

## **PRESERVE OUR ANCIENT LEGACY**



### **ONCE UPON A TIME**

In the late 1800s, my great-grandmother Charlotte, who owned a string of hotels in London, received a Chow Chow in lieu of payment for accommodation from an actress. Unfortunately, there is no record of who the actress was or how she came by the dog herself, but so began a family tradition of Chow ownership, now passing into the fifth generation.

My grandmother, Doreen Grant, went on to become the first breeder and importer of Chows into South Africa, eventually establishing Grant's Kennels in Rivonia in 1934. All my life, I have only ever lived with Chows, as has my mother, and her mother, and her mother before that.

Over the years I have seen the popularity of the breed grow – and, with it, the evolution into a “furry bulldog”, hardly recognizable as a Chow. I urge all those who are serious about the breed, and particularly breeders themselves, to contemplate the words of Miss CE Collett, who wrote the seminal book on the breed in 1953, and whose work is, so far, unparalleled in epistemic breadth and depth.

I am particularly impressed by her extensive palaeontological research into the ancient origins of the Chow, including a detailed explanation of the “bear ancestry” myth. This book is a **MUST** in the library of every Chow enthusiast!

## TYPE

Included are some photographs from my grandmother's photo-album. Perhaps these may aid as a reminder of the original Chow Chow type.



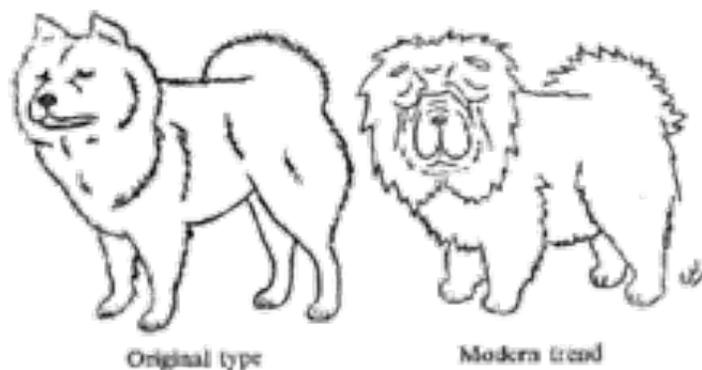
The first two are of Doreen Grant, as she was then (later Schoeman), on Rivonia farm, where she formally established Grant's Kennels in 1934. The one with the adult dogs, although the photograph is in worse condition, does show quite clearly, I think, Chow Chows a lot closer to the "Chow VIII" prototype than anything on show today.

How, I wonder, can we *justify* moving from that to what we know today?



The diagram below, taken from Miss Collett's book (p113) I think explicitly depicts the modern exaggerations. This is what she had to say about it, back in 1952 already:

"Breeds become subject to passing fashions which are not helpful in safeguarding the original characteristics, and continual interfering with leading features, either by exaggerations or eliminations, leads to the final destruction of the very features that are the main characteristics. And we cannot revert to the original form, for there is no return ticket with evolution. Thousands of years ago the Chow Chow was 'found worthy of the use of man' and developed as a multi-purpose animal primarily for hunting, guarding and herding. What has been so carefully preserved over the centuries should not be wantonly destroyed for a whim or passing fashion."





The next photograph is of our family “pet” Chow, bred by Doreen at the start of the 60s and known as Chan at home. We brought him over from the UK when we immigrated to South Africa in 1968. He won a number of small prizes locally, although he was never toured at all. At the time this photograph was taken, my mother was pregnant and, with 4 small children, there wasn’t time for all the show palava! Quite frankly, I think, having grown up in the middle of, my mother just didn’t have the energy for it all! At any rate, you can see how the “style” had changed in those 20 years, yet type remained essentially true.

Below is a photograph of Gran’s Golden Boy, who sired the famous Multi BIS Ch Grant’s Bogum Chang of Ningpo – both bred by Doreen Grant – and owned by Barney and Martha Rogoff.



## SIZE

Kai was my mother's dog (no photograph available), born in 1974 of the last of Doreen's "good" breeding – perfectly proportioned (broad chest, "heavy" build – though not relative to the "bulldog" type), very short coat in dark self-red, 62cm at the withers – and he is the last "large" Chow I've ever seen, to be perfectly honest, although in the period 1969 to 1974 I remember many of my grandmother's dogs being at least that large.

What a pity that none of the registrations required adult height! Just checking back to the "standards", I see the original English standard specified ONLY a minimum 18", no maximum. Then later, looks like mid to late 1950s, the standard changed to 19"-22". The American standard specifies 17"-20" – so perhaps it was in trying to get the HEIGHT down that they started turning out the "furry bulldog" type!

I am very concerned to see Chow Clubs and Kennel Clubs approving smaller and smaller maximum heights to be added to breed standards, as this is not in keeping with the original type.

Weight and size: Minimum height for Chows to be 18 inches.  
Some years ago Mr AO Grindley collected a number of heights of dogs and bitches who were celebrities of the late thirties and mid forties and a selection is given here:

Ch Choonam Hung Kwong	22"
Ch Choonam Mong Yen	20"
Ch Choonam Mei Su Tang	19"
Ch Sabu	20"
Ch Viking of Barwick	20"
Ch Anthea of Barwick	20"
Ch Li Wu Fah	19"
Ch Linslee Boy Blue	21"
Ch Mandarin of Adel	19"
Ch Peach of Silverway	19"
Wong of Silverway	22"
Minos of Adel	22"
Brutus of Ho-Ping	20"
Choonam Hu Chung	21"
Heworth Marie	18"
Bhormot Yung Li	20"
To these I will add:	
Ch Rochow Dragoon	21"
Ch Rochow Akbela	20"
Ch Rochow Adjutant, known familiarly as "Little Joe"	19"

This is what Miss Collett had to say about size (p118):

“There have always been small, sound Chows – I can recall a number of them over the years. There have also been some really good big ones as well, and these are essential to maintain size and strength as well as type and quality. We must never forget that the Chow was originally a big dog. We have improved our Chows by rearing them, generation after generation, under better conditions and by selective breeding. But we are now in danger of changing the Chow by exaggerating the very characteristics which are essential for the show ring. This is one of the major pitfalls of deliberately breeding to intensify certain characteristics, and in due course can lead to the deterioration of other qualities. The Standards call for a lively, compact, upstanding dog, active and alert with perfect balance. This is being lost with the diminishing size, and with diminishing size we have an enormous increase in weight and bone, and with the increase in weight and bone we have a high percentage of non-breeding bitches, monorchids, abnormal whelpings, hysterectomies and early deaths. We even hear of the Chow being ‘past its prime’ and ‘retired’ at five and six years old.”



Goldfields, the early days – this photograph shows, left to right,  
Doreen Grant with black Chow Chow  
Billie Orr with Borzoi  
Unidentified person with German Shepherd Dog  
Martha Rogoff with Multi BIS Ch Grant's Bogum Chang of Ningpo

## TEMPERAMENT

Which brings me to the controversial issue of the Chow temperament – the single biggest reason why I would never choose to live with another breed, whatever the Chow may look like. I am a dog trainer. I have worked extensively with “normal” dogs and studied the dog psychology based on wolf pack instincts. It is in this area most of all that I see “throw-back” characteristics more typical of the bear than the wolf – the product of so many centuries of selective breeding amongst the inscrutable tribes of the Mongolian plains and Tibetan mountains, long before the Chow reached China.

A few personal observations on a particularly delicate subject:

Chow Chows are one man dogs, bonding with an individual or family between the ages of five weeks and five months. Older dogs do not rehome easily, and moving adult dogs may result in temperament problems. Chows are subject to seemingly idiosyncratic likes and dislikes and, like elephants, never forget – they can bear grudges for life!

Chow Chows have been bred for, among other things an independently decided protective instinct and, although a typical Chow will almost never bother to move himself for an artificially engineered “crisis”, he can be fierce if he perceives a genuine threat.

Chow Chows do not like being handled by strangers, which is why they do bite vets – unfairly, but understandably, giving rise to their “bad” reputation. A stable Chow should, however, tolerate the greetings of visitors and the approach of judges, particularly in the company of a trusted and respected owner.

An interesting aside here is that Circus trainers of any of the “pack” animals – horses, dogs, lions – are usually unable to train bears, and vice versa. This may provide a little insight into why Chow Chows are generally described as “untrainable” by traditional dog training methods, and “stupid” by Stanley Coren!

And herein lies the challenge for owners – and judges – who have been previously conditioned by “normal” dogs.

Frightened dogs of any breed, including Chow Chows, are the most unpredictable biters. The Chow is not particularly interested in dominating other dogs. He will not pick fights, but neither will he back down from them. The same is generally true of his relationships with people. He seems to have a significantly lower need for human approval than other breeds and will not readily submit. However, nor will he attempt to dominate them. A bit like cats. It is on this point that the Chow Chow temperament is most frequently misunderstood. Domination techniques cause fear. Socialization increases confidence.

The danger of unpredictability comes in when a Chow Chow does not respect its handler – either because the dog has not been socialized and therefore lacks confidence, or it is not “bonded” with the handler for whatever reason, or it does not sufficiently respect the owner because of ineffectual handling on the part of the owner.

Interestingly enough, Chow Chows may be better behaved with people who know nothing about dogs in general, than with those who count themselves as “expert”!

But I must emphasize that “suspicious” should not equate to fearful – do not throw the baby out with the bath water! Chow Chows must be socialized. They must respect their owners. But attempts to force submission will lead more consistently to a broken spirit and a timid, frightened and unpredictable dog, than will over-indulgence.

A relationship with a Chow Chow is one of mutual respect rather than domination and submission. All Chow Chows enjoy spending time with their personally appointed “hero” and, to this extent, some Chow Chows will enjoy traditional dog training. Living with a Chow Chow is not to have ownership of a slavishly devoted subordinate being, but – again, like a cat – to share your life with a different species, neither greater nor less than, but intensely loyal, nevertheless.



Charlotte Chesney at home with her Chow Chows in London in the early 1920s.

## OUR UNIQUE LEGACY

Once again, Miss Collett describes the Chow nature aptly, thus (p36):

“Having once mentally signed the bond of allegiance to a particular man, woman or child, he is forever their dog, and no amount of petting, bribery and cajoling can win his affection away. He will face discomfort, fatigue, hunger, and even death with the true Oriental’s disregard for such bodily afflictions, and if subjected to captivity, will silently wait with uncanny patience until he successfully planned and made his getaway. He will die for you but he will not readily obey you. He will walk with you but not meekly and abjectly at heel. He will, given time, honour your friends and relations with a dignified condescension, but he will not fawn on them, and all the honeyed promises of ‘walkies’, ‘bikky’ and so on, will leave him infuriatingly indifferent.”

An interesting article in the August 1945 issue of the Dog Owners Monthly Newsletter explains an incident in which a Chow would not allow a judge to examine his mouth – “suspicious and unsocial nature of the breed being one of its chief characteristics, judges should realize the futility of attempting to rob the Chow of it”.

In order to protect the reputation of the Chow Chow, we should socialize our dogs to stabilize temperament, not as an attempt to turn them into simpering teddy bears!

One last caution here is that the fundamentally different (independent, stubborn, strong-willed, aloof) nature of the Chow Chow can result in truly dangerous offspring when crossed with other very dominant breeds, such as the Rottweiler or German Shepherd. The Chow’s “reduced need for approval” exacerbates naturally dominant tendencies in other breeds, and every attempt should be made to prevent these matings as far as possible!

Whilst I understand the term “improvement of the breed” and hence “modernization” of the original Chow Chow, the essential type should never change. I do believe that most breeders act with good intent and the deepest sincerity in what they believe to be the best interests of the breed. To this end, I implore you to take heed of Miss Collett’s closing warning (p119):

“We are living in an age of change and destruction, but there are certain things which should not be changed or destroyed. In the Chow Chow we have one of the few unspoiled treasures that remain, a rarity, a basic breed still more or less uncorrupted by the ruthless march of progress. A natural animal, and until a century ago as much of the wild as the undomesticated intelligence, dignity, beauty and that untouchableness which is the hallmark of all God’s free creatures.

**“We allude to it possessively as being OUR breed. But it is also a responsibility, handed down throughout the ages. We are only the custodians, and as such we have a duty to preserve it for posterity.”**

Let not the history of the Chow Chow come to reflect what we have done to the rest of our planet – PLEASE PRESERVE OUR ANCIENT LEGACY!!!



Doreen Simmons (as she was then) at home with her Chow Chow in London in the early 1920s.

The Chow Chow by C. E. Collett, ISBN 0 7182 0906 0, first published 1953, copyright © 1959 Nicholas Vane Publishers Ltd. This book is unfortunately out of print, although some second hand copies may be available.

This article was first published in the book: "The World of Chows in 2003 & 2004" (<http://www.redrose.nl/WorldChows.html>).