

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

By Sharon Boyd

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Much has been written about the irresponsibility of the DCA board and how it has handled the Backcross issues badly. I would like to traverse the past few years and tell you the truth about what has happened. In the end, YOU be the judge.

When the Backcross project was resurrected a few years ago, the DCA board was very interested in it and supported it totally. However, it was recognized that the board of the 80's had made grave mistakes in not including the DCA membership in the decision making process and THIS board vowed not to make the same mistakes. It was the wish of the board that the project would not begin its new life with excess baggage from the past but be judged on its own merits with the entire membership having a stake in the outcome. With this in mind, the board voted to avoid the R word for the present.

Meanwhile, BC proponents began providing information and data to convince us all that breeding a Dalmatian to a Pointer was the absolute answer to stone disease. They have told us, and we have accepted, that all AKC Dalmatians are high uric acid. (Note: None of my own dogs have ever been tested and no one I know has provided their dogs for such tests but we still believe it. That's what I call trust!)

Two dogs from the project were brought to a DCA board meeting. Both bitches appeared to be on the shy side. However, it was acknowledged that they were both pets and had therefore not been exposed to the kind of social interaction our show dogs experience. One of the dogs had acceptable markings and appeared to have reasonably suitable structure. The other one had a gray-ish background color and frosty, splotchy spots. Her conformation did not approach show quality.

At one point it came to light that one of the AKC dogs who had been used to sire puppies from Backcross bitches had bitten a child in the face in the parking lot at a DCA specialty, leading to concern as to the criteria for selection of breeding candidates. A letter was sent to Denise Powell, the recognized leader of the breeding project of the BC dogs, asking for clarification and explanation. She responded with a xerox copy of a magazine article on temperament testing.

A DCA board member who was a BC supporter, with the help of a DCA committee named to study Low Uric Acid, developed an extensive website devoted to the subject. Pages of editorial content from both sides of the issue were printed in The Spotter. Pages upon pages of pictures of the BC dogs were advertised as well. The Dalmatian Club of America Foundation subsidized the travel expenses of 10 BC dogs to come to the national specialty to present a showcase of the dogs to the membership. A booth was open throughout the week and manned by project leaders where extensive printed material was available as well as live dogs to touch and feel.

A panel discussion led by three outspoken proponents was presented as a national specialty educational seminar. This program was well attended and well received. A lecture by the former chair of the Study Group on Stone Disease was presented the following year with excellent attendance and interest.

The DCA Board has agreed to every single request of the BC project proponents to promote and expose the project without exception. Nothing has been denied them. Suddenly, at the second quarter meeting of the board of 2008, Ken Berg, a DCA board member at the time, filibustered to

poll the membership on the subject of registration. Many board members were against the move feeling that prematurely going in this direction would mean a certain death knoll for the project. Yet, Mr. Berg insisted and a 7-1 vote of the board indicated Mr. Berg would get his way. Mr. Berg insisted that the board take a stand in favor of registration. However, the board wanted to stay on neutral ground, not wishing to influence the membership one way or another preferring instead for the membership to utilize the extensive educational materials made available and made an agreement to remain publicly neutral. All but three board members honored this agreement. All three who did not honor the agreement were vocal BC supporters.

The ballot went out and, as feared, the answer was a resounding NO to registration.

Much information had been gathered, professionally organized and presented to the membership and it was felt that they could easily access this data and make their own informed decision. But the membership had lingering questions that just could not be answered. For instance, if all AKC Dalmatians are high uric acid, why do only a small percentage of the MALES form stones and block? What other feature is inherent in the breed to cause this disparity? And, in eliminating the defective HUA gene, what other unwanted characteristics are we trading for? We have seen that a large percentage of the BC dogs possess less than acceptable markings. From this we must deduce that the defective gene is linked to that which influences spotting. What other important breed features will be affected by the removal of this gene? No data has been provided which would indicate any research has been done to discover the answers to these questions. It would seem that the BC supporters are not interested in these facts. The people who oppose registration feel these important facts MUST be known before registration can be contemplated and these dogs are forever ensconced in our gene pool to pass along whatever they bring, good or bad.

The BC supporters presented a paper to the DCA board entitled "Final Report on LUA" in which they stated that "all questions had been answered". In this paper, which can be provided to any interested party, they stated that the project had no scientific element but was merely a breeding program managed by a few interested breeders. It says, "There is no formalized project, study or research that pertains to LUA Dalmatians"; "There is no formalized scientific protocol for the breeding of LUA Dalmatians"; "There is no... data base or clinical trail to keep follow up generational data"; "There is no formal LUA project".

No birth to death records were available since the resurrected project included dogs no older than 4 ½ years at the time. No LUA to LUA breedings had been done and none were contemplated. This they felt was the final report on the Low Uric Acid project. However, because of the gaping holes in information, they were not able to convince the membership that registration was the right way to go at this time. The frustration level rose and mean-spiritedness raised its ugly head. Many unethical measures were employed and untruths were fostered and allowed to perpetuate. A media campaign employing the editorial talents of a popular dog magazine editor castigated the board for their unwillingness to accept the BC dogs as pure Dalmatians when this had never EVER been an issue with the membership or the board.

Members of the DCA board had thus far elected to take the high road and not engage in public displays of defensive measures wishing instead for the RECORD to speak for itself. However, the attempts to discredit a board and a membership made up of people who represent hundreds of cumulative years of experience in the breed and which is totally dedicated and extremely knowledgeable must be seen for what they are. The board has done everything it could to further this project. The project stopped short and the membership thinks it should go forward and prove more before registration is considered.

Why is the membership vilified for wanting to proceed with CAUTION and make sure what we're doing before we add these dogs into our gene pool???? What if we are trading HUA for PRA or HOD or vWD? What if removing the gene for HUA eliminates urate stone forming but proves that

a stone former will form other types of stones such as calcium oxalate stones which cannot be dissolved? Does it matter what KIND of stone blocks the urinary process causing life threatening consequences? What is wrong with being SURE before we plunge headlong into this?

Apparently there are no LUA to LUA breedings from which we could gather data. This leads to speculation that the gene for LUA could be lethal. There are lethal genes in parakeets, horses, some breeds of dogs and many other species. In the 35 yrs this project has spanned WHY are there no UU puppies????? Does the complete elimination of the HUA gene without an HUA recessive produce solid BLACK dogs; solid WHITE ones? Indeed another question which needs answering.

Only a small percentage of MALES in our breed suffer stone disease even though we have been told (and accept) that ALL AKC Dalmatians are HUA. What is the factor which causes some to be affected and most not to be affected? Is there another gene we need to study? Is it just a matter of good animal husbandry? Members want to KNOW... not speculate. Further research is needed but none is planned nor contemplated. We are told that "all the questions have been answered". Is there an alternative to introducing another BREED into our midst to alleviate this disease? What other diseases will we face with the introduction of the Pointer? The Pointer standard allows 4 features which are DQ's in the Dal standard.

Drs. Bartges and Osborne, experts on this subject, have categorically stated that uric acid is not the only causative factor in stone disease. No evidence exists which proves that the removal of the gene which causes HUA will provide the utopia of no more stone disease. It is assumed (and accepted) that removing this ONE feature will be enough to eliminate urate stones disease. Fine, but what ELSE comes with it? Does it eliminate ALL stone disease? Why is that an unreasonable approach and why are we wrong to demand the answers?

Yes, the papers of Drs. Schaible's and Nelson have been provided but do not go so far as to approach answers to these questions. Dr. Schaible has stated that his data did not include what is needed to help answer the questions the membership needs answered now.

The faction of the club which wants to register the dogs has not brought to the membership good information, based on SCIENTIFIC results with which they can make a very important decision which could have far reaching and permanent affects on our breed. The faction which is resisting registration sees vast merit in the endeavor but wishes to proceed with caution so that nothing detrimental comes WITH the gene which will eliminate HUA. Which of these factions do you REALLY think has more of the welfare of the breed in mind?