

## **The Real Truth about the ABBA**

2009 was an important year and among many notable occurrences including, our first African American president and a new player entered the bully world bringing with it new ideas and policies and stirring up a lot of controversy among the following of the existing registry.

The editors of Dogman wanted to bring all sides of an issue to the bully community, so you can decide for yourself. Too many in our community simply follow the party line without ever stopping to think it's right for them.

So one of our writers sat down with the ABBA founder and Executive Director, Jennifer aka "GRASSHOPPA" Nasheed to get the information straight from the source.

**Q. Okay, first off, let's get this out the way, what is up with the name "GRASSHOPPA"? You don't look like a cricket? (laughing)**

A. It's from the TV show Kung Fu with David Carridine. "Well done Grasshoppa" is what the Kung Fu masters would say to Caine whenever he was able to correctly answer their riddles. To me, the name said that I was a serious student learning from the best.

That is what made me decide to go by GRASSHOPPA. I wanted to let people know that I didn't know everything about bully breeding, which was a great mystery to me when I picked the name, but I relied on great teachers to reveal the answers....the "Bully Fu" masters.

The awesome thing about GRASSHOPPA is that while he was being taught, he was also teaching. The lessons the masters were teaching him, he would teach to others during his travels. I am still doing that in the bully community.....so the name really fits when you look at it like that.

**Q. So who did you learn from?**

A. Every day, I learn something from somebody. I am an eternal student. But the people who were most influential when I started out breeding bullies were Carlton Pratt, Dave Wilson, Ron Ramos, Gary Campbell and Byron Hayes. I was very blessed to be able to come right in the game and be introduced to some of the most experienced and knowledgeable breeders, some of them were pioneers of the American Bully. I asked a lot of question (I had a lot of questions!) and fortunately, I was able to ask the people who could give me the answers.

And this is what made me different from a lot of people. If I ask a question and someone gave me the answer, I followed directions exactly. A lot of people don't do that, they ask a question

and then when they are given the answer, they just ignore it and do what they want to do. Then they wonder why their breedings don't turn out as good as other peoples or why they have so many problems with their program or caring for their dogs, etc! LOL

**Q. So now to the questions everyone is probably wanting to know the most now days, what is the ABBA about and what made you decide to found a new bully registry now when there already was one? And especially since you were so active in the existing registry previously?**

A. (laughs) The \$64,000 question! I get asked that so often, I could explain it in my sleep (and its on the ABBA website over and over) but I am happy to answer the question again for your readers, I want them to have a real understanding of the reasons and hopefully settle this question for once and for all.

I guess a good place to start is by answering the last question first. One of the first lessons I learned when I first began breeding bullies, was that breeding bullies worthy of the show ring was the goal. That was the examples set by the founders of the breed. The dogs in the pedigrees were champions and grand champions and I am a good student, remember? LOL

So I got really involved in showing my dogs and dog shows are held by registries. I attended and supported more than one registry because I didn't really care about the registry, the more registries my dog could succeed in, the better.

And I encouraged other breeders to do the same (back to what I said about learning and also teaching) because when you succeed in producing champion caliber bullies, it takes your kennel and breeding program to the highest level and plus showing was just so much fun.

I have attended and participated in hundreds of shows (I am sort of a show ring fanatic...LOL) but after while I started noticing things that I really didn't agree with. And without going into great detail right now the most important thing was that I became very frustrated with the options that I had, and like I said, I went to a lot of shows and talked to a lot of people so I knew I was not alone in being dissatisfied. There were a lot of people like me that were frustrated too. But unlike most people who just sit around and complain but never do anything about it, I decided to be different and do something different to make things better.

The important thing here is the word "alternative" as in something different. I saw no need to create something that was exactly like was already available. No sense in recreating the wheel.

So I thought a lot about the ramifications of starting a bully breed registry, what I could mean both good and bad. I thought mostly about how I could help the breed and breeders who love

these dogs and very little about worrying about who might not like it. I don't live my life according to what others will think of me. I have a good moral center and plenty of common sense. What matters to me is whether something is worthwhile, honorable, and most important, can I help someone else while benefitting myself. To me, the ultimate goal, the best of both worlds.

**Q. And of course, you thought about the money you could make, right?**

A. Of course, but money was not the only or even the main consideration. I will do this if it only made enough money to pay for itself because that's the problem with our community now, people are throwing what best for the dogs down the toilet in chase of the almighty dollar but I believe that we can be profitable AND do right by the dogs. It doesn't have to be either or.

But, I would love to be able to do this for a living. Very early in life, I was told that the way to find out what you should do for a living is to find something that you love so much that you would do it for free and then find a way to make a living at it. I have been doing that ever since, first it was music then working in corporate America, then real estate and now bullies. They all have that in common, things I loved enough to do for free and that I got paid to do.

There is nothing wrong with making a profit if you give people good value for their money but we are a nonprofit and that means that money in excess of operating costs goes to increasing ABBA programs and services. The money that the ABBA collects enables us to provide premium registry services to our community.

We promptly process our registrations, we operate well organized, safe and professional shows and offer education and training FREE OF CHARGE. So on all accounts, our members get more than what they pay for. All registries should keep that their top priority.

And we give back, charitable support is a cornerstone of the ABBA mission. Every show, we try to find a worthy charity to support, rescues, women and children's organizations. It is important to give back. I been tremendously blessed both financially and with kindness and I feel an obligation to pay it forward. An ultimate goal for the ABBA is to operate our own pit bull rescue and shelter and I have no doubt that we will accomplish that goal the same as our other accomplishments.

I can make a living doing a lot of other things but I really love these dogs. Plus I am one of the few who have the skills and determination for this and most important, I know this is God's Will for me, so this is the path that I am on. It has been challenging but I have been having a good time and everyone who comes to an ABBA show really enjoys it and they get a lot out of it, what I intended. And we are helping people every day. It's awesome.

**Q. I have been to your website and there is a lot of information on it. So in 25 words or less, what is the essence of the ABBA?**

A. That's a challenge for me....to put something in less words.....lol. Actually, the ABBA has several main aims....I was taught that if you are going to do something, do the best you can possibly do. So that really makes the 25 words or less part a real challenge. There were so many ways the ABBA could make a difference without sacrificing our strengths or primary focus that we thought let's go for it. In life, you miss 100% of the shots you don't attempt.

Okay...here goes.....the ABBA is a positive bully breed organization emphasizing structure, dog sports, health and training, education and fun with the goal of rehabilitating the image of the breeds and the community. The ABBA delivers premium registry programs and services with integrity, professionalism and excellent customer service.....That was hard...is that more than 25 words?

**Q. So who all is involved? Who is the ABBA?**

A. The ABBA has from the beginning been a group effort. It simply is too big a job and too important for one person to accomplish everything. It started with me and Reggie Williams in my home office and since then I have been blessed to have talented people from all over the world make valuable contributions at every step in this process. And it has been important to me to make sure that everyone who was involved be recognized and acknowledged for their contributions because people in our community seldom appreciated the way they should be. Seems like people are much faster to try to tear you down instead of giving you the credit and respect you deserve.

It was important to me to get the very best people involved because our community deserves to have the most qualified people possible. And also, we were the first registry to post bios on our website of our staff. That is something I brought over with me from corporate America.

It's important because it adds credibility to our registry (our community). The general public recognizes and respects accomplished people who are experts in their field even if sometimes our own community doesn't. And also, I think that our community should know who the people are who are running the ABBA so they can feel comfortable believing that we will get things like registration processing and judging done fairly and on time.

So those are some the blessings but also most of the challenges of operating the ABBA surround the people.

**Q. Let's talk about that. What is your take on the way things have transpired?**

A. The ABBA has been subjected to a relentless campaign of lies, sabotage, bashing and pressure and sadly, a lot of people who really believe in what we are trying to do and more importantly, would really benefit, have been intimidated and pressured to prevent them from supporting the ABBA or to fall away if they were involved. It is unbelievable because this behavior is unheard of for any legitimate business much less for a dog registry.

But fortunately, that has also been having the opposite effect of drawing people to us and publicizing what the ABBA is trying to do. And the ABBA is forcing others to step their game up and that is benefitting the community. The bully community has been forced to settle for a really long time because they didn't have a choice and now that is all in the past.

The ABBA is bringing premium registry services to the community and the ABBA is here to stay. We are offering a choice....and this is perfect for a lot of people because they don't want to support or endorse activities that they don't agree with.

It's been challenging but also rewarding and mainly, this is just part of my journey. The stakes are very high but I am strong and 100% committed to seeing this through and fortunately, so are the rest of the ABBA team because I couldn't do it alone.

**Q. I am sure you have been asked, why do we need or want another bully registry?**

A. As far as want....Americans like having a choice....that is why America is not a dictatorship. We want to choose our leaders. The ABBA in the bully world is natural....like Democrats and Republicans....like Academy Awards and the People's Choice. Like the AKC and the UKC....a natural evolution...people always want something different...they are always looking for the next big thing.....

It would have been nice if there wasn't a need but there was. There was no place for people to go who wanted to compete with their bully dogs in something other than conformation. There was a need for a bully resource to provide information and resources on conformation, training, health and behavior. There was a need for a bully organization to be a leader in the fight against BSL and MSN. And most of all, there was a real need to improve the fairness and consistency of judging practices and the ABBA was intended to offer an alternative to all the above.

I think the reason why so many people are upset with me is because I was just about the only one brave enough to speak on these issues publicly. And no one ever could ever accuse me of lying or that my statements aren't true. I just said publicly what everyone was complaining about privately.

But since this is all true so why get mad at me? People really ought to be mad at those who were denying them fair judging and took their money and wasted their time and still didn't send the registration papers.

**Q. So what makes the ABBA different or better?**

A. Whether or not the ABBA is better is up to members of the community to decide. I think the ABBA is different because it is definitely more fun and more interesting and educational than any conformation dog show I have ever been too! And it is different because no other registry that I know of has as its primary goals to be fair, professional and fun....and delivers on it every time! And no other bully breed registry has stated that one of its primary missions is to rehabilitate the image of the pit bull and other breeds similarly stigmatized. The ABBA has been and is still vocal and active in its efforts to change the way the public views these dogs.

Another way we are different is.....there are only two registries that recognize the American Bully and the other registry does not have a performance program, an educational program, a training program or a Jr Handler program. The ABBA does. The ABBA also has DNA profiling and CGC. We are different and we are striving to be the best. Who wants to work to be the second best? Not us

**Q. What is something people don't know about you?**

A. I have been through a lot in my life and all of it has a part in why doing this right now is the only option for me.

A little more than 5 years ago, I was diagnosed with breast cancer and initially the news was not good. I thought I was going to die for months and during that time, I planned my funeral and put my affairs in order. I can't explain how traumatic it was to tell my husband and kids that Mom might not be around much longer. It was really hard.

Fortunately, God blessed me to have successful surgery and chemotherapy and I have been cancer free ever since but then I developed serious liver problems and I am still dealing with that. Going thru all that changed me forever, I probably won't die from old age and that's okay, I am going to make the most of the life I have. The most important thing I learned is tomorrow is not promised so don't put off a single thing that you can do today. And I also live my life with the thought "If this was my last day, would I be happy with the way I lived my life today?" Thinking like that makes me keep things in perspective. I can easily tell what is really important. So when it came to the decision to start the ABBA, this was an opportunity for me a make a difference not just for me and my family but for a whole community and that is a legacy that I

would be proud to leave. If I died today, and people asked, What was Jennifer doing the day she died” the answer would be that I was trying to make a positive difference, and I am proud of that.

**Q. What is the one thing you would change right now today in the bully world, if you could (besides the obvious)?**

If I could, I would require everyone to go to a class before they would be allowed to breed bullies. The class would teach the proper way to care for breeding dogs and pups, genetics and training. After going to the class, they would take a test and once they passed, they could breed bullies. The ignorance in our community is killing the breed literally and figuratively.

**Q. What are the future plans and goals for the ABBA?**

The ABBA has big plans for 2010 and beyond. In 2010, we are planning for there to be an ABBA show every month on average somewhere in the world. We are planning 4 international shows as of today and hoping to add maybe 1 or 2 more.

We are planning to fully introduce our performance program which is still being designed but is very very near introduction. The performance program will probably be our most dynamic program changing as new sports and activities are added. We want to have Spring Pole Hang Time, Family Protection, Agility and Obedience...but Bully Style.....not the same stuff that is around but with a twist to make it more fun, more exciting and most important MORE ACCESSIBLE to our community who may not have the time, money or trainers to enable participation in traditional dog sports.

In other areas, we will continue to recruit top notch trainers, judges and other professionals to make the ABBA the best registry the world has ever seen. We are planning joint events with other registries and organizations including, UKC, IOEBA, Remyline, Mikeland Federation and others. And our DNA profiling program and our Canine Citizen Program will become widespread and popular and hopefully other organizations will follow suit.

We have big dreams and big plans and why not? We deserve the best and nobody is going to hand it to us, we have to do it for ourselves....and we will. And we hope the bully world will join us.

The End

