

'I want to never stop learning'

We talk with Handler Christi Halliday

Christi Halliday has been involved with German Shepherds for more 20 years, beginning as a child. She handled the first Dallas daughter ever to go Best In Show (the bitch had six in one year). She also owner/handled her son, who was a Multiple BIS/BISS CH, and she is now working toward a third consecutive BIS special, this time breeder/owner/handled. Since foot reconstruction surgery in December, Christi has been out of the ring. But she recently returned with a mission.

"It would be the dream of a lifetime – to have first handled, then owner/handled, then breeder/owner/handled a top dog," she said. "We'll see."

Kennel Name: [Imp-Cen Kennels](#)

Location: Waynesburg, PA

Occupation: Christina, Professional Handler; Connie, Dog Groomer.

GSDbyDesign: How many years have you been involved with GSDs?

Christi: Christina, 28 years; Connie, founder of Imp-Cen, 34 years

GSDbyDesign: How did you get started in your breeding program? And how did your kennel name come about?

Christi: I guess I was born into it. Mom got involved with raising and training in 1974. The first Imp-Cen-bred dog earned a companion dog title in 1976. I handled my first Best of Breed winner in 1982, having first won points on a shepherd in 1980.

The name Imp-Cen is derived from my Mom's first two German Shepherds, *Imp & Centaur*.

GSDbyDesign: Who are some of your all-time favorite GSDs (of your own breeding or otherwise)?

Christi: As for dogs I've personally known, my Zane, (CH Rowland's Cezanne of Imp-Cen CGC). Without question, I believe he is my four-legged soulmate. There are many other dogs I'll always admire, either from personal experience or for their contribution to our breed. Foremost is the beautiful **CH Rowland's Cure For Love**, who really brought my career as a handler into focus. My job is supposed to be "making a show dog," but this bitch was well beyond anything I could do for her. She "made me." I was just blessed to be along for the ride. That's how great she was, and still is, well into her 10th year.

Other special dogs I admire include CH Kismet's Sight For Sore Eyes, who literally was responsible for resurrecting our old lines. My first ROM came from that single litter out of my CH Imp-Cen Shiloh's Song. We are currently finishing our fifth and sixth champion from that litter.

Other great ones in my opinion include, CH Altana's Mystique, CH Covy Tucker Hills Monte Alban, CH BeechHill's Benji V Masko, CH Torque of Frohlich, CH Padechma's Persuasion, and CH Yoncalla's Mike.

GSDbyDesign: Who was the most influential person in your breeding program?

Christi: That's easy, Mom! She started from the absolute bottom of this gig and worked her way up. She taught me a lot about self-sacrifice and how the "smooth road" isn't always the *best* road to travel. I also must mention Jim Moses. Even when I was a kid, he was always there with comments and suggestions, some of them not always what I wanted to hear. But he really showed me the ropes of the conformation ring, and I am forever grateful.

GSDbyDesign: Tell us about "Kira" and that wonderful year for you and her owner, Betsy Scott.

Christi: The "Kira story" really starts in the spring of 2002. On a whim, her owner Betsy Scott thought it would be fun to put Kira into a couple shows as a "special" to see how she would do. I was a bit reluctant at first, not having done much handling for anyone but myself for many years; at least I hadn't handled much professionally since the birth of my daughter in 1995.

Kira, aka CH Rowland's Cure For Love, was still very green in spite of being almost 5 years old. She had finished quickly and was bred to Sel CH Pinebuck's Rhodes To Victory, thus giving me a special puppy, Zane. Kira's first weekend turned out to be a very competitive circuit in New Jersey, where the entries drew large majors. I faced a field of roughly five or six top specials from the area. I had an almost sick feeling from nerves when I entered the ring, not sure what I had gotten myself into.

Kira swept the breed that weekend and garnered a very competitive Herding Group 2. I was hooked, having only placed in a group twice before in my whole life.

I convinced Betsy it was time to pack up the van and head west toward Ohio, my stomping ground. We entered three shows in Marietta, and were stunned at once again. The competition included several specials, to say nothing of the strong dogs of other breeds entered at the show. We won the breed on day one, but nothing in the group. We were a bit deflated, but hey, who the heck were we anyhow? That would all change on day two.

Betsy and I were stunned with not only the breed win, again over strong specials, but we won the group! Then, I nearly got sick. I'd never won a group before, how would I do this very special gal any justice?

I went into the Best in Show ring at that moment to face my fears, and came out with the very first Dallas (Ch Kismet's Sight For Sore Eyes) daughter to go BEST IN SHOW. We were on our way through a magical year.

Kira took me on the adventure of a lifetime. Her record: 54 shows; 44 BOBs; three BOS; 31 Group placements, including 17 Group Firsts, six All-Breed Best In Shows; one Best In Specialty; AOE at the Invitational; and at her final show, Best Of Opposite Sex to her sire, at Westminster. She was the #2 German Shepard for 2002, and the #1 bitch.

I had the honor of then showing her at the National in North Carolina in 2005. Judge Debra Hokkanen awarded Kira the 7 to 9 Veteran Bitch class. And yes, my first class win at the National since Junior Handling in 1980. Today, she is a bit grayer, nearly 10 years young, so full of herself. BIS/BISS Ch Rowland's Cure For Love CD TC, aka Kira. She still takes my breath away.

GSDbyDesign: Tell us about how you found Zane - and why you chose him.

Christi: In the fall of 2001, we purchased a dark, plushy and all-together clumsy 3-month-old puppy from Betsy Scott of Hampstead, Maryland. We called him Zane, and over the next several years, he would re-write our history.

Zane was first shown in Louisville, KY in March of 2002. He earned a major reserve from the 6-9 class. But he was a puppy, and he was in the shadow of his dam, Kira, who also was the talk of the shows that summer. Jim Moses called and a very young "Zane" went off to "school."

In the spring of 2003, Zane came home a finished champion, and Jim said, "Go out and special him." And with that, we began our magical journey. At age 21 months, Zane became the first Imp-

Cen dog to go Best In Show, but really that was only the beginning. At the end of that year, he was the #1 male German Shepherd Dog and Best of Opposite. Sex at Westminster 2004.

To date, Zane has earned over 141 Best of Breed wins, a 4th All-Breed BIS, a Specialty Best, 22 Herding Group 1s, and more than 65 Group Placings - in four years of showing. He has also proven himself as a quality sire, with several of his progeny winning points from the puppy classes, and a futurity placing daughter from his first litter.

As many now know, Zane suffered splenic torsion in August 2005. The combined efforts of Town & Country Animal Hospital in Wheeling, WV, and the miracle workers at Columbus Med Vet in Columbus, OH, saved him in spite of a near 24-hour delay in surgery. (The delay was because of the seriousness of the situation. Zane was so unstable. Med Vet waited until just the right moment to attempt the surgery.) Not only did Zane survive, but with removal of his spleen, he seems stronger, and much more energetic than ever.

GSDbyDesign: What is the most important quality to you in a GSD?

Christi: Character and temperament. Without those, you merely have a shell of a dog.

GSDbyDesign: What problem(s) do you think are most prevalent in the breed?

Christi: Sadly, correct temperament. We have to do far too much "socializing" these days because the puppies lack confidence, or we swing to the other extreme, and get 'em so overly-frenzied that they act like Golden Retrievers instead of "quietly standing its ground and showing confidence and willingness to meet overtures without itself making them."

GSDbyDesign: When you select a puppy, what are you looking for? Be as specific as possible.

Christi: I want to see puppies eager to meet me and explore new surroundings. I want to see "balance of structure" even at a young age. Watching puppies in a yard, just moving on their own, is the best way I've found to evaluate them. Just sit out there with your morning coffee, and watch them. Smoothness and coordination will show up in the best ones. Those are the ones you hang on to and "grow out." A well-bred litter, especially, can fool you if you aren't patient! An added advantage is knowing the lineage of the puppies that you are looking at . . . sometimes, specific features show themselves later on.

GSDbyDesign: What is the best thing about being involved in GSDs?

Christi: The many good friends I've made along the way. Also, as a handler, it's the power to make peoples' dreams come true. I'll never forget a wonderful fellow who struggled some 50 years, had great working dogs, but desperately wanted the AKC champion title. We were blessed enough to make that happen for him. There wasn't a dry eye in the house that day, and that's one moment I'll never forget. What a thrill.

GSDbyDesign: What are your goals in the breed? What else you do hope to accomplish?

Christi: I want to breed the best quality German Shepherds possible. I want to never stop learning about them. I want to always be as honest and forthcoming as I can be to help this wonderful breed reach its maximum potential.

GSDbyDesign: What contributions to the German Shepherd Dog do you want to be remembered for?

Christi: I just want to be remembered as someone who did all that was possible for the breed, and the people who love them.

The German Shepherd by Design will be conducting interviews of notable breeders and handlers throughout 2008. If you would like to be featured on our website, contact Becky at gsdbydesign@aol.com.

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