

Virginia Harris

The story of my deep connection to the Thai/Old Style Siamese is a familiar one. I grew up in a household that bred Siamese from the late 1950's into the 1970's. Seal point Siamese kittens were my earliest playmates and these intelligent and loving companions enriched my childhood.

In the 1990s, I was a member of the original TCA (Traditional Cat Association), the first grass roots club to promote the old type of Siamese in the United States. I witnessed what went right there, as well as the many things that went wrong. When growth in sheer numbers of breeders was valued over mentoring and many lost sight of group cooperation, the TCA's efforts were no longer focused on the survival of the breed.

Later, however, I witnessed the successful efforts of dedicated breeders fighting for recognition of the Old Style Siamese. Although I was a pet owner at the time, I saw what can happen when breeders and fanciers do work together, namely the earning of championship status for the Thai in TICA. Since then, I have progressed from pet ownership, to showing Thai alters in TICA, to breeding. I have been a member of the TICA Thai Breed Section for almost three years now, have shown to Supreme Grand Champion Alter, and have shown twice to Regional Wins, and twice to international Best Thai Alter of the Year awards. This experience has taught me a great many things, including how much there is still to learn, and how very important it is to give back to this natural breed.

I am passionate about wanting to preserve the Thai Siamese. I believe the only way we can be successful is if we work together. We cannot allow personal agendas to take precedence over group cooperation, and we must always be mindful of what occurred to the Siamese breed in the 20th century; the history that led us to where we are now. I often hear TICA judges refer to my cats as being "moderate" in all ways and they sometimes mention that being moderate is a challenge when judges so often reward the "wow" factor. Catering to the "wow" is exactly why it became necessary to create the Thai breed as separate from the Siamese. We value the Thai for its health, personality, and trueness to the native appearance over everything else. It will continue to be important that the breed committee remains strong and does not become tempted to permit anything that is not consistent with the conformation of this natural breed.

I am grateful to all who successfully fought the early battles that finally resulted in recognition. Our job now is to continue the education of judges through showing, to practice ethical breeding and to mentor new breeders. I am very worried at the current lack of unity in our breed community. We must all recognize this is a team effort and there is no room for exclusively promoting individual lineages or catteries. Open communication, reaching out to one another, mentoring the more recent breeders, and learning from the experienced ones, are the means to ensuring this natural breed of Thailand is not lost to future generations.