

INTERVIEWS

With Past ALSA Board Members and ALSA Judges

by Dolores Gardner

The 2005 ALSA show season officially ended with the Grand National in November. Along with it came the end of another year of frustration for many exhibitors and judges alike. Several have written articles for this issue. These include Deb Garvin (ALSA judge and former board member), Brian Bennick (ALSA member, exhibitor and show superintendent) and Ken Dunn (ALSA member and exhibitor).

I interviewed two departing judges, Kathy (past ALSA board member) and Dale Peterson (past chairman of ALSA policies and procedures committee). Based upon my discussions with others who declined to be interviewed, fearing retribution from ALSA, Kathy and Dale's comments are on point. Joe Payne, former ALSA board member, was gracious enough to share a letter he sent to the rest of the board just prior to resigning. His letter, though written a while back, sounds as if it was written yesterday. Joe's letter is printed in its entirety below:

Memo from Joe Payne to ALSA Board of Directors:

"What is ALSA without Judges? It is absolutely nothing or less than nothing. I have talked to some of the judges that I know personally and I have listed below three that have applied for re-certification and requested to be elevated to level III judges, some of these requests were done almost a year ago. The judges committee has not responded, or if it has, it has been to say I haven't sent it to the committee. They also have been told by the chairperson that "I have a life". How many times has the Board heard that from some board members lately. Below are the issues with just 3 of the ALSA judges and I personally believe that this is just the **tip of the iceberg**.

Ron Baird sent in re-certification in March of this year; Lougene Baird sent hers in approximately 4 months ago. Harold Herbold sent in a request to move to a level 3 judge in October, 2003 and a second request in February, 2004. Having not been answered by ALSA and because Level II judges cannot judge larger shows, Harold Herbold currently does most of his judging for AOBA. This is not acceptable, in fact this is a runaway train headed to a major disaster and the entire **Board** is responsible, not just Sandy.

We have all been told about other various issues with apprentices, the new judges rules that apprentices have to do their final apprentice show under one of the three judges on the judges committee and etc. and that they can't apprentice at a double or triple show. This rule is keeping many of our membership from becoming judges and all of the apprentices pay their own expenses, which can be substantial, to become a judge and get paid \$300 a day which sometimes means a 10 to 12 hour day plus travel time. If you look in the classifieds or the union pay scales, this pay for judges is very low for the hours that they put in traveling and judging and this organization is putting road blocks at every turn to keep them from becoming judges and maintaining their license to judge.

This is not just a judges committee issue, this is the entire Board's responsibility and if something is not done soon there will only be the select few that have judges licenses to judge over 200 plus shows each year.

These shows are put on by States, County Fairs and other large organizations that communicate with each other and Judges sign contracts up to a year ahead of time. That means that they have contracts signed and do not have answers about their certification, because the Judges Committee has not answered their request for up to a year. Then come January and they cannot judge and have to tell these large organizations that they must try and find a Certified ALSA judge, because ALSA has refused to renew their license. This will lead to more and more State Fairs, Local fairs and etc. declining to have **ALSA sanctioned shows** and the existence of ALSA is gone. As a CPA I have to have 40+ hours of continuing education each year, I send that information in with my Fees and within 30 days I receive my quote "license" to practice as a CPA for the next year.

With ALSA no one but the select few know if they are allowed to Judge **ALSA SANCTIONED** shows. Remember when you read this that the 200+ ALSA sanctioned shows are judged each year have to have ALSA certified Judges. As Directors of ALSA we are ALL responsible to provide an adequate pool of ALSA certified Judges to judge those shows and this pool is dwindling rapidly under this current system.

The entire Board is responsible for everything done by the Directors. Just because one Board member is the Liaison does not absolve you from the responsibility to make sure that we are following the Bylaws, Standing Rules, Handbook and the protection of the Assets of ALSA."

From my perspective, nothing has changed since Joe wrote his letter.

Interview with Kathy Peterson

What comments do you have about the 2005 show season?

This year has been a tough one in terms of showing. Natural disasters and high gas prices have dampened the spirits of many. In some parts of the country, there has been a real problem with parasite control in llamas, further curbing the number of exhibitors at shows. I attended a few shows this year as an observer and tried to find logic behind the judges' placements. In many cases, I could find none. This is a disheartening circumstance which many have observed. It does no good to speak up, for often the exhibitor will be "punished" by not placing well in future shows.

I believe several factors contribute to the problem. First, there is inadequate initial training for potential judges. Second, follow-up evaluation (as each judge evaluates and places animals at a real show) is non-existent. Third, as many have observed, *judges who are capable of correctly placing classes seem to get "off track" as time goes on.* Many exhibitors choose shows to attend based upon who's judging. Some exhibitors say they know that they must "take turns winning," and they say that's all right, as long as they get their "turn." Judges who also show their own animals are the worst offenders. Others say they don't get a fair shake in front of some judges, because these judges don't like them, or because the judge is "punishing" them for various reasons. What does liking or disliking someone have to do with fairly placing their animals?

I've often wondered if it might help with the favoritism and good old boy problems with ALSA if judges were not allowed to judge shows within their regions, but realized that is not workable. What we **REALLY** need is for ALL judges to be ethical, and that would eliminate the problems. ALSA should establish some type of judge review system where judges are observed and evaluated "on the job" by an independent party. Also, some type of judge peer review system could help.

If the ALSA board of directors is serious about helping the llama industry, then they should NOT show llamas while they are directors. Instead, they should focus on making ALSA the best it can be. Directors who show their animals place undue burden on judges and run the risk of creating the perception that directors receive favors from judges - even if this doesn't occur. Why run the risk in the first place? That's why the CLI management team has chosen not to show their animals at CLI shows.

In the past year I have observed a couple of judges who did a really good job fairly evaluating and placing classes. Those two were Patti Morgan at the October, 2004, Alabama show and Gayle Woodsum at the 2005 Fort Worth show. I know Patti, but have never met Gayle."

Do you plan to judge any ALSA shows in 2006? Why or why not?

I enjoy judging a few shows each year, but don't judge enough to get automatic recertification. Rather than attend the required advanced judges' clinic, I have decided to let my judge's credentials expire. In addition to having no confidence in the ALSA judges' training program, I believe the clinic instructor's evaluation would be guided by his like or dislike for me personally. If circumstances were different and we had ALSA leadership that was outwardly focused on its membership and the long-term success of ALSA, I would happily attend an advanced clinic. Since we don't have that, I won't be judging any more ALSA shows."

What regrets, if any, do you have about your decision?

I have no regrets about my decision. Given the current conditions with ALSA, it's time to move on. My regret is that exhibitors must endure the politics and favoritism that often occur in the show ring today, with no apparent progress being made to return showing to the fun, fair experience it once was. *I also regret that the few good judges ALSA has are being dragged down by politics and favoritism.*"

Do you plan to attend any shows in 2006? Why or why not?

We'll continue to attend ALSA events and will participate occasionally, depending upon whether the particular judge has a reputation for judging the animal instead of the person standing at the end of the lead rope."

Many have exited the llama industry in the last couple of years, citing various reasons. Do you plan to follow suit? Why or why not?

We have been involved with llamas since 1987, so we're no splash in the pan. Our llamas give us great pleasure, entertain us, amaze us, make us laugh, and sometimes make us cry. *All in all, it's a grand relationship that we plan to nurture far into the future.*

Interview with Dale Peterson

What comments do you have about the 2005 show season?

It obviously was a dwindling year for participants at most shows. ALSA demands their part for virtually providing nothing. The participants win ribbons awarded by judges that are ill trained and show favoritism to their friends, which taints the significance of the award.

*Do you plan to judge any ALSA shows in 2006?
Why or why not?*

My judging days with ALSA are over. I no longer will be part of a circle that has only themselves and their friends' best interests at heart. Credibility and integrity within this circle does not exist and the lack of it runs rampant through the judges' committee, upwards to include judges sitting on ALSA's board of directors. Also, if you read ALSA's latest board of directors' minutes you will see how the circle is contemplating censoring judges that speak out about the injustices. **MUM** is supposed to be the word.

Kathy and I have turned our judging attention to CLI. We have spent the last year in the company of the most gifted alpaca fiber judges in the industry. An intense amount of work has gone into our learning experience. The alpaca industry was built on attention to fiber and we thought if anyone knows suri fiber, it is the alpaca fiber judges and instructors. The llama industry is shifting more and more toward suri fiber and there are practically no llama judges that have a grasp on exactly what suri fiber is. ALSA side stepped the issue by electing to say that they judge conformation regardless of the fiber. Other than not judging conformation very well either, they basically admit that they do not know what suri fiber is.

What regrets, if any, do you have about your decision?

I have no regrets about leaving the ALSA judges' circle of today. If circumstances were different, I'd be proud to continue being an ALSA judge. I do regret that a wonderful organization with so much potential to have a profound impact on the llama industry has been led down the path of eventual destruction by self-serving individuals who call themselves leaders. *And most of all I regret that the enormous amount of work hundreds of ALSA volunteers and members have done over the years is being thrown away.*

What were the last shows you attended and what were your impressions?

I attended Lamafest in Michigan this year. It was a very pleasant experience. The event was well organized, overall attendance was great and there was a wide variety of vendors. There were onlookers throughout the facility all weekend. It was a most enjoyable event. As far as the ALSA show went, it was obvious that if you were not a judge you had very little chance to win. ALSA judges turned out in large numbers to show and the results were predictable. Animals that deserved to be standing at the front of the line were dismissed or placed toward bottoms of classes, while inferior ones led by ALSA judges won. It was one of the most blatant situations I've seen.

I also attended the North American in Kentucky in November of this year. The show was down considerably in attendance from the year before. There appeared to be

fewer llamas than last year and alpaca attendance was almost non-existent. That was surprising given there were hundreds of alpacas there last year. I learned that show management was either unable or unwilling to make it an AOBA certified alpaca show with an AOBA certified alpaca judge like the year before. It just goes to show that the alpaca organization and its members do not think that ALSA judges are qualified to judge alpacas and fiber. And they are right. Hence, hundreds of alpacas did not attend the show. Why the numbers were down with the llamas I do not know. One might surmise that some of the llama people think along the lines as the alpaca people about ALSA judges. There also was an air of discontent and sounds of grumbling. Basically, it was the same old boring ALSA show the llama community has become to expect. No fun.....no excitement.

Do you plan to attend any shows in 2006? Why or why not? What's missing at shows?

Kathy and I will still attend some shows. The people and the animals are what shows are all about. The one thing that we used to have at shows that is missing today is FUN. I remember telling people in Birmingham, when we entered the gates at a show, the rest of the world turned off for the next two or three days. While at the show, we (llama people) talked about our llamas, our breeding programs and how to make better llamas, etc. We had a good time, shared ideas and arranged potential breeding prospects, and if we were fortunate enough to win a ribbon...well, that was a bonus. As we left the event, the world gradually turned back on, but not until we had spent endless hours and hundreds of miles traveled talking about our great experiences. **That** was fun! It's hard to have fun in today's climate. I believe a competing show organization is needed. *Competition makes organizations think, adjust, become more responsive to their members and, most of all, it raises the bar.*

The ALSA board of directors' October meeting minutes gives details about judges, recertifications, upgrades and new judge appointments. What are your reactions?

It's "**that circle thing**" again, taking care of friends. Let me connect the dots for you. Phil Feiner sits on the board of the LFA. The LFA asked to do an ALSA quad show at their event this year, just like the Celebrity did (trying to keep up with the Celebrity). ALSA denied that request, but granted LFA permission to do a double show. Remember, when LFA was started, it was to be totally independent of ALSA. That is why it is called Llama Futurity Association. (I know this because I am a lifetime member and past president of the LFA). Then it appears, almost as a consolation prize for not granting the LFA a quad show, Phil Feiner, who is on the LFA's board, was immediately elevated to a level II judge in spite of his short tenure as a judge. Feiner then hosted an ALSA fiber judging clinic at his farm. This was a clinic where ALSA was to replace their mail order fiber training with some actual hands on training facilitated by the judges'

chairman, who has almost no fiber training himself. In attendance, among others, was John McDougall, the President of the LFA. After the clinic McDougall was promoted to the next level of judging (Level II) in spite of his limited experience being an ALSA judge. Almost immediately, the LFA informed ALSA that it would host another ALSA double show at their event next year, regardless of LFA's mission statement and original intent.

Darrell Anderson was promoted to the top level of judging. I personally like Darrell and think he is a real decent person. It somewhat bothers me that he was one of the four ALSA judges at this year's Celebrity where most everyone in attendance was amazed just how inconsistent the judging was. I was in an advanced judging clinic with Simon Zadina. As I recall, he got few halter placements correct during the clinic. He since has been promoted to the top level of judging. I know Debbie Shellabager, who has been a sponsor of the ALSA National for about ten years. I do not know Deb Yeagle.

During the October ALSA board meeting, there must have been quite a bit of discussion about judges' behavior. Here's an excerpt from the Judges Committee report of the minutes:

"Committee shared concerns with the ALSA Board regarding what seems to be a growing trend of ALSA Certified Judges engaging in public diatribe against ALSA and its representatives. It is the committee's feeling that such behavior is counter to the ALSA handbook requiring Judges to "at all times exhibit the highest standard of integrity and professionalism." Judges are representatives of ALSA and should serve as ambassadors of ALSA to the llama community, and not be engaged in destructive dialog aimed at interfering with the smooth functioning of the show association. The committee requests direction for the board in dealing with this problem."

First question: What part of the show association is "smooth functioning?" Second question: Does the section of the ALSA handbook concerning judges' integrity and professionalism apply only to judges who voice displeasure, or does it also extend to judges who deal out favors in the show ring and take punitive actions against exhibitors who express dissatisfaction with them? Hipocrisy and self serving are two thoughts that come to mind. It isn't surprising that many judges and exhibitors are fed up.

ALSA needs to develop some type of open dialogue or forum that encourages judges to share ideas, concerns and even gripes, without being punished. Maybe judges are speaking out in public, because they have no other venue. I understand their frustration, because I too have experienced frustration with ALSA.

Over a year ago Kathy and I submitted our paper work by email and regular mail to the judges' committee chairman to be considered for upgrade to level III judges (where we were before our sabbatical). To this day we

have not had a response from the judges' chairman or anyone else at ALSA. *We must not be in the circle.*

I have been a lifetime member of ALSA from the 80's and was a judge before Kathy and I owned llamas. At that time everyone was striving to make ALSA a success and was cognizant of how important it was to have integrity, not to show favoritism and to be careful not to let our friends influence our decisions in the ring. All of that is gone now. Replaced by..."**that circle thing.**"

Many have exited the llama industry in the past couple of years, citing various reasons. Do you plan to follow? Why or Why not?

Kathy and I have invested two decades of our lives in the llama industry and we are not willing to throw that away. No, we will not give up on this industry, its people, and especially the llamas.

Do you have any other comments?

Yes...some history. When our only son died it took Kathy and me six years to get over it. Although we continued to own llamas, we participated in almost no shows. After our sabbatical, we again became involved with llamas and began to devote our time there. We got recertified as ALSA judges.

We found that the llama industry as we had known it no longer existed. Many of the prominent and active people had left. Most of the so-called leaders of the different organizations were, and still are, clueless as how to develop cohesiveness within the llama community. Today there is back stabbing, infighting, grumbling, discontent, frustration, insider maneuvering, so-called power grabbing and, most of all, a total fracture of the llama industry. The demise of the value of llamas and the apparent inequities to all but a certain circle led me to the conclusion that the llama industry is "broken". Even so, I believe it can be "fixed". It would take a new organization that was all encompassing with all functions under one "umbrella."

Collectible Llamas, Inc, (CLI) was formed in July of 2004. The core of this organization, the Executive Management Council (EMC), includes people with extensive business management backgrounds and decades of camelid experience. The EMC conducted an in depth examination of the llama industry and concluded that it was indeed failing. It also determined that some of the parts could be salvaged but, by and large, it should be rebuilt from the ground up. How to do that was the question. We recognized that any attempt would be resisted by self propelled agendas, jealousy and sheer fright. People would say that we were attempting to destroy the industry or that we were out to get rich at the llama industry's expense. We knew that it would not be easy, nor would it be fast. We did know that there was enough discontent and if some areas were exposed for

what they are then others might be salvaged. All in all, we love the llama industry enough to try. *We have met opposition mostly from the power grabbers and self agenda people, but with over a year of challenging work by our supporters and the EMC, we have made some great strides.*

CLI now has the only creditable registry, the Certified Llama Registry (CLR), in the industry that is open to **ALL** llamas. It **requires** DNA and micro chipping of all llamas entered into its registry, letting buyers know what they are getting and sellers market their llamas with confidence. No mystery. We have access to the media through Cool Camelids magazine, a non-profit magazine where **all** camelid owners can advertise for very reasonable prices. We have initiated our show division and when it is on solid footing the next step will be to begin national advertising to draw newcomers into our industry. CLI's infrastructure must be in place before any attempt is made to persuade new people to enjoy llamas. We will guide these new people with an organization that is all inconclusive and has them and their llamas' best interests at heart. We are totally fair and equitable with no personal agendas. We will not have power trips and politics and, most importantly, CLI will issue **NO** favors.

All of the CLI management team has been extensively involved with the camelid industry for a very long time and we have seen people and organizations come and go. We all have or have had successful careers and do not look to this extraordinary amount of work and frustration to make a living or to have the right to tuck out our chests. We do not claim to have all the right answers and neither do we advocate the demise of any other organization. We do, however, realize that the other organizations apparently lack the wherewithal, will or desire to nurture the llama industry. *We genuinely love the llamas and the industry. That is why we are working so hard.*

Thanks, Dale

"It's long past time for ALSA to return to the days when it was responsive to its membership, had well trained judges who made fair decisions in the show ring and winning in the show ring had significance."

-Dolores Gardner

In Summary

Some may say all of this is nothing more than ALSA bashing. To them I say it's long past time for ALSA to return to the days when it was responsive to its membership, had well trained judges who made fair decisions in the show ring and winning in the show ring had significance. If the ALSA wheel looks like, rolls like and sounds like it is broken, then maybe it is. I hope each of you will take a few minutes to complete the survey that follows this article or complete it online at

www.CoolCamelids.org. ALSA needs to know what you think. It's a way for you to send a message to them without fear of repercussions.

About the author:

Dolores Gardner has been a member of ALSA since the early nineties. She became an ALSA judge in 1997. She earned the Level III classification in 2001. Attending shows as an exhibitor or a judge is in her words, "Just plain fun! And, I love to look at llamas. Of course, it's more fun if the animals are straight and wonderful or if I walk out of the ring with a blue ribbon, but it's always fun. If attending shows becomes a chore or the delight in showing leaves me, then I will quit going."

She lives in Daingerfield, Texas.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Be a part of history!

Enter your llamas in the first CLI satellite show.

What: *Conroe Classic*
(Traditional, Silky
& Suri Classes)

When: April 23, 2006

Where: Conroe, Texas
*In conjunction with the
Texas Classic Llama Show*

***All entry fees will be paid out in
premiums & prizes.***

Go to:

TheCLI.org

**& click on "Events"
for details.**