

Cats Who Mattered

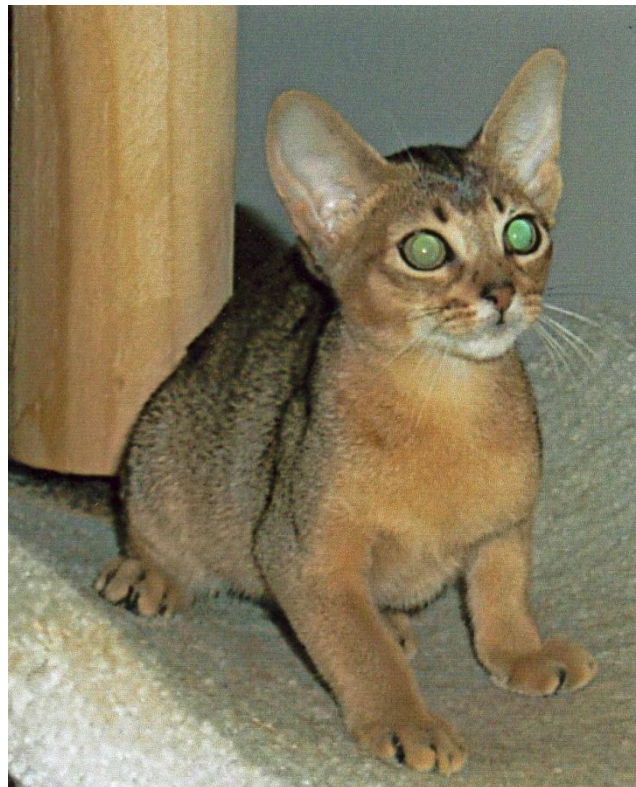
CCCA Gr Ch, Gold Dbl Gr Ch & (US) Gr Ch Zzaby's Pipe Dream, DM

My good friend Sylvia Fitzgerald died earlier this year, leaving behind a married son, some excellent Abys that were quickly re-homed by Aby friends in San Diego, and so many good memories. Sylvia was born in England, and her father brought her out to Australia, where she stayed long enough in Sydney to be Miss Bronte Beach 1958! She subsequently met Jim Fitzgerald, married and moved to the US, and in 1966 started breeding Abyssinians under the Phaulkon cattery name. She then became a CFA shorthair judge, and an excellent one at that.

By the time I met Sylvia, in the early 1980s, Jim had long gone, Phaulkon Abys were justly famous, and Sylvia had acquired an abiding passion for baseball in general and the San Diego Padres in particular. I visited whenever a business trip took me nearby, and I saw all the cats at home. I actually saw and greatly admired the famous "Rider" (Gr Ch Phaulkon's Ridin' High, DM) when he was a young cat in 1985, in his middle years, and just before he died in 1999. I was even able to arrange for Sylvia to judge at The Abyssinian Cat Club of Australasia's 1988 show.

So when I started looking for a new stud to import in 2000, it was to Sylvia I turned for advice – she recommended Karyn Dillard, of Zzaby Abyssinians in Little Rock, AK, and to underscore the recommendation, told me that she herself was getting a male from Karyn.

I corresponded with Karyn, liked the pedigrees and



Piper at 13 weeks

photos I got, and arranged to visit her on a trip to the US in May 2000. I had also arranged to get a Clarion female kitten, but the rabies shot and titres for her were irretrievably stuffed up at the US end, so I wound up with just the boy from Karyn. Piper was lovely (and nameless) at 13 weeks, and I could see his dad, Gr Ch, RW Zzaby's Cigar, who was then four years old, so I had a good idea what Piper might grow into. Karyn agreed to let me have the kitten, though there was a stumbling block – his name. Because his dad was Cigar, Karyn wanted a smoking name, but as a reformed smoker, I definitely didn't! I eventually offered Pipe Dream as a compromise, which was accepted.

As a "touristy" thing on my second day in Little rock, Karyn offered to take me to the house where Bill Clinton was born, or to the late Elvis Presley's home, Graceland, in nearby Memphis, TN. I chose the latter, Karyn got behind the steering wheel, and once we got to Memphis, we were lost. Karyn said she had a map on the back seat of her Mazda 626, but when I looked, I saw hundreds of maps, so I suggested we stop and ask someone. She put her hand on my arm and said "You're a man but you're prepared to ask



Gr Ch, RW Zzaby's Cigar



“Grand” Piper (photo Chanan)

for directions?!” We got to Graceland soon afterwards and I thoroughly enjoyed the visit to a lovely Southern mansion which was surprisingly tastefully furnished and arranged.

I also saw the kitten Sylvia was getting, Zzaby’s Jackalope, and was able to report to Sylvia when I visited her a few days later, that he was very nice indeed, with preternaturally large ears. That was the last time I saw Sylvia, but we corresponded and spoke many times, and she had recently even got e-mail.

Piper was the first of our American imports who did not to have to undergo prolonged, complicated entry requirements, consisting of six months of quarantine and then six months’ residence in the UK followed by three months’ quarantine here, or something similar but with Hawaii as the intermediate point. By Piper’s time, new, much more enlightened rules had been implemented, which are in force to this day. A cat bred in a country where rabies was known both to exist and be well controlled, now had to undergo the following procedure:

1. Be microchipped and vaccinated against rabies, from the age of 12 weeks;
2. Not less than four weeks later, have a blood sample taken and tested by a laboratory approved by the Australian Government agency, AQIS.
3. If the result of the blood titre is “yes, this cat has been vaccinated against rabies, but no, it does not have rabies”, a calendar starts ticking

and the cat can come out of quarantine in Australia 180 days later.

4. The options then are that the cat can spend 30 days in the US and 150 days in quarantine here, or increasing periods (in 30 day increments) back home and correspondingly shorter periods in quarantine in Oz. I chose the “minimum quarantine option”, where Piper just had to spend 30 days at Eastern Creek.

While Piper was back home, awaiting “deportation” to Australia, he could be shown, and was, by Karyn, though I paid for the show entries. Under CFA rules, he became a cat at eight months, and by 12 months he became a Grand Champion, at a show just south of Houston, TX.. He was on the plane to Sydney two weeks later. Consequently, he was the first American import to “go Grand” before departure.

Piper arrived in quarantine in late January 2001 and endured his 30 days’ without too much trouble, as you can see it in the photo below. This was aided by our ability to visit him twice per week – what an improvement on yesteryear!

When our first American imports arrived in 1980, quarantine visiting hours were 2-4 p.m. on the 3rd Thursday of each of the three months. When I had the temerity to ask the quarantine manager why we couldn’t visit them more often, the answer was: “because this is a quarantine station, mate, not a bloody zoo”!

Piper quickly adapted to his cat run here, and went to his first cat show within 10 days of coming out of the “nick”. The experience was remarkably trouble-free, except that he ran into Nile Oberon and came second to him in every ring. This happened for most of 2001, but Piper did manage a few Best in Show awards, including The Abyssinian Breeder show that year,



Piper in quarantine

where he was Best Cat in one ring and R/U to Supreme cat.

His first litter, to Nile Bird Of Paradise (Baby Bird), arrived in June, consisting of a Tawny male and two Tawny females. We had an international competition for the kitten names, and Ian Duffy came up with the superb suggestion of *Hillbilly* for the boy, noting that Piper came from Little Rock, Clinton country, and Arkansans have often been portrayed as hillbillies. Hillbilly went to Sue Jentsch in Melbourne. The better female was called *First Lady*, and she went to Georgina O'Connor in Christchurch. The "other female" was of course called *Monica*, and she went as a pet to a German teacher in Kuranda, in North Queensland.

Two problems arose during Piper's first year with us. One was that his show temperament deteriorated, and we nearly didn't get him through the 2001 CCCA National show. This was a 6-ringer held in Canberra, and because they didn't have a hall big enough for all the exhibits, they cunningly halved the hall size requirements by having six rings for cats on one day, and six rings for kittens the next day. That fixed their problem but exacerbated Piper's. Still, with the help of lots of friends, we got him through the show, and he was even R/U to Best Gr 3 Cat in one ring.

The other problem – which remained until he was neutered and re-homed – was that Piper was a very poor eater, and I used to have to spend at least an hour per day with him to try to entice him to eat. No matter what delicacy we tried, it was much the same every time: feed Piper, check a while later and find he hadn't touched his food, sit in his run with Piper walking up and down my legs and me waving the dish under his nose. It's just as well that I had recently retired, and could afford the time for this. His appetite improved enormously when he was neutered, and if

you want to know by how much, you can cheat and look at the last photo. Life being what it is (a female dog!) we subsequently discovered Periactin, and its benefits in giving cats an appetite.

2002 was a very good year for Piper. He did well at shows, including The Abyssinian Breeder show, where he was Best Cat in one ring, his first son, Hillbilly, was best in the second ring, and his younger son, Piper Aztec, was Best Cat in the 3rd ring. Piper then went on to be Supreme Exhibit, with Hillbilly as the runner-up. Piper also had several good wins back home, and finished the year as R/U to Gr 3 Male Cat



Piper in late 2005, just before he went to his pet home

of the year in NSW. Studding was also going very well, although we did get the odd straight profile. His next top kitten after Hillbilly – also to Baby Bird – was Nile Ganymede, who won several times as a young kitten before going to June Paul in South Africa, for whom he became All-Breed Cat of the Year and winner of an all-expenses-paid holiday. Hillbilly was 4th Gr 3 Kitten and R/U to Gr 3 Cat of the year in Victoria.

By 2003, it was apparent that Piper was setting a new style for Abyssinians in Australia. It was a combination of his appearance – body type, head type, and particularly ear placement and size – and the quality and spread of his progeny. We were not being restrictive with his

line (kittens went with restrictions like "must not be at open stud until the age of 2"), and so his descendants went forth and multiplied. In late 2002, Sue Hatcher near Sydney imported a beautiful American stud, (US) Ch Unkamen Territory, who was of a similar style, and in many ways reinforced it. By the end of the year, in addition to Hillbilly (VIC), First Lady (NZ), Piper Aztec (SA) and Ganymede (South Africa) doing well, there was also Maltese Falcon (WA), Play It Again Sam (TAS) and our own Sabrina Fair. This was the year when Hillbilly was Stud Cat of the Year and Piper a close second.

Calamity struck in 2004. Sue Jentsch had heard from a Canadian Aby breeder that a Zzaby cat back in the States was suffering from a genetic condition known as pyruvate-kinase deficiency, which was heritable and had already killed off some Abys through cyclical anaemia. PK deficiency is much more familiar now and apparently less deadly than originally thought, but back then the news was terrifying. Fortunately, a genetic test was available in the US, such that if you sent the laboratory a blood sample, they could examine the DNA and determine whether a cat was affected, a carrier, or normal.. Sue had Hillbilly tested and he was a carrier: Disaster — what had I brought in and unwittingly visited an Australian Aby breeders?! Piper tested as a carrier, and it was a bit of a relief that he wasn't affected, because some of his offspring could thus be normal, and so they were, but some were also carriers. At the same time, other breeders in Australia tested their cats and discovered PK deficiency that must have come from at least two sources unrelated to Piper

To get a grip on the situation, and because PK deficiency was also breaking out in the US and Europe, I organised an on-line forum that generated questions that I put to Dr Urs Giger, the Swiss-born veterinary scientist who had isolated the disease and designed the DNA test for it. The information thus generated was tremendously helpful in that it pointed to the path to be followed — test your cats; look after the affected ones but do not breed from them; breed



Piper in June 2010 (photo Anne Leahy)

carriers with normal cats to the extent possible; gradually desexed and re-home carriers, having first ensured that you do not lose any important lines,

The results of that questionnaire are still useful, and still on my Web site at http://www.nileabys.com/pk_deficiency.htm

Those were very trying times, when the price of a good friend was above rubies, to adapt the Bible. I wondered if Sue Jentsch knew how close we came to giving up breeding?

We continued to use Piper as a stud, but of course all kittens were tested for PK deficiency. Fortunately, it was now possible to use buccal swabs, sent by ordinary air-mail rather than express post. We stopped showing him, but by then he'd reached the levels of CCCA Gr Ch and NSW Gold Dbl Gr Ch. Those, as far as I know, are still the highest ever attained in Australia by an imported cat.

In 2005, we were well along the road to eliminating PK deficiency carriers. That is a lot easier to say now than it was to do then, because it required parting with some very good friends. We had a grandson of Piper's, Phantom Of Hope, who could replace him at stud, and was PK deficiency free. However, we still got some good offspring from Piper, like Gr Ch Nile Pay The Piper, and so did Carol Collins in Gr Ch Johari Africander, and so did Jenny McKernan with Asmara Crown Of Ishoa and Asmara Crown Of Bushido, as did Diane Oates with Gold Ch Shadowlea Dream Beau and Eur Ch Shadowlea Beautiful Dreamer, and finally the late Julia Koppe with ACF AoE & Gold Dbl Gr Ch Lear Possum Dreaming..

In early 2006 Piper was neutered, and regretfully rehomed because we couldn't get him to stop spraying in our house that is full of entire females. However, Piper loved his great new home, and enjoyed having a 4-legged companion who joined him, Nile Betelgeuse, his great grand-daughter on both sides. Piper also became a DM in 2006, a Distinguished Merit cat because at least 15 of his offspring had become Champions or higher. He was the first Aby male to gain this honour, and is still the only one

As at July 2010, Piper's grandson, CCCA Gr Ch & Diamond Dbl Gr Ch Nile To Travel Hopefully, who was diagnosed as PK deficiency affected, is perfectly well, and hasn't had a day's illness in his 6½ years with us. Piper is also very much alive and well, as you can see from the adjoining photo. Of course, he is also lurking on a lot of your pedigrees.

George Kennedy
Nile Abyssinians