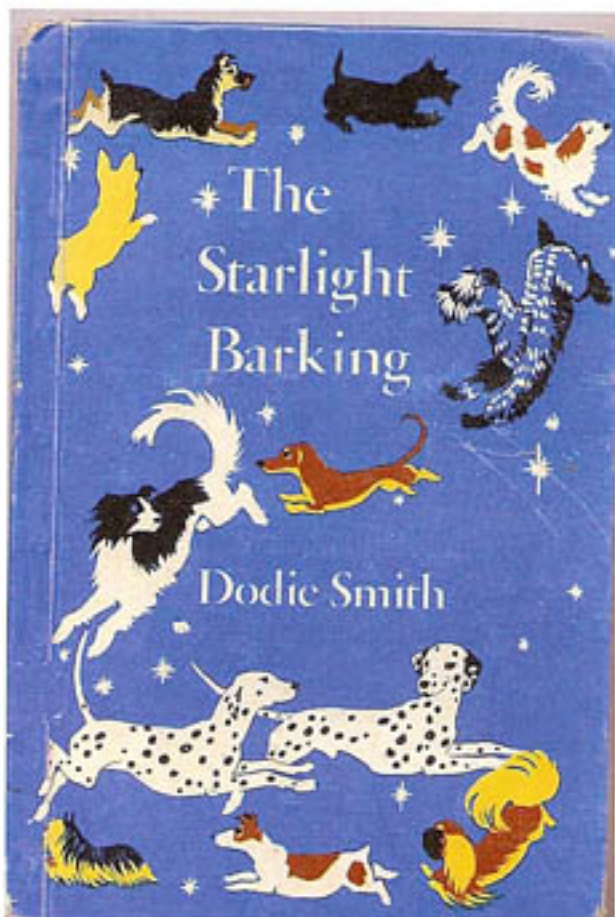
Dodie and Alec Smith with their Dalmatians.

After being in 41<sup>st</sup> place by AKC registrations in 1980, our rise in popularity began in 1986. We were back up to 30<sup>th</sup> in 1986, then 29<sup>th</sup> in 1987, 24<sup>th</sup> in 1989, 19<sup>th</sup> in 1990, and 15<sup>th</sup> in both 1991 and 1992. In 1992, 38,927 individual Dalmatians were registered by AKC.

In 1993 Dalmatian registrations took another leap to 9<sup>th</sup> place and we broke into AKC's Top Ten and remained in the same position for 1994. John Mandeville wrote about fad breeds in a Registration Statistics article in the April 1994 AKC *Gazette*. He discussed the fate of Chows as they dropped lower and lower just as the Irish Setter and St. Bernard had in earlier years...and he accurately foresaw the future of Dalmatians. "The American public," he wrote "almost always has a fad breed. Invariably, such breeds have unique and appealing qualities. They also have attributes that do not really make them candidates for mass popularity. The result is a sharp increase in popularity and an equally sharp decline."

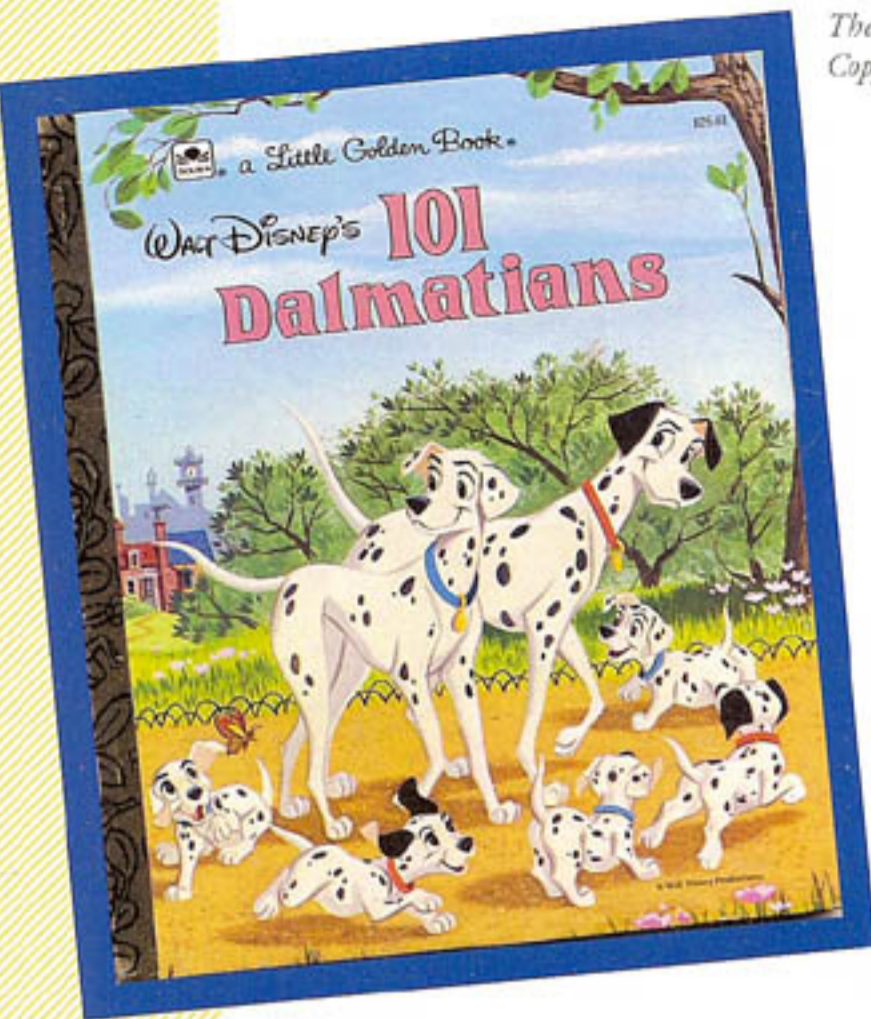
In the Summer 1995 *Spotter*, in her "Spotlighting" column, Joanne Nash wrote about statistics, popularity and Mandeville's comments. Joanne wrote, "Dalmatians have been the fad breed of this decade, and while we had hoped the breed would never reach the Top Ten it appears possible that 9<sup>th</sup> may be the highest ranking we'll achieve." Joanne was right.

In 1995 registrations dropped and our ranking settled on 11<sup>th</sup> place. And it was in the Spring of 1995 that a Disney representative wrote to DCA asking for



Cover and illustration from *The Starlight Barking* (sequel to *101 Dalmatians*). Copyright by Dodie Smith and published by Simon & Schuster, Inc. in 1967. Illustrated by Janet & Anne Grahame-Johnstone.





assistance in recruiting Dalmatian puppies for a new live 101 Dalmatians movie.

Registrations in 1996 dropped again and our position stopped on 15<sup>th</sup>. Ultimately the live-action remake was filmed in England, but 1996 was a very busy year for DCA, regional clubs and everyone involved in Public Relations. The new movie hit the theaters Thanksgiving 1996, and every newspaper and TV show had a story about Dalmatians. Every club did parades, interviews and photo shoots, and we presented the general message; "Don't buy on impulse, find out about Dalmatians before you buy and go to a reputable, experienced breeder."

In 1997 the registration drop continued and we were 17<sup>th</sup>. The 1998 numbers were less than half of the year before and our ranking fell to 30<sup>th</sup>. The home video release of the live action 101 and the live action sequel, *102 Dalmatians* did not slow our decline. In 1999 we ended at 40<sup>th</sup> position and in 2000 we were down to our lowest position in over 50 years; we were 49<sup>th</sup> in breed popularity.

Since 2000 our fall has not ceased. In 2004 only 1,012 individual Dalmatians were registered with the AKC, placing us in 80<sup>th</sup> place. Watching the monthly numbers in 2005, we may not yet have hit bottom.

Ten years ago, in her Summer 1995

Illustration by Janet & Anne Grabme-Johnstone from an Avon Camelot book. First printing January 1967, second printing November 1969.



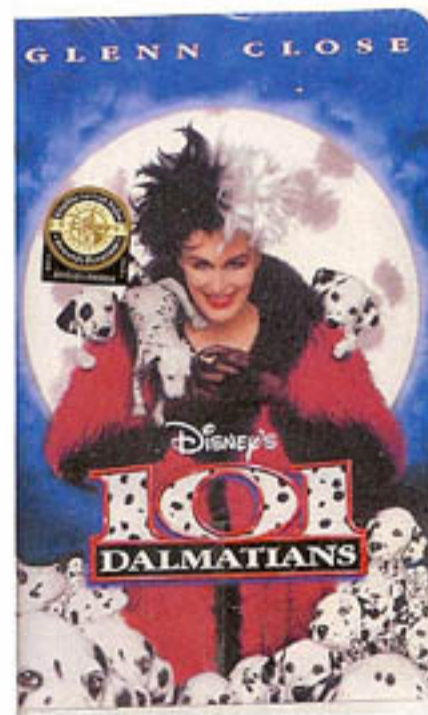
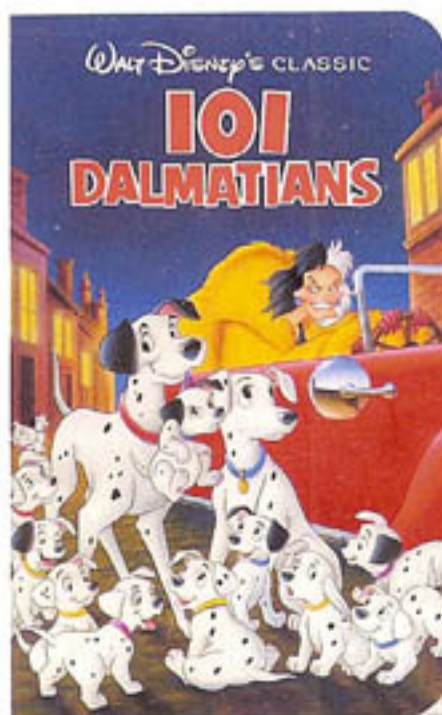
*Spotter* column, Joanne Nash wrote, "If Dals follow the traditional fad breed pattern the slight decline in numbers for 1994 is a harbinger of further declines. We can hope before too many more years that the breed will be back at an appropriate level of popularity, with sufficient dogs to maintain a broad enough gene pool but not exceeding the number of dogs for which good homes are available."

How many dogs with different pedigrees constitute a broad enough gene pool? That question, along with what is an

appropriate level of popularity, will be answered in our next 100 years.



Thanks to Rebecca Loader for the *Woman's Day* magazine pages. All AKC statistics are from AKC librarian Barbara Kolk. The Smith biographical information is from The Dodie Smith Information website, <http://home.comcast.net/~sulkowj/dodiesmith/>



Video cover jackets from 101 Dalmatians – the cartoon and live versions.