A Retrospective

Two winners of Best in Show at the American Whippet Club National Specialty, Ch. Merci Isle Burncoat Babylon and his sire Ch. Merci Isle Meridian. Photo by Samuelson Studios.

Merci Isle

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The Beginning

Merci Isle began in 1967, the year I had my first hands-on experience with a Whippet. I was 18 years old at the time, had grown up in love with dogs and all animals and was working as a kennel assistant to professional handlers Ben and Marie Talbot at the Royal Acres kennels in Washington State.

I was into “real dogs” in those days, but this skinny little thing just wrapped me around her paw... She would stand a few feet away and just stare adoringly into my eyes. At first I thought it was odd, but after a while I found it charming, and my fate was set.

The Talbots’ daughter owned “Peggy,” whose registered name was Ch. Pennyworth This One Is Mine, and they had obtained her from Mrs. Margaret Newcombe’s famous kennel in New Hampshire. I had seen the full-page color photo in LIFE Magazine of Ch. Courtenay Fleetfoot of Pennyworth after he won Best in Show at Westminster in 1964. That sealed the deal, but I didn’t know it at the time. Peggy was a daughter of that gorgeous Whippet in LIFE Magazine, and she charmed me into “seeing” Whippets for the wonderful, beautiful breed that they are, inside and out.

My first Whippet was a little fawn-and-white dog named Verdi of Merci Isle, who was given to me by Marie Talbot after I stopped working at Royal Acres in 1971: I had told her how much I wanted to own a Whippet some day. I also got his registration papers, which were blank. He was born in the town of Mercer Island in Washington State, where I grew up, hence my kennel name and my beginnings.

Continued
Ch. Merci Isle The Sting
b. 1975 by Ch. Westgate The Sorcerer x Ch. Merci Isle Strange Brew. BOW at AWC Western specialty 1977, shown with judge Bo Bengtson and Rosemary Sutton.

Ch. Westgate The Sorcerer

Ch. Merci Isle Designer Genes
b. 1982 by Ch. Summerwind’s The Magician (a Sorcerer son) x Merci Isle Magnificent Me (a Strange brew daughter). WB & BOW at the first So. Cal. Whippet Fanciers Assoc. 1983 under judge Dale Simmons, handled by Iva.
Verdi was a grandson of that wonderful little Whippet I had met, Peggy, and had some of the most illustrious names imaginable in his pedigree: Ch. Ringmore Finisterre, Ch. Pennyworth Would You Believe, Ch. Courtenay Fleetfoot of Pennyworth, Ch. Laguna Ligonier and Ch. Tantivvey Diver of Pennyworth. I learned later that Peggy was the dam of Ch. Pennyworth Starlet, the famous bitch that went to Jackie Q. Kubat’s Dragonfly Whippets, now in Argentina.

Although Verdi was never used in my breeding program, his litter sister, Widgets Pandora, whom I purchased as an adult, certainly was. She is behind all Merci Isle dogs today. These two dogs were the poster children for how Whippets charm everyone with their sweet, natural affection for people. I so wish I had dogs like them to breed to today. They were of beautiful type and had wonderful temperaments. They had it all.

Over the years I have been blessed with some great mentors, and also learned from some bad examples I have seen, but like everything else, I didn’t realize the value of this in the big scheme of things at the time. Right or wrong, I learned from the best and the worst. Only later, as I looked at my dogs, at my dogs’ pedigrees and at what I have accomplished over nearly 50 years of loving Whippets, did I realize that I had really been paying attention to these people.

I was fortunate to know the people I did: A-list breeders and exhibitors who saw that I was serious about Whippets and took me under their wings. Many became my mentors — John Shelton, Isabell Stoffers and Michael Dougherty to name three of my favorites. They were highly knowledgeable, strong-opinioned leaders, and I am so grateful they didn’t just pat me on the head and ignore me. They sought me out to teach me how to do things with dogs with honor and integrity.

Merci Isle has always been a small breeding operation, breeding on average barely a litter per year, plus a few co-bred with others. I have bred, according to old records and what I can get from the AKC, well over 100 AKC show champions and at least 40 that are Lure Coursers of Merit, AKC and/or ASFA Field Champions. There are also Merci Isle champions in Canada, Sweden and Great Britain that I am extremely proud and grateful for.

Welcome to this visual representation of my beautiful Whippets and the many rewards that loving them has afforded me through the years. I hope you enjoy what you see!

IVA KIMMELMAN
Merci Isle Whippets
Sires of Significance

A few sires of the past have had great significance for Merci Isle.

Ch. Delacreme de la Renta, ROMX

Ch. Hamrya’s Lucky Charm, SC, FCh., ROM

Ch. Sporting Fields N’ Erin Piano Man
b. 1994 by Ch. Topaz Jazz Singer x Sporting Fields Simplicity. Bred by Dionne Butt Giles, owned by John and Sharon Lyons.

Jeffrey Kimmelman

I want to take this opportunity to thank my husband, Jeffrey, for being my biggest cheerleader and supporter. He has also been an important guide for decisions that turned out really well.

It was Jeffrey who insisted we rescue and take possession of Spectre Forever Amber when her owners thought so little of her they literally threw her and her AKC papers over her breeder’s back fence.

We took Amber in and Jeff saved her. She was a wreck, a totally feral Whippet that had apparently received no socialization whatever. Jeff won her over with infinite patience and offerings of cheese, which she loved, and it was he who encouraged me to breed her to Ch. Morshor’s Majestic Dell, which produced five champions, including Ch. Merci Isle Hot Flowers. The rest is history, as they say. Amber’s dam was a granddaughter of Ch. Merci Isle Brave New World, so she was at least partly of my breeding.

Jeffrey is also quite a good handler: he never gets stressed, doesn’t care about the unimportant things that go on, tries to win with a dog he believes in — and often does.

Merci Isle The Maneater, FCh.
b. 1986 by Ch. Spectre Westgate The Mystic x Ch. Merci Isle Designer Genes, pictured lure coursing with Jeff.
I raced my dogs before I ever exhibited in the ring in the early 1970s. I was taught to show and race, usually on the same weekend.

Then I discovered open field coursing and later lure coursing, through Lyle Gillette, whom I knew from the field. Lyle had started the American Sighthound Field Association in California in 1972. I have long been identified as a Whippet fancier who promotes the traditional dual purpose enjoyment of our breed, and I still breed for healthy, handsome, well-made dogs with a keen prey drive.

I have tried hard, and often succeeded, to produce dual-titled Whippets with every litter. If a Whippet can’t run like a Whippet should, it is not really a good representative of its breed.

**It’s All About Agility and Speed**

**Ch. Merci Isle Jacaranda, LCM**
b. 2011 by DC Surrey Hill’s Golden Boy, LCM x Ch. Merci Isle Dove Feather, FCh.

**Ch. Merci Isle Butterfly Ballet, LCM**
b. 1999 by Ch. Sporting Fields N’ Erin Piano Man x Ch. Merci Isle Dreamy Draw, FCh.

**Ch. Merci Isle Dove Feather, FCh., ROM**
b. 2005 by Ch. Byerley Savile Row x Ch. Merci Isle Velvet Hammer, FCh.

**Racing and Lure Coursing**
Spectre Forever Amber, ROM (left) with her daughter Ch. Merci Isle Hot Flowers, FCh. and granddaughter Sw. Ch. Merci Isle Whisper To A Purr, pictured in the early 1990s. Photo Magnus Hagstedt.

THREE GENERATIONS

Spectre Forever Amber, ROM b. 1985 by Ch. Saxon Shore Amber Waves x Ch. Spectre Chalcedony. It was just a stroke of luck that this beautiful Whippet came our way.

Ch. Merci Isle Hot Flowers, FCh.
b. 1988 by Ch. Morshor’s Majestic Dell, LCM x Spectre Forever Amber.

I adore and live for my dogs but have never loved another dog like "Willow." She was my baby. It drove Jeff crazy that I had a hard time leaving the house without her. I don’t know why, but she was the one. Willow lived to be 16 years old.

Someone Special
Sw. Ch. Merci Isle Whisper To A Purr
b. 1989 by Ch. Delacreme de la Renta x Ch. Merci Isle Hot Flowers, F.Ch. Shown with Iva, pictured winning her Puppy class with judge Carol Willumsen and trophy presenter Dr. Barbara Henderson at the 1990 AWC National Specialty. ‘Kittre’ later went to my friend Magnus Hagstedt in Sweden and produced several champions both for his Signum Whippets and for Airescot.

Ch. Merci Isle Distant Mirror
b. 1993 by Ch. Merci Isle Meridian x Merci Isle Black Heart, FCh. Pictured with Jeff and breeder-judge Cindy Scott.

Merci Isle Black Heart, FCh.
b. 1990 by Ch. Hamrya’s Lucky Charm x Ch. Merci Isle Spectator Sport

Ch. Merci Isle Zephyr
b. 1989 by Ch. Delacreme de la Renta x Ch. Merci Isle Hot Flowers, F.Ch. Litter brother to Zoom, lost prematurely in an accident.

Ch. Merci Isle Bavarian Chocolate
b. 1981 by Ch. Knolland High Time x Ch. Merci Isle The Moonraker. WB & BOW Santa Barbara Kennel Club under judge Bo Bengtson, bred and owned by Iva and Christine House, shown by Sharon Zaker (now an AKC judge).
"Zoom" and Jeffrey

AWC National SBIS
Ch. Merci Isle Meridian, ROMX

b. 1989 by Ch. Delacreme de la Renta, ROMX
x Ch. Merci Isle Hot Flowers, FCh.

"Zoom" won the AWC National Specialty under breeder-judge Mrs. Lorraine Groshans in 1993. Bo Bengtson wrote in Dog News: "It was a tremendously popular win for a dog which oozes Whippet type and has been close to getting 'the big one' several times before. (In fact, his young son Ch. Merci Isle Burncoat Babylon preceded his sire as an AWC specialty winner last fall!)

Owner-breeder-handler Iva Kimmelman has been one of the most consistent and conscientious Whippet breeders since the 1970s — and I think everyone was thrilled to see her persistence pay off."

Game Changer
AWC National SBIS
Ch. Merci Isle Burncoat Babylon
b. 1991 by Ch. Merci Isle Meridian x Ch. Morshor’s Appraxin Sheree. Left, on the beach; above, winning the AWC National Futurity in 1992 under judges Mary Beth Arthur and Jean Balint. He also won the AWC Southern specialty that year and the AWC National specialty in 1995, both under breed specialist judge Dr. John Shelton.

Merci Isle Bananarama, JC
b. 1996 by Ch. Merci Isle Meridian x Ch. Merci Isle A Distant Mirror, SC
The International Connection

SBIS Aust. & Am. Ch. Byerley Savile Row, ROMX
b. 2000 by Aust. Ch. Khabaray Hugo Boss, imp. UK x Aust. Ch. Byerley Demeter. Bred and owned by Peter Moore and Peter Griffith in Australia, who graciously let us lease 'Sav' for a year and a half. During his stay in the U.S. he qualified for his ROMX title as a top producer.

UK Ch. Barnesmore Red Rose at Palmik
b. 2008 by German Ch. Barnesmore Paint The Town Red x Barnesmore Summer of Love. Bred by Felicity Thompson in Ireland, imported from Palmik in the UK, dam of champions at Merci Isle.

Am & UK Ch. Merci Isle Magnolia at Palmik
b. 2011 by DC Surrey Hill’s Golden Boy, LCM x Ch. Merci Isle Dove Feather, FCh. ROM. Exported to Palmik kennels in Great Britain.
Dog shows were created for breeders to exhibit potential breeding stock to judges for their evaluation. Somehow that got turned around to be all about winning and not much more. I believe the Whippet in ten years won’t look like the original breed if this nonsense about extreme side gait doesn’t stop. This is a breed that is about running at top speed. Assessing side gait was to check if the dog was sound (not lame), nothing more. Unfortunately, some judges who don’t know any better have perpetuated the problem. Type should come first, then let’s test for soundness on the down and back and the go-around. More is not better.
SBIS Ch. Merci Isle  
Dove Feather, FCh., ROM  
b. 2005  
by Ch. Byerley Savile Row  
x Ch. Merci Isle Velvet Hammer, FCh.  
Breeder-owner handled by Iva under judge Dana Cline. "Plume" won SBIS at the 2006 AWC Eastern specialty under Australian breeder-judge Ian Dougherty.

Ch. Merci Isle Poinciana  
b. 2011  
by DC Surrey Hill’s Golden Boy LCM  
x SBIS Ch. Merci Isle Dove Feather, FCh., ROM  

Bred to Produce

DC Surrey Hill’s  
Golden Boy, LCM  
b. 2007  
by Ch. Chelsea Chalcedony x Ch. Diabless Surrey Hill Say Yaha, JC.  
Merci Isle Maverick Bandana, FCh.

Ch. Merci Isle Above The Clouds, FCh.
b. 1999 by Ch. Sporting Fields N’ Erin Piano Man x Ch. Merci Isle Dreamy Draw, FCh.

Ch. Merci Isle 2Kill A Mockingbird, FCh.
b. 2004 by Ch. Merci Isle Light The Way, FCh. x Merci Isle Maverick Bandana, JC. Winner of the AWC National Futurity 2005 under breeder judge David Samuelson.

Ch. Merci Isle Zig Zag Girl, FCh.

DC Chelsea Gold Rush of Keynote, ROMX
NSBOS Ch. Tangens The Maverick Cosmonaut, FCh., CRX

b. 2007 by Ch. Winsmoor Maverick Cowboy Up, JC x Plumcreek HW Across The Moon. Purchased as a puppy from Eva Engvall. BOS at the AWC National Specialty 2010 (judge Russell McFadden), AOM AWC National Specialty 2012 (judge Connie Brunkow, above). He was picked out from photos by Jeff and Iva and confirmed with an examination by our friends Paul Lepiane and Bo Bengtson in California. He is everything we hoped for as a performance dog, show dog, sire and companion. The inspirational sires from other breeders made a huge difference when incorporated into my bitch line and helped change the direction that contributed to the Merci Isle success. The real game changers were definitely Savile Row and Cosmonaut. If not for those two dogs, very prepotent in many areas, I wouldn’t have the fantastic dogs I have had for the last ten years.

Ch. Merci Isle Paradise Garden, FCh.

b. 2012 by Ch. Tangens The Maverick Cosmonaut, FCh. x UK Ch. Barnesmore Red Rose of Palmik

Ch. Merci Isle American Beauty, FCh.

b. 2012 by Ch. Tangens The Maverick Cosmonaut, FCh. x UK Ch. Barnesmore Red Rose of Palmik

Ch. Merci Isle Jacaranda, LCM

b. 2011 by DC Surrey Hill’s Golden Boy, LCM x Ch. Merci Isle Dove Feather, FCh. Winner AWC ASFA field trial 2014 in an entry of 158. Judges were Tom Cigolle and Todd Miller. “Jax” held the No. 1 ASFA Whippet position from April to October 2014.
The Future...

A Tribute

The saying from history, “If I see farther, it is because I stand on the shoulders of giants,” is always true when it comes to breeding great dogs. No one does it alone. It takes a long time to create a bloodline.

There are many who helped shape the Merci Isle Whippets and all they have accomplished. They let me use their breeding programs for inspiration, their gene pool, their examples of how to properly care for dogs and what to avoid.

I especially want to thank Bo Bengtson, Michael Dougherty, Eva Engvall, Peter Griffith and Peter Moore of Australia, Magnus Hagstedt of Sweden, Mike Howgate and Yvonne Hull in the U.K., John Shelton, Isabell Stoffers, Susan Vargas... — but the list could go on. Thank you!

Four Future Champions...
— three of them titled in the field as well. Left to right, shown in late 1999: Ch. Merci Isle Butterfly Ballet, LCM; Ch. Merci Isle Luxury Life, FCh.; Ch. Merci Isle Look Out!; and Ch. Merci Isle Velvet Hammer, FCh.

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