

Basenji 101...up close and personal

By Wanda Pooley

Chronology:

1956 – age 12 - gazed upon the silver screen as Skeeter and the exotic “Lady” scampered through the Mississippi swamps.

1982 – age – Older. Spied a small typed index card on the company “For Sale or Trade” bulletin board announcing “Five 8 week old basenji puppies for sale - \$60 ea. See Scott in the Test Lab.”

I stood in front of the board, staring at the card for several minutes. Could it be? After all those years, a basenji puppy was within my grasp?? Mind you, I had never so much as even touched one, had no idea what they were like. But really, it's still just a dog, isn't it? My whole life to date had been in the company of several “over-the-fence-by-midnight” canine companions so I surely wasn't lacking in doggie smarts. This was a FIND!

Off I trotted to the test several intricately machined when I rushed up from behind. you tell me about your puppies?” gazed at me for several seconds,

“Five 8 week old basenji puppies for sale - \$60 ea. See Scott in the Test Lab.”

laboratory. Scott huddled over parts, deep in concentration, “Scott,” I announced, “what can Scott sat back in his chair and as if to mentally collect himself.

“Well,” he said, “Basenjjs are a real interesting dogs. Have you ever seen one?”

“No,” I admitted. We then went on to discuss the breed for several minutes with me finally agreeing to stop by his house after work to see the little darlings.

Since I would be home late, I thought it would be prudent to ask my husband, who worked two floors up, to feed the mix-breed poodle and the Spitz at home their supper.

“A what?” Mac exclaimed. “A basenji,” I said, “You know, the dog that doesn't bark.” He peered at me over his glasses, “We already have two dogs, you know.” “I know. I'm just going to look, for Pete's sake. Kind of like an educational trip.” I reassured.

At 4:12 p.m. when the bell ring, I was off to Scott's house, just a few blocks away from the shop. Nothing could have prepared me for what happened next. Scott's wife let me in, saying her husband was outside with the puppies and would be right in. I sat down to wait, expecting to see some cute, clumsy puppies waddle in, maybe lick at my hands and face. What really happened is five whirling dervishes exploded through the doorway, leaped across the couch, spun around the hassock, swung to a stop to stare at The Intruder. Five pairs of eyes took in my presence and with a collective burst all jumped in to the chair with me, knocking me back against it. Noses poked in my ears and eyes, one puppy tugged at my hair, another grabbing at my sleeve. “What ARE you?” I shrieked with glee. “Tasmanian devils?”

Quickly losing interest in the newcomer, off they rushed to explore any possible changes in the house during their daily confinement. They discovered a case of empty pop bottles and proceeded to pull the bottles out and up-end them, draining the last drops of soda remaining in the bottom. That done, the group moved on to the waste basket. One swift bump and it toppled over. Scott and his wife struggled to retrieve the contents of the basket and frankly, without my help, I believe that battle would have been lost.

Not to be deterred, the little band of marauders continued on, sniffing, poking, and tugging until they were satisfied that the kitchen was fully under their siege. I could only stand back and watch in total amazement. Never had I seen such a display of canine creativity by such a juvenile gang. What happened to puppyhood? These 4-legged kids made the Little Rascals (maybe before your time) look like amateurs.

“I'll take one!” I exclaimed.

The lovely little creature was named “Angie,” a nice tri-colored girl. On the drive home, I thought of ways to explain to my husband why we needed a third dog. Funny, though, Scott kept mentioning something about buying a cage for the puppy. All my years of owning dogs, not once did the thought of putting one in a crate ever cross my mind.

Shrugging, I couldn't imagine why I should start now.

Angie spent the first hour or so huddled behind a large stereo speaker. Guess this was just too much for her, what with being separated from her brothers and sisters, but she was soooo sweet. She finally ventured out and promptly fell asleep in my lap as I watched TV. "What a little darling," I cooed to my husband, "Why, she's going to be no problem at all."

The next morning was a work day. Hmm, what to do with Angie while we're gone? I inspected the bathroom and declared it a safe place to keep a puppy during the day. Setting down a water dish, some kibble in a bowl, and nice little blanket, Angie watched us as we closed the door and went to work.

During the day, I half-heartedly called some pet stores and inquired about crates. "Hello," I said to the clerk who answered the phone, "I'm calling about a crate for a dog that will be about 16" when it matures. What do you have?" The clerk went on to describe the crates in the store and suggested I would need something at least 30" long and maybe 24" high. "Okay, how much," I asked. "WHAT.....\$49.95 for some wire soldered together!!" I hung up the phone and played the "Price is Right" game the rest of day. Call after call only yielded a savings of about \$5.00 and that was if I drove across town to some store. Well, I probably really didn't need a crate anyway and decided to just forget the whole thing.

Late that afternoon, I called home because by now my son would be home from school. "Hi Justin, how's Angie doing?"

"Mom," he said in a small voice, "I can't get the bathroom door open."

"What do you mean, 'You can't get the bathroom door open?'" I quizzed. "Is it stuck or something?"

"No, it just won't open, honest." Justin pleaded. "You had better come home. Maybe the puppy is hurt."

I made it home in record time, screeched the car to a stop in the drive, burst into the house, and rushed to the bathroom door with my son tagging on my heels exclaiming "She's alive. I can hear her."

Pushing a bit on the door yielded no results so I put my shoulder in to it. Groaning under the pressure of my body, the door began to move slightly, ever so slightly. A two-inch gap finally rewarded me some limited visibility. Below, at the bottom of the gap in the door Angie stared up at me, ears perked, wrinkles profuse, and a joyous look in her eyes. Her little curled tail twitched with delight. Beyond her lay mass destruction!

The floor was white with shredded toilet paper, the clothes hamper, knocked over and blocking the door, had its contents strewn everywhere; the towels were all pulled down and had been well nested throughout the day. The accumulated height from the heap of towels and dirty laundry gave Angie easy access to the top of the toilet seat. Then it was on to bigger and better things. She had managed to get the medicine chest door open and had spilled everything to the sink below. The toothpaste tube had many small teeth marks to show for its struggle to survive. Over the toilet lamely stood the remnants of one of those springy cabinet things that give you a bit more storage space. Its flimsy door was pushed in and the compartment devoid of its perfumes, makeup, hairbrushes, etc. Those lay on the floor in pitiful array.

Of course, everything was christened with puppy pee and poop. Easily two loads of laundry stretched before me that night. After reassuring myself and Justin that the puppy was just fine and happy to see us home, I closed bathroom door. Marching to the kitchen, I pulled out the phone book and thumbed the yellow pages.

One ring, two rings, at last on the third ring a voice from heaven answered, "Hello, Hemmy's Pet Store. How may I help you?"

"Do you have a wire crate approximately 30" long and 24" high?" I asked.

"Let me check," the clerk replied. "Yes," she said when she returned to the phone, "I have just one left."

"Good! I'll be right there. Don't sell it to anyone!," I ordered.

Walking in to Hemmy's I announced I was the woman who had just called about the wire crate. The clerk pulled the box down off the shelf and in procession we strode to the check-out counter. I pulled out my check book and began writing as the clerk rang up the total.

"That will be \$57.52 with tax, please," the clerk told me, "You know, it's funny. Just after you called, another woman came in the store wanting a crate just this size. She was quite angry when I wouldn't sell it to her."

I looked up at the clerk, sheer craziness glistening in my eyes. "You have no idea what would have happened had that crate not been here when I arrived," I spewed, signing my name with a flourish on the check. Then I took a deep breath, collected my wits and started telling the woman about Angie's exploits. We both had a good laugh and I drove away, a calm starting to spill through my bones.

The mess really wasn't that bad to clean up and Angie was none the worse for wear for her day's experience. I put the crate together and put the puppy inside. Standing back to view this scene, I felt, not to mention extreme relief, but that I had crossed over in to a new realm of the canine world. Here was a breed that was definitely "a cut above" your average dog. Only 24 hours had passed since my first introduction to basenjis but I was learning fast.

One month later I went back out to the test lab to visit with Scott and show him some pictures of our little bouncy, lively basenji girl. He admired the photos and then thoughtfully said, "You know, if you are interested, I still one more female left. I'd let you have her for only \$40."

"Oh Scott," I exclaimed, "I can't imagine having two basenjis!"

"Why, Wanda, I even know someone who owns four basenjis!" Scott revealed, shocking me even more.

"Get out!" I squealed!

Well, the rest is history. Oh and yes, I did buy that littermate for a whopping \$40.