

## **Robert L. Barker, Founder of the Giant Schnauzer Club of America**

1916-2000

by Yvonne Schilla

Reprinted from Giant Steps © -May/Jane2000

In 1961 Bob and Bonnie Barker, who were breeding and showing miniature and standard schnauzers in Detroit, saw a newspaper advertisement for a Giant Schnauzer litter, 6 months old. They found the litter in a barn near Buffalo NY. Ch. Schatzie Die Rhine Madchen CD returned to Michigan with them and became the stimulus to start the Giant Schnauzer Club of America. Bob felt the dogs needed a club to help them as well as encourage camaraderie and exchange information among the owners. A newsletter, GIANT STEPS, was started. Bob wrote the articles and Bonnie did the typing and cranked a mimeograph machine every month. It was on legal size paper with show news and discussions on various topics. New people were introduced and members utilized it to maintain contact with each other. STEPS brought cohesiveness and focus to Giant Schnauzer fanciers.

Both before and during World War II Bob had been an Army hospital administrator. He was an attorney with degrees from what is now Wayne State University in Detroit. Shortly after Bob was born in Washington DC, his father moved the family with seven children to Detroit. When Bob and Bonnie met, they soon found a common interest in dogs.

The Barkers entered Schatzie in shows, but not finding any competition in Michigan, they tried Illinois. There was no competition until they attended shows in Chicago, where they met Tom and Julia Bagley. They in turn introduced the Barkers to the breeder of Schatzie's sire, Vigilant Chum CD. And of course this was Catherine "Kit" Brown. They with a few others (Fred Crapo, Zenon Hansen) established the nucleus of the GSCA.

Later at a show in Ohio they saw a young dog (about 4 months old) who could not stand. Hip dysplasia was the diagnosis. In the 1960s some were x-raying German Shepherd Dogs, but on the whole dog owners were oblivious to the danger. Upon returning home Barkers had their imported male examined and discovered he was dysplastic. Here was a dog with points and a promising show career, able to easily jump a four foot hurdle, and, even more important, a welcome addition to the tight gene pool. The dog was immediately neutered and placed in a home as a well loved family pet. Bob used his editorial space in GIANT STEPS to tell all about this new pathology.

Many club members were concerned with the limited gene pool available here. The plan was to enlarge the gene pool with judicious importation of dogs. Bob corresponded with Ernst Sprenger-Gruner, the breeder of the Krayenrain/de la Steingasse Giants in Switzerland. The Krayenrain kennel was the premier kennel in Europe at this time. With these importations and the increased activity in the show ring, the numbers of Giants started to increase greatly.

Over the years the Barkers bred and showed not only the three schnauzer breeds, but Kerry Blue Terriers, Toy Manchesters and Shar Pei. All were considered house dogs. When asked during an interview which was her favorite dog, Bonnie said Schatzie was THE dog. While she had been raised in a kennel with little socialization, within a week of her arrival Schatzie took on the task of guarding the two boys, lining up with the minis for coffee and buttered toast in the morning and keeping the rest of the four foots in proper place. Growling and fighting were unnecessary, she just gave that "schnauzer look".

Bonnie also said Giants are her favorite breed. She finds them to be fantastic animals. While protective, they are loving and playful with her children. They are loyal and adaptable as well. Her last Giant, Beau, died at thirteen last December and Bob died in March after fourteen years in the Michigan Home for Veterans. For several years Bonnie made the six hour round trip every week to be with Bob, even though he was little aware of his surroundings. As Bob's condition deteriorated, the trips were cut to two a month. Beau, of course, went with her to visit Bob and all the other veterans. Loyal, loving, protective yet playful and adaptable-that describes a Giant.