

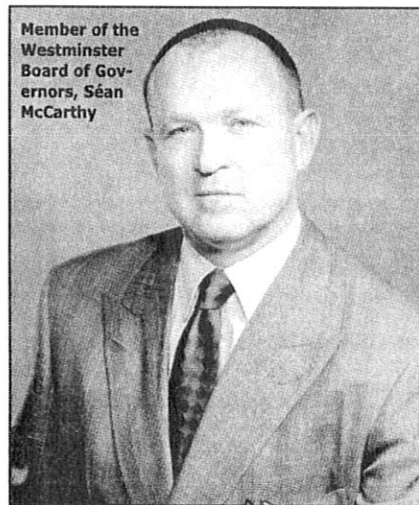
An Interview with Séan McCarthy

Chief Ring Steward and a Vice President of Westminster Kennel Club

“I think you need to know why you’re doing what you do in dogs. The people who are in dogs for a long period of time do it because it’s not about the winning—it’s about the dogs. Your goal should be to make better dogs. I think there’s something to be said about reminding oneself that it’s not about the ribbons, it’s about making the dogs better. You hear people talk about the 5-year horizon in dogs. It’s because some people get frustrated after they’ve won all the ribbons they want—that’s what it was all about for them. There’s a ‘career path’ in dogs, a life path if you will, that surrounds the fact that you’re trying to make better dogs and enjoy being part of this fraternity or community of people who love dogs. If it’s the ribbons you’re after, ultimately you’ll have an itch you can’t scratch.”—Séan McCarthy

I had the distinct honor and pleasure to sit in Séan’s office in Manhattan in December to have an inspiring interview. Séan is the CEO of Assured Guaranty, a firm that guarantees bond issues. It’s a prosperous company and Séan has done very well for himself. What’s remarkable is that he’s used some of his success to make a mark in the dog world with the aim of bettering every breed he’s been involved with.

When the elevator doors open on the 28th floor of 31 West 52nd Street, one is ushered into a different world. Down below, there is the usual chaos of midtown Manhattan. People



Member of the Westminster Board of Governors, Séan McCarthy

rushing everywhere with things to do, cabs running down pedestrians who are trying to beat the lights. Here, on the 28th floor, you are surrounded by glass, wood, and beauty. Wonderful contemporary art hangs on the walls. It’s quiet. I’ve thought about this place a lot since I was there. It’s a place for great thinking. If I ever want to sit sometime and

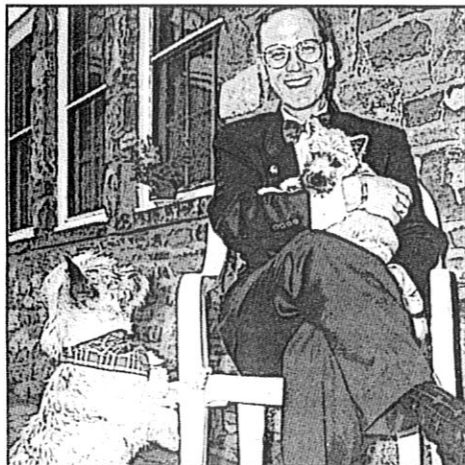
have great thoughts, this would be the place to do it.

The receptionist directed me to a comfortable spot to wait for “Mr. McCarthy”. I wandered over to the floor-to-ceiling windows and looked out toward Rockefeller Center. This part of Manhattan has always energized me. There are lots of exciting places in Manhattan, but here in midtown is where the heart pumps and the blood courses through the veins. Looking down on it heightened the feeling. Behind me, an open staircase led up to the next floor. I never saw what was there, but I’ll bet the view is magnificent. I hope I can go back one day just to visit the floor above. Maybe it will inspire even greater thoughts....

Séan McCarthy bounded around the corner of the receptionist’s station. I’ve known Séan for a while—certainly not decades, but a short time. Every time I’ve seen him he’s wearing a huge smile that lights up everything around him. He’s not only a happy person, but a positive thinker with a clear sense of direction. He’s an inspiring person, someone who moves you to want to leap onto the high road with him. He makes you feel as if there’s plenty of room to join him.

You’ll find Séan’s name in the Westminster catalog, listed as the Chief Ring Steward of Westminster Kennel Club. He is also a Vice President of WKC, as well as a member of the Board of Governors. In the dog world, clubs are often scrounging to get stewards for their shows. It’s quite different for Westminster. “Our waiting list is very long,” he told me. “We try to give assignments in the fairest way possible”. Indeed, a stewarding assignment at Westminster is a big honor.

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BY KARL M. STEARNS

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We sat at one end of Séan's beautiful office and he began to tell me his story—how he began his love for purebred dogs, about his childhood, his own family, what he enjoys besides his involvement with dogs. It's my privilege to relay the story to you.

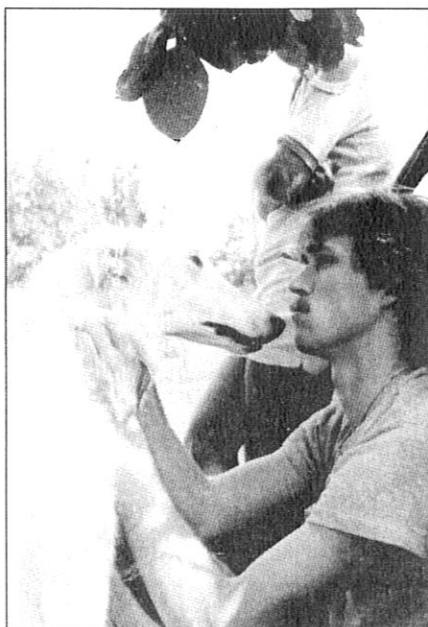
Séan attended dog shows at Ladies' Kennel Club when he was young. For part of his early life, he lived in Ireland. You can still hear a trace of an Irish brogue when he speaks. "We always went to the Dublin Horse Show," he said. "There were dog shows in conjunction with the horse show. They had kid events, etc., and I was an avid fan of dogs." He started in dogs with an English Bulldog. "Not a very good one," he remarked.

Séan was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts when his dad was in graduate school. His dad went on to run the UN Development Bank. The family moved to Ireland for a time, and then eventually moved to Maine where Séan grew up. They lived in Christmas Cove and Bangor and Séan went to boarding school at Phillips Exeter Academy. We got chatting about Bar Harbor, ME, one of my favorite spots on Earth, and Séan told me he spent 5 summers there working in Geddy's Pub. He tended bar, and was a chef at another place. In his enthusiastic description he said, "It was great! You could sail all day and then work at night!"

When Séan went away to Georgetown University, he wanted to get a dog. Since he ran track in college, he wanted to get a dog he could run with. His selection was a Borzoi, which he obtained from Paul Einstein (Kalinka). He enjoyed some remarkable success: "He was a lure course dog that went on to win the national championship in lure coursing," Séan recalled. "I was 19 years old, travelling all over the place with this great dog I could run with." In time, the desire to have a show dog surfaced. It was the start of a long relationship with John Reeve-Newson and Richard Meen.

"I saw Dick and John at some shows in Washington. I made an appointment to go to their kennel in Campbellville, ONT, Canada. I got a dog from them and showed it. We had a long standing relationship in terms of owning and showing dogs together, about 20 years. They had quite a few breeds, but where we overlapped was in Borzoi. By then, I had gotten married and was starting my involvement in Jack Russell Terriers. I was one of the early people in that breed. I was head of the Judge's Committee, and active in the Jack Russell Terrier Club of America. I used to host a big show for them in North Salem, NY. One of my JRT's won their national specialty. I bred JRT's for a long, long time."

The pathway through dogs wends its way into many breeds for Séan. He has been particularly partial to "14 inch" terriers. He has owned Lakelands with Jean Heath and Bill Cosby. He has also had Wire Fox Terriers that Peter Green showed for him. Bobby Fisher showed Lakelands for him on the East coast. Séan lived in Beverly Hills for about 5 years, one block from Gloria Reese. With the move back East to care for a larger portion of Assured Guaranty, there was a desire to live in Manhattan. "We wanted a townhouse, so of course we needed a dog that was good for living downtown. We got



Séan finds a breed to run track with in college: the Borzoi

a French Bulldog, who we still have. Michael Scott showed it for us. Currently our house dog in Manhattan is a Tibetan Terrier we got from David Murray. She's a little over a year old, and very loved. She's my wife's pet. When she finishes her championship, we'll campaign her."

Michael Scott introduced Pointers into the McCarthys' lives. Séan commented, "Dick and John were moving

away from breeding and into judging. Michael introduced me to Pointers and it started a 10-year love affair with the breed. We have a partnership with Helyne Mederios (Seasyde Pointers). I get all the fun parts of being in the Pointer world and Helyne does a wonderful job with all the hard parts. It's a great relationship, very similar to what I did with Dick and John for many years. We have a dog in Europe that's won a couple of Best In Shows, and we'll show at Crufts this year. He's the son of Holly. We did quite a bit of winning with Holly. Her son took winners dog at the national this year. We have a number of other young dogs we're going to continue to campaign." Dogs in the McCarthy family are rotated between homes in Manhattan, East Hampton, and the Turks and Caicos Islands. (Note to myself: I want to be a dog in Séan's house.)

Séan has enjoyed a circle of associates and mentors over the years that have enhanced his participation in dogs. He spoke fondly of these people and how he feels about what he's accomplished. "I've been very fortunate to be associated though my life with wonderful people in the dog world. I started with Dick and John, Jean Heath, Peter Green, Bobby Fisher, Michael and Michelle Scott. If I was a dog, I'd want to be with Michael and Michelle.

They make sure the dogs are well-cared for and happy. It's important for me and my family because the dogs that live with us before and after their show careers are pets and live in our homes. When we showed Holly, our pointer, she became the top sporting dog in history. We could have shown her another year or two beyond that, but the purpose of doing this is to show them and breed them. While she was a once-in-a-lifetime dog, Holly's impact on the sport of dogs with her progeny is what is most important. I think that's the most exciting part of being in dogs. We have about 20 pointers from different litters at different ages and I feel as if we've done a good thing for the breed. I felt years ago we did the same for Jack Russells when they were short legged, long backed dogs and we sort of worked the breed into something more traditional."

Séan recalled for me some of his early days in showing. "I was a terrible handler. I used to get so nervous. It was the only thing I ever got nervous with. Going into dog shows was nerve wracking. One time in Colorado I was showing. Gerda Kennedy was the judge. I was flubbing

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everything terribly. At one point she came over to me and said 'It's OK honey. I'm on your side. Just take him up and back.' She had the patience of a saint when I was such a terrible handler. She was very kind to me."

McCarthy's success in dogs has been achieved with help from people who have been important to him. Frequently, he refers to "the community" he views as the collective people in the dog world. He explained: "The dog show community has brought a lot of great things in my life. It is unique because it exists wherever dog people gather. These are people I've known for a large part of my life. They have a real passion for what they do. I remember camping out at shows with Dennis Sprung and Roger Rechler. Roger used to have parties before the Garden show. The caviar he served was such an indulgence! The real sense of community is highlighted in so many ways in the dog world. For example, Take the Lead is such a unique organization formed to help people in the dog world who are disadvantaged. I hope I have a 50 year relationship with Helyne. I think she has the most integrity of anyone I've ever met inside the dog world or anywhere else. She's a wonderful person." He has also found ways to give back by serving for many years on the board of the ASPCA, the board of the Dog Museum, and the board of the Scholarship Fund at Georgetown University. He also involves himself in numerous smaller charities as well.

In his world outside dogs, McCarthy has been in the financial guaranty business for 25 years. The business is a very narrow niche of the broader finance world. Séan told me a bit about Assured Guaranty. "The original company was formed by Jim Lopp who hired me out of college. I started in this very building almost 30 years ago. This business has recently been very exciting, but volatile. I have had to testify in Washington about a dozen times in the last four years as an expert. We've tried to help clarify and read through the issues of what has caused problems in the market. Our company has done well because of the quality of the underwriters we have here. I'm very fortunate to have great people to work with."

I mentioned earlier the contemporary art displayed all over the 28th floor. McCarthy doesn't consider it an investment but a passion, something he and his wife Tammy enjoy. Their interest is in contemporary art in the range of abstract to figurative art. The collection includes pieces from Joan Mitchell, a painter from the 50's to young painters from Miami—about 400 pieces in all. In addition to a love for art, the family loves to salt water fly fish and sail on their old-fashioned, fully restored sailboat. Diving is another interest. And one other thing: "I love to cook," he said. "We do a lot of that."

Our conversation turned to Westminster Kennel Club. Séan said this: "I love working with the club. I first came to Westminster when I was in college and I showed a Borzoi here when they had open classes. One of the great traditions of the Club is they have members



Séan and his lure-coursing champion Borzoi

sitting down on the ramp, the Ramp Committee. They focus on greeting people. As an exhibitor, you're nervous, your whole life is flashing before your eyes. The show is so unique in the dog world. So, when I first became a member of Westminster I was on the Ramp Committee. For me, even today, seeing the faces of people coming into the show is incredible. You can see and feel the excitement they are feeling. Logistically, the Club is very fortunate to have Florence Foti as Director of Operations. Tom Bradley's (show Chairman) immense experience with the show

really makes things run smoothly. My job is largely mechanical, and I feel very fortunate that I can be part of such a well-run organization." He went on to describe the work done to make the show happen. "By December, everything is pretty much in place and we're getting the final strokes of implementation in place. Most of the big decisions have been made, so it's just a matter of executing. This year will be a challenge because of the construction at the Garden but we've spent a LOT of time both in our organization and with the superintendent to make sure everything goes as smoothly as possible."

Something that makes Séan particularly proud is the work done with the New York Academy of Art to develop this year's Westminster poster. The Club held a contest that narrowed the field down to 5 finalists. Then the winner was chosen. The original painting was donated by the Club to the Animal Medical Center. Séan was enthused as he spoke about it. "I think it's great to find ways to draw Westminster Kennel Club and the people of New York City together. Westminster's goal is to support the dog world and our local community, to give something back to everyone."

Séan showed me a picture of his children. He really beamed. "Tammy and I have four children between us. They range from 13-22. We're in the power-curve of the teen years. The oldest, Lucas, just graduated from Amherst, where he was the quarterback. The next, Kaylee, is graduating from The Lawrenceville School this year. Then Patrick is a sophomore at St. Paul's, a boarding school in New Hampshire, and Christine is at home with us suffering as an only child. She and the dogs get lots of attention."

We often flip past the page in a premium or catalog on which is listed the club members and officers. Sometimes we know some of them, but we may not know their story—what has brought them to the world of dogs, what the rest of their lives are all about—and indeed how they've participated in this community we're in. I hope when you see the name Séan McCarthy in the Westminster catalog, you'll feel now as I do—that you've come to know a really fine person. Séan has added something to make each breed of dogs he's had better and has worked behind the scenes in many ways to enhance the dog world and the people in it. His presence is uplifting and inspiring. I'm glad this community includes him as my neighbor!