

Although this Article has been written many years ago, it is very relevant for today. Many dogs have been produced and suffered from Epilepsy before Megan, and sadly many others are still being produced after Megan, this is not just about our dog, it is about all these other dogs suffering with Epilepsy.(Our words)

EPILEPSY- A LESSON FOR RE- LEARNING?

By Sheila Rankin. GSD National Magazine. UK May 1997.

Soon after the notice regarding the Dr. Phyllis Croft Foundation appeared in the press, I received a letter from Linda Allan who has recently suffered the trauma of the death of a beloved Shepherd through epilepsy. Here is an extract from that letter;

I read the magazine with interest and I also study other journals relating to GSD's. I am amazed and dismayed that absolutely no mention of epilepsy is ever featured. Is this because it is such a taboo subject or do the experts and professionals consider it not worth a mention?. There is so much emphasis on hip scores and when I selected my "Oscar" I took this into account along with good temperament but to my cost I knew nothing about epilepsy. I can not understand why it is not given more publicity, is there any other inherent problem that come close to the trauma of living with a fitting dog? Since Oscar was given sleep I have asked many times "Why me?"

A glance at Oscars pedigree would have been enough to set alarm bells ringing for those who were around in the late 60's and early 70's and who will remember, if they care to, the Hendrawen Quadrille of Eveley episode but younger breeders will possibly not have heard of him. Quadrille was by Hendrawen's Vondaun Quebec ex Vanity of Eveley. He won a CC early in his show career and, as breeders then were not much different from breeders today, including my late husband "TV" and I. This resulted in there soon being many of his progeny winning while he was still a young dog himself and as a result even more breeders used him.

Stories started circulating that Quadrille was having fits but his owner said that these were the result of him having been in contact with the distemper virus and that his fits were no more hereditary than a broken leg is hereditary. Then George Woods and Harry Dunkely of Novem alerted other breeders that 3 of a litter they had bred by Quadrille had started fitting. We have retained a dog "Sheracyn Nevada" and a bitch "Sheracyn Nemesis" from a litter of 10 by Quadrille ex a Ch. Ludwig daughter so although neither were having fits we took them to Dr. Phyllis Croft to have an EEG. Breeders were sceptical of this EEG equipment which certainly did not inspire confidence. It consisted of various leads which were attached to the dogs heads by pins and a bulldog clip attached to their neck chains. The brain patterns were recorded on a length of paper which Dr. Croft studied later. Of necessity the reading was not very long so if it showed unusual brain activity indicative of epilepsy on the short strip then it must be assumed that the dog was an epileptic. **EVEN IF HE HAD NOT HAD FITS.** However, if there were no unusual patterns on this short strip it could NOT be assumed that the dog was definitely clear because unusual patterns may have shown up if the test had lasted longer. Some breeders did not understand this and if they were told by Dr. Croft that there were no unusual patterns they

assumed that the animal could not possibly be an epileptic. To further complicate the matter, some owners whose dogs who actually did show unusual brain patterns and who were pronounced epileptic said that their dogs never had fits and this gave further fuel who described the test and or the idea of epilepsy as an hereditary problem. The fact that some dogs gave epileptic patterns but did not appear to have fits may be because they were kennel dogs and the owners were never present when a fit took place or possibly that the dogs never encountered the circumstances which might stimulate the brain into a fit, but whatever the reason some breeders used this as an excuse not to use the services of Dr. Croft and her EEG.

We received the verdict that Nevada was an epileptic and was highly likely to eventually start fitting but Nemesis graph showed nothing unusual so Dr. Croft felt that she might not have fits. We decided to keep Nevada and to carry on showing him but never to breed from and Nem we gave to a game keeper on condition that she was never bred from. Unfortunately Nem had a misalliance with a Labrador and whelped a huge litter, the stress of which triggered off fits and she was put down. Ultimately 5 from our litter of 10 died or were put down with fits. Nevada continued to win and although it was well known that Dr. Croft had pronounced him to be an epileptic quite a few breeders tried hard to persuade us to let him mate their bitches. One lady who was emigrating even wanted to take a bitch in whelp to Nevada to her new country "after all, nobody there would know about epilepsy".

Then came the day that Nevada had his first fit. To see this lovely and much loved dog thrashing in the dirt, mouth bleeding from a bitten tongue, eyes staring, no control over bladder or bowel and, rather unusually screaming quite horribly was a pitiful sight is unforgettable.

Nevada gained his title at Crufts 1970, was BOB and RCC in working group. A couple of months later he started to fit in the morning and as he came out of one fit he went into another. I was on my own that day with no transport and unable to get a vet to come to the house. I sat with him all day watching him get weaker and weaker but the fits continued until TV eventually arrived home and we took him to the vet where he was put to sleep with us holding him.

After Nevada's death other Quadrille sons and daughters "disappeared" though some went on to be bred from quite extensively and have themselves produced epileptic progeny. Quadrille himself died and his obituary, written by one of the then most respected breeders (now deceased) ignored all mention of fits and stated that "he died of a tired heart". Of course he did, so would have Nevada if the vet had not intervened.

German dogs were coming into this country thick and fast and many breeders felt confident that by their use there would be no problem with epilepsy. Fant V D Weinerau arrived and in time produced several different progeny from different bitches. Luckily he had not been used very much and his owner removed him from stud before too much damage was done. There have been other imports known to have produced fitting off spring and some are mentioned in Dr. Willis book "The GSD a Genetic History of the Breed".

The division in the breed between "English" and "German" enthusiasts meant that

the 2 sides rather lost contact with each others pedigrees and Quadrille has now disappeared off most pedigrees altogether while his sons and daughters who are known to have produced epileptics are almost off. This means that the newer younger breeders on the "English" side are often unaware of what lies behind their litters. Isabelle Donkin is regularly asked to search the pedigrees of fitting Shepherds and has been horrified by the amount of lines going back to Quadrille, in one case in excess of 30 lines. Those on the "German" side would not, of course, be using dogs that have this amount of Quadrille in them but he lurks off some of the pedigrees of both dogs and bitches of this side too. Recently Isabelle sent me details of a Shepherd who could be described as colloquially as being on the "German" side. Quadrille appears 6 times just off the pedigree and while Quadrille 6 times that far back will probably give no problems what will happen in a year or two when the unwarily start doubling up.?

There are always breeders who will not see the writing on the wall, some even doubt that epilepsy is inherent. At the AGM of the League in 1982 a breeder who is still alive and still breeding cast doubts on epilepsy as an inheritable condition and put forward the theory that rough play between litter mates causes blows to the head that can later result in fits. About the same time a very well known German judge giving a talk over here said that fits in Germany were not inherited but were due to a vitamin deficiency. Blows to the head, white flour, contact with a virus, vitamin deficiency, crossing the North Sea (that affects the hips too!) etc., etc., may well be causes of fits but when none of these things is the reason it only leaves the pedigree.

So why have I dragged up all this ancient history?. Not to start a witch hunt but hopefully to persuade breeders to check further back than the actual paper that the pedigree is written on and to suggest that stud dog owners check behind the pedigree of bitches brought to their dogs. It may be very flattering when someone from the other side decides to use your dog but you will not be very happy if the bitch has multiple suspect lines but your dog gets blamed for any later problems! I also urge owners and breeders to send details of fitting Shepherds, or of those suffering from ANY other suspect inherited conditions, to be put on the Breed Councils data base, to paraphrase Shakespeare "The evil dogs do live after them" so unless the breeders of today take a more open approach than those of the past there will be more broken hearted owners like Linda Allan asking "**WHY ME?**".

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