

SHARON HUNKINS, SHE BICHONS AND COTONS

BFR: How did you become interested in Bichons, and how long have you been in the breed?

SH: In 2003 I suffered the tragic loss of my 23 year old son and my husband 10 days apart in separate incidences. Then two months later, the loss of my husband's 35 year old son who lived on the East coast. I was devastated. One of the lowest points of my life.

One morning while I sat in my P.J.s in the corner of the living room, contemplating what was I going to do with the remainder of my life and what could make me happy again, I thought of my Poodles from the 1960s. That was what I wanted in my life again. Now to find the right breed of small companion dog.

A few months later I was invited to visit acquaintances who were temporarily living in Italy. I needed to get away and recover. So I did. At the last minute I was told they had had a litter of puppies on the Friday before I was to arrive on Tuesday. Not really a problem for me as I grew up raising dogs, horses and beef cattle in the midwest on family farms. This was a first and "surprise" litter for the owners who had no documents for either of the parents.

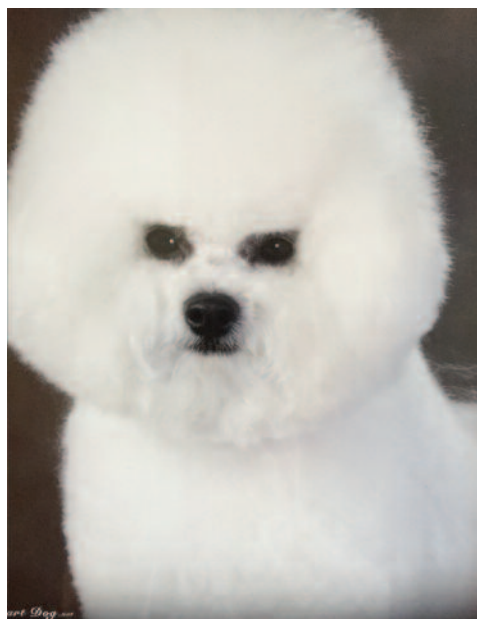
On my arrival I see a matted white dam with long nails, six puppies and no crate or puppy/litter supplies. While her owner was pet sitting the neighbor's dog, she says, her next door neighbor's intact male raped her intact female, thus the litter. This was a first and "surprise" litter for the owners—okay.

Since I had a little grooming business since I was 10 years old, "Sharon's Poodle Parlor", (That was about 1960) I did have some basic grooming knowledge somewhere in the back of my head! I was also familiar with whelping, crate training and basic care of litters.



Ch Mi-Toi's Our Lips Are Sealed aka "Lips"

So what was a planned two week vacation became a six week vacation filled with helping with this litter that I learned was called Bichon Frise. I was able to dematt and trim the mother's nails, which was not an easy feat. I had been offered a puppy for myself but declined because I was unfamiliar with the breed standard. If I were to obtain



Ch SHE Bichons Humphrey Bogart

one of these lovely little white dogs with a happy-go-lucky temperament, I wanted one to show and breed.

So I headed back to California to locate a show quality female for myself.

BFR: Have you ever shown any other breeds? Or currently do so?

SH: My mother gave me a two-year-old apricot Poodle from the Sassafra line when I was 10 years old and sent me for private grooming lessons. We also had a British import, a male Toy Poodle, who was the beginning of my mother's breeding program. Things were a lot different then regarding OFA checks etc. Anyway, Mom bred a few Poodles and a very few Pekingese. We also had farm dogs including Border Collies which my cousins raised, and Beagles my uncle raised, a Boxer and a Pomeranian. Back in the early 1960s where I came from, a registered dog was unusual. Our dogs were AKC registered. We did not show. Later, after I left home at the ripe age of "just turned 18", I had a few St. Bernards, a few Collies and Golden Retrievers.

I began with Bichons in 2004 followed by the addition of Coton de Tulears in early 2014, before the breed was recognized by AKC.

BFR: How did you come up with your kennel name?

SH: My kennel name is SHE which happens to be my monogram. I needed a name to designate the origin of my dogs.

BFR: Who were your early mentors? What advice did they give you?

SH: I was so "green" that I groomed and showed my first two Bichons myself, never having been to a single training class or even a dog show as a spectator.

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SHE Bichons, cont'd

That was a story in itself!

To groom the first two show dogs I entered, I set a Bichon Frise Reporter magazine up beside my grooming table and copied the trim from a photo in the magazine. I went to the show (2004), two dogs under my arms, with zero equipment and just walked into the ring after I figured out how to get an armband – a comedy of errors which is another story in itself. That must have been a sight! Seriously, those were the days. So much fun.

Quite frankly I had no mentors. Everything I know I learned from my own experiences and failures. I watched and learned from a number of professional handlers while I sat in the grooming area, from early morning until BIS.

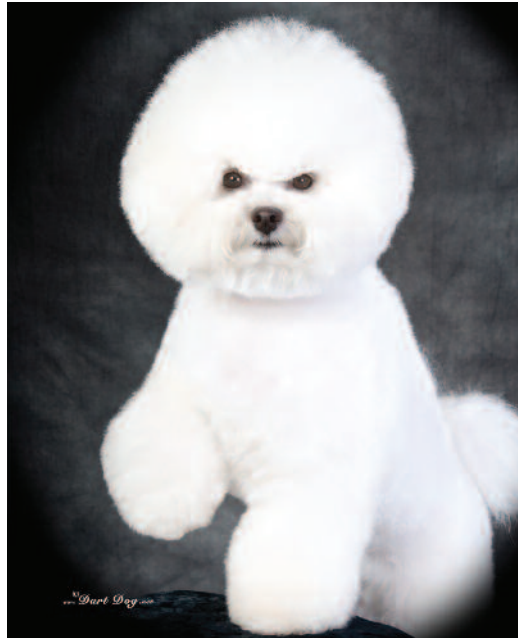
Because I wanted to learn the choreography of the dog show business, I took 30 days off from my day job to travel as an assistant with my handler. I loaded and unloaded the truck, bathed and dried dogs and so on.

BFR: Where did you get your foundation dogs?

SH: purchased a show potential female puppy from a breeder I found who was listed in the breeder listings of the National Club. I contacted every breeder on the list of the National Club and she was the only person who said she had a show quality female puppy. I told her I wanted the female pick of the litter. I drove to pick up the pup then a few months later purchased another female puppy from the same breeder.

BFR: Why did you choose those particular dogs?

SH: As a beginner in the breed, and after my first experience with purchasing and showing a bitch puppy to championship only to have her test positive for juvenile cataracts at age 3, I had sort of learned the “who’s who” in Bichons. Some of the people who I considered might be the best in this arena did not answer my emails or phone calls.



Ch SHE Bichons Thoroughly Modern Millie

I was starting all over again after my bad start and looking for someone who seemed to be successful.

BFR: What were your earliest key breedings?

SH: One of the first breedings was a bitch show puppy purchased from a very notable California breeder who required a contract which included the price of the puppy as well as a contract that the breeder would handle the puppy to AKC championship. This required a 10-month stay at their kennel, boarding, grooming and handling fees as well as entry fees. After she obtained her championship, I was required to complete OFA testing. That breeder chose the stud. I provided the round trip transportation and they required the first two picks from the litter I whelped.

BFR: Who were the first progeny that you felt were the type you wanted your kennel to stand for?

SH: Ch. SHE Bichons Humphrey Bogart, who was whelped from the litter mentioned above, was the best. He produced beautiful puppies. I have not produced large numbers of champions.

When I first became involved in



hobby breeding and showing my observation was, and first question was, “Why do we not see Bichons of the breed standard in the public?” It was my goal to make the public aware of what a Bichon conforming to the breed standard looks like.

It has been interesting to me that people will say that their dog is a Bichon when it is nowhere near the standard for the breed. And in fact probably is not even a purebred Bichon.

Additionally, I believe that health and excellent homes are more important than titles. No matter what their physical attributes, their hearts are the same. This is the heart of the breed.

BFR: Who was your first Champion?

SH: My first Champion was the first puppy I purchased. When she turned two, I completed her OFA certifications and bred her to a well-known champion stud dog. The first litter produced a very nice litter except for one female puppy born with only 3 legs! Both stud dog owners and the bitch breeder claimed no history of this in their breeding. Prior to her second breeding I retested her eyes...bilateral juvenile cataracts!

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SHE Bichons, cont'd

I had a huge financial investment in her as I had quickly learned I was not capable of grooming and showing her myself without a professional handler, and the stud fee was enormous. She was my first heart dog. The breeder said she had never had any juvenile cataracts and did not offer me any remedy.

I spayed her, also her offspring despite some advise I received from an old time breeder who said I should continue to breed her and just follow up the off spring. Back to square one. First lesson learned.

And the second lesson was, the more you breed the more aberrations will appear. Do not be surprised of anything. This is not an exact science. Dispite your testing and or precautions, anything can happen – and it certainly does. Some of it is genetic and some of it is just chance.

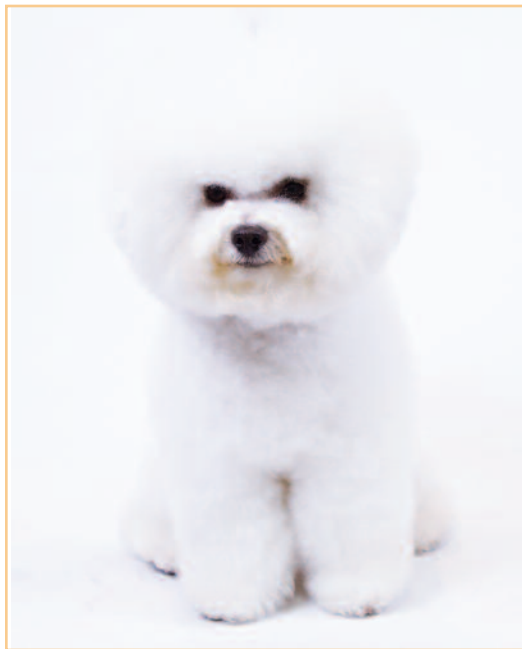
BFR: How many other champions have you owned/bred?

SH: I have owned 16 Champion Bichons, I bred 12 of them. The current count of Coton Champions is 7.

BFR: Do you sell to others or just breed for your own needs?

SH: I have provided foundation bitches to a couple of known kennels in California who have done exceptionally well and are still producing and showing.

BFR: At what age do you consider a



GCH SHE Bichons Gary Cooper. He was #1 OH Bichon in 2013. The photo was taken by the AKC and was on the AKC website to represent the breed This is the photo that appeared when you selected "Bichon Frise".

puppy show quality, and sell them as such?

SH: Puppies should not be sold as show quality. They are only show potential until proven in the ring.

The experts say that puppies are best evaluated at exactly eight weeks of age when they are most proportionate. I have taken the seminar and have the literature. I agree with most of that theory.

BFR: What are your thoughts on training puppies to get them ready for the ring?

SH: Puppies will be puppies, so let them. If properly handled, their behaviors also mature. The problem is not the puppies, it is how we respond to that. My thought is that too much training is something like involving a young child in so many

organized activities that they have no time to play or have down time. There needs to be a balance.

BFR: Can a Bichon be both a house dog and show dog?

SH: There is a difference in a house dog vs. what I call a pet dog. Pet dogs are house dogs. Yes, show dogs can be house dogs. Pet dogs have no rules or discipline essential for show dogs because their owners do not know what is expected of a show dog. In general they love their puppy so much that there are no boundaries or expectations. Something like raising a spoiled child! Many are not crate trained, which is essential. Pet dog behaviors are very difficult to overcome when you want to put them in the ring. It's complicated!

BFR: Do you have a preference between dogs and bitches?

SH: Traditionally the handlers prefer dogs rather than bitches. Why? Dogs don't go into season and blow their coat. They don't have to regrow coat after whelping a litter of pups. You don't have to manage a heat season with a male dog. Therefore, male dogs have less downtime for show purposes.

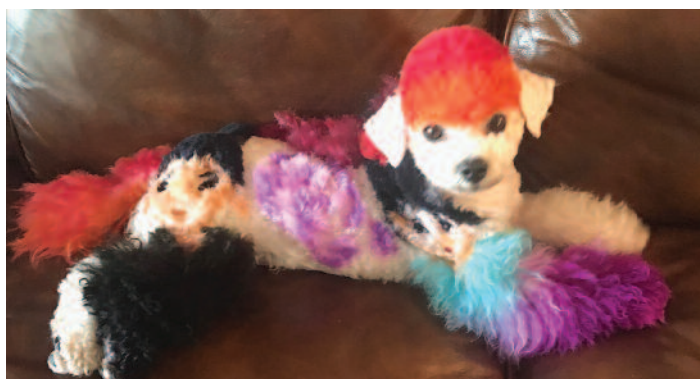
I like both. In fact my eye is usually drawn to the dogs. You can often know the gender of a dog just by looking at the head. They are often more showy. I love both.

BFR: How many times would you breed a bitch in her lifetime?

SH: That is a situational question. It depends on the health and condition and age of the bitch and her past whelping history. In no circumstance should a bitch ever be compromised to obtain a litter.

BFR: Do you have dogs at public stud and if so what are your requirements for the bitches?

SH: Yes, occasionally. I require a CHIC number and I want to go over the bitch



SHE Bichons Zsa Zsa Gabor. She won at the International SuperZoo competition at Mandalay Bay 2018.

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SHE Bichons, cont'd



I got to hold J.R. In New York at a therapy dog benefit hosted by David Frye.

to see if her body type and history is a match for the stud.

BFR: What do you feed and do you supplement at any time?

SH: I do not routinely use supplements. I only feed preservative- and color-additive-free feeds. I prefer a grain free dry feed. I have had good results with My Perfect Pet and Royal Canin Bichon formula dry feed.

BFR: Of all the dogs you have owned, which are your personal favorites and why?

SH: That is like asking a mother which of her children is her favorite – they are all different. I believe people connect with some of the kids better than others. They all have their strengths and weaknesses. Accept them as they are. Accentuate the strengths and support them.

BFR: Do you use handler or show the dogs yourself?

SH: I normally handle my dogs myself and have been in the top 10 Owner Handler rankings many times, in both Coton de Tulear and Bichon Frise. My bred-by dog, Gary Cooper, was #1 Owner Handled Bichon 2013.

BFR: What do you think is the biggest mistake owner-handlers make?

SH: When you are an owner-handler you

are vulnerable to every possible pitfall. I have had much satisfaction in mentoring new owner-handlers who are showing my dogs. Most notably and currently, Jenny Listug, who owns Ch. SHE Bichons Oliver Norse. Also am currently mentoring new owner handlers in both Bichons and Cotons.

I do tell new owner-handlers that being an owner-handler is like representing yourself in court. Who do you think is going to win? The attorney or you? Also similar to women in the workplace – to be considered for the promotion you have to work twice as hard and be twice as good to get it. It's easy to get stuck into old habits. I find that ringside video of an owner handler is invaluable. A picture is worth a thousand words. The owner-handlers can self-critique and compare to the professionals.

BFR: What is your favorite dog show class to enter and why?

SH: No favorite. I enter what I have to show and that is predicated by the classes which are offered. I do like bred-by. I have enjoyed showing puppies.

BFR: If you use a handler, what do you look for in choosing one?

SH: I have used a number of professional handlers over the last 15 years. Most of them I would still recommend. I have learned a few things. A handler who is proficient in Bichon grooming is invaluable. Most handlers specialize in a particular Group – Sporting, Nonsporting etc. They will be looking to enter the show where there are most points available to whatever they are showing. If they are showing mostly St Bernards, they may not be entering shows where there are points available for Bichons. Look for someone who has enough help and a safe vehicle/equipment. There is a difference in licensed AKC handlers. Look at what the AKC requires to be licensed if

he/she is listed on the AKC website.

BFR: What was your most memorable win?

SH: When my bred-by bitch Ch. SHE Bichons Betsy Ross took Select Bitch at Westminster 2016.

The second most memorable win was the very first time I attended a National Specialty and with my first entry at a National Specialty. My bred-by bitch, SHE Bichons Thoroughly Modern Millie, was First place in the 12-18 month bitch class, 2010.

BFR: We all have done silly things and have embarrassing moments, please tell us one of yours.

SH: Oh boy. Which one! One time I took the wrong entry in the ring. It was a 4-6 month puppy class. I was getting some friends to have fun and take puppies in the ring. Another time my skirt fell off ringside while I was waiting to go in the ring! I will spare you the details. At least it did not happen in the ring!

BFR: Do you prefer breeder judges or all-rounders?



Ch Aphrodite's Reflection RobinHood. We went to a car wash and this guy wanted to hold him and I took the photo. He had just finished his championship

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SHE Bichons, cont'd

SH: Both have strong points. In the beginning I thought that only the breeder judges had the edge. But breeder judges may know more about the people breeding and showing the dogs than the all-rounders. That is a potential bias whether recognized or not. They may know the breed so well that they could key in on very specific aspects. It is important to judge the dog as a whole and not exclude for one particular aspect.

All-rounders are probably better at judging the dogs entirety as compared to the breeder judges. I like the way they judge the Bichon in comparison to all the other breeds. They are drawn to movement, muscle consistency and general condition.

However, in Bichons, the first thing you look at is the face and the last thing you look at is the face. With everything else equal, the face should be the deciding factor.

There are a number of breeder-judges who have much experience judging a number of other breeds which adds to their acumen. I vote for a breeder-judge who has a broad awareness of a number of breeds.

BFR: What do you think are the most common faults in Bichons today?

SH: Unsound gait is a standout for me. If a dog does not move well, it is not put together well. No excuses.

I believe we see far fewer long-backed Bichons than in recent years, which is a tribute to our breeders. In contrast I believe there is concern for the other extreme. The frame is an off square, not square.

BFR: How would you rate type, temperament, and soundness in order of importance?

SH: Soundness is at the top of list.

Temperament is of great importance as it happens to be a hallmark of this breed as well as the face.

The first thing you see in a Bichon is the face and the last thing you see is the face.



*Dolly Madison SuperZoo model.
"Is it over yet?"*

I believe there are no perfect dogs. That is why they should be judged as a whole, a complete package.

BFR: Which three words best describe the breed?

SH: Flying white monkeys?? Just kidding.

BFR: Do you have any family members that show or are interested in getting involved in the sport?

SH: My brother was a hound judge for 25 years. He remains an active breeder and hunter with his own rare breed hounds.

BFR: Are there any other people who have dogs of your breeding who have done well with them, either in the ring or as producers, that you would like to acknowledge?

SH: Hollyhock Bichons purchased their foundation bitch,

"Holly" from me. They were the featured breeder in the last Bichon Frise Reporter. They learned how to make entries, groom, and handle from me. They had never owner handled before.

Jenny Listug, who shows SHE Bichons Oliver had never had a show dog before. After her two very elderly pet Bichons passed away she purchased a six-month-old intact male from me with no intent to show. This suddenly changed after she learned to groom and handle from me. She is the single most successful beginner owner-handler in Bichons that I am aware of.

BFR: Do you have a resident house mouse?

SH: No

BFR: Do you have any other pets besides dog?

SH: No.

BFR: What other hobbies do you have that are not dog related?

SH: Dogs have always been my hobby. Working with them is my passion. They are my heart and soul.Δ5

BFR: What are your plans for the future?

SH: It depends!



Coton pups