

## WHO

Cristy Bird here, and I am asking for your vote for Thai Breed Committee in TICA.

- Grew up with Siamese cats from Glory-S Cattery in the 1960s. Then, even the top show cats were moderate in type compared to now.
- A breeder of Thais (Old-Style Siamese) since 1994. Member of TICA since 1995. I had already been a member of TICA for ten years when we applied for PNB status for the Thai breed.
- Doctoral degree in Public Health (Dr.P.H.) from UCLA. Before that, a bachelor of science degree in Mammalian Physiology (B.S.) from UC Davis and a master of science degree in Nutrition (M.S.) from CSULA. Did post-doc in USC's Genetic Epidemiology Dept. Published research scientist in the field of cancer epidemiology.
- Although I took up breeding to save the Old-Style Siamese (Thai), along the way I have also bred Chausies, show-style Siamese, Khaomanees, and Ocicats. I have shown cats from most of those breeds, as well as American Bobtails. I've seen that breeds vary a lot. The Thai breed is rare in having it all -- good health, intelligence, and an adaptable personality.
- Collected 35 to 40 DNA samples in Thailand that were later analyzed by Dr. Leslie Lyons and her team, and showed that the native cats in Thailand have probably bred in isolation from the rest of the world's cats for centuries. The Siamese breed in the West is closely genetically related to the native cats of Thailand.
- Was science editor and author of one chapter of Martin Clutterbuck's 2004 book, *Siamese Cats, Legend and Reality*.
- Have imported about 20 cats from Thailand, mostly Wichienmaat (Thais), but also a few Khaomanees and Suphalaks. Have also worked with American and European Thai lineages.

## WHAT and WHERE and WHEN

Witness to the history of the TICA Thai:

- Member of Trad. Cat Assoc (TCA) in the 1990s, the first American breed club of any real longevity devoted to the old, moderate type of Siamese. Unfortunately, it and its offshoot clubs remained unable and usually unwilling to work with the established cat fancy.
- Long-time president of PREOSSIA, founded 1999, the first breed club to define the name "Old-Style Siamese" and work with fanciers of the breed in both North America and Europe on goals along with the greater cat fancy.
- Working chair of the Thai breed for four years – and therefore the person who had to submit all the applications for advancement, meet all the deadlines, and negotiate all the registration rules for the Thai, so that our breed could qualify for championship.
- Twice elected chair of the Thai Breed Committee (after the Thai achieved championship) by the members of the Thai breed section.

When we were all working to get the Old-Style Siamese/Thai recognized with an international standard back in the 1980s and 1990s, the odds seemed stacked against us. Everyone had a different notion of what the “original” Siamese looked like, including those who claimed (against all evidence) that the Siamese had always been as extreme in conformation as it is now. The Siamese breeders lobbied to keep us out of the world’s major cat associations. Breed clubs we founded in North America and in Europe fell apart because of disparate human personalities, even pathological ones. Those few breed clubs that survived sometimes competed with each other for members, for coverage by cat magazines, and to make their ideas the dominant ones.

When the Thai was recognized by the WCF in Europe in 1990, the future looked better for our breed. But the breed in North America still did not have recognition. The cat continued to be registered as Siamese, but could not be shown because they were not extreme. And, soon we heard that the WCF standard was too vague, and the same Thais could be ranked very differently at shows, depending on the judges and the country. As a “new” breed in WCF, cats were sometimes used in Thai breeding programs that were not authentic Old-Style Siamese, nor imports from Thailand.

Because of this, breeders from Europe and from North America decided to work together to get the Thai recognized in TICA. They saw TICA as a truly international association in which they could all register and show together. They could write a detailed Thai breed standard and define the Thai as what it is, the native pointed cat of Thailand, the Wichienmaat or Old-Style Siamese. Because the Thai is a natural breed, TICA gave us the right to import cats directly from Thailand to keep our breed authentic and genetically healthy.

After seeing the Thai all the way through the new breed process and from probationary championship to permanent championship, I decided not to run for breed committee again in 2014. It seemed like time to let other breeders have a chance to try their ideas out and serve the breed on the committee.

## **WHY**

So, why am I now, in 2017, running for Thai Breed Committee again?

The Thai Breed Committee is supposed to be our voice in TICA. The members of the Committee are supposed to represent all who are members of the Thai Breed Section – all of us. Differences in opinion should be handled through discussion, fairly and democratically.

Also, the Thai Breed Committee is supposed to act as the spokespersons for our breed in TICA. The chair should be attending board meetings or reading all meeting agendas and meeting minutes. The entire Committee should be watching out for proposed rules, new breeds, and other things in TICA that could potentially harm our breed. They should be organizing breed seminars regularly to keep TICA judges educated about our breed. They should be reminding the Thai breed section members when it is time to renew memberships. They should be keeping section members informed about opportunities to promote our breed in TICA, as well as opportunities to learn more about breeding and genetics.

Unfortunately, none of the above has been happening. Have you heard from your breed committee members lately? Do you feel comfortable writing to them with questions and concerns? No?

That's a problem. We are at a stage now when the Thai breed is growing everywhere in TICA's world. Inevitably, Thai fanciers often have different ideas and different breeding goals. We may disagree with each other at times. That's okay. But we need a breed committee that serves all of us, and helps us engage each other and talk to each other in a constructive manner.

This is essential for the welfare of the Thai breed.

We need a breed committee, especially the chair, who answers your questions and isn't afraid to talk to the TICA Board of Directors, TICA committee members, officers, or judges about anything that may affect the welfare of the Thai breed. We need a breed committee that goes to TICA shows regularly and notices when there are problems with judges' interpretations of the standard that can be fixed through education or through adjustments in the wording of the standard.

Only a few weeks ago I was at a show, and saw a Thai disqualified which should not have been disqualified. It was not my cat. It was another breeder's cat. But that makes no difference. This was a case where education of judges or a slight change in wording of the standard would have prevented the disqualification. Right now, we don't have a breed committee that is doing that job.

To take another example, recently a new breed called the Toybob applied to TICA for advancement. This was a breed that used to be called the "Thai Bobtail" or "Thai Bob." The earlier applications to TICA described the Toybob as a "miniature" or "toy" version of the Thai, with a bobbed tail. Obviously, this is a concern to Thai breeders. But, when I attended the board meeting where the application was to be discussed, I discovered that none of our current Thai Breed Committee members was present. Not only that, they had not written any letters expressing concerns or asking questions – not to their Regional Directors, nor for submission to the agenda of the meeting.

Because the current Thai Breed Committee did not attend the meeting or write a letter, I was the only person there on behalf of the Thai. By myself, without the support of the breed committee, there was not much I could do. The board voted to advance the Toybob breed, and none of the concerns of the Thai breed have been addressed.

I am not saying that we should oppose new breeds every time they seem to resemble our breed or cause us other problems. I am saying that it is the responsibility of the Thai Breed Committee to defend our breed as needed, and offer constructive input to breeders of new breeds when they seem to pose problems for our breed.

Our current Thai Breed Committee is not doing its job. That may not be because of all three committee members, but it takes two out of three to vote to do the things that are important for our breed, important for us all. At least two out of three are not doing their job currently.

That is why I am running for Breed Committee again. I promise you, if I am elected to the Thai Breed Committee, I will be your representative at TICA board meetings. I will air your concerns, and I will keep

you informed about our breed. I will organize breed seminars to educate the judges – including all the new judges in the judging program. If the breed standard needs to be adjusted to fix ongoing problems, then we will do that. And, of course, the entire breed section will get to vote on that, as is required by TICA rules.

The Thai Breed Committee should be your advocate and the advocate of our breed in TICA – specifically in TICA. Please vote next month when you get your breed ballot. I hope you will vote for me. But, whoever you vote for, make sure it is someone who will be a strong and vocal advocate for the Thai breed, a good representative for all of us.