

Lulu, A Hollywood Tradition

Last week I had a unique opportunity to chat with Coco d'Este and her dog Lulu. Coco is a multi-hyphenate. A noted actress, writer and acting coach, she is responsible via her efforts as personal manager and publicist, for the resurrected career of actor David Carradine.

For over 35 years, Coco has made a successful life for herself venturing in practically every facet of the entertainment industry in front of and behind the camera designing, producing, writing, acting, makeup, teaching, personal manager, mentor and then some.

I met Coco at an autograph signing show and was so impressed about her dog Lulu and how much she reminded me of Lassie, that I had to get an interview.

Q When you first adopted Lulu, was it your sole intention to train her to be in films or in front of the camera?

A Actually, I wanted my own dog. David had a mountain dog named Thunder. In the beginning, I didn't know where to get a Collie, so I made a few calls. I was able to contact Bob Weatherwax. Bob and his father trained Lassies for over 50 years and had a litter of Collie puppies up for adoption. When I first saw Lulu, I fell in love with her right away.

When working with a dog like Lulu, whose ancestors go back 9 generations to Lassie, do you feel it was easier to teach her tricks because of the long line of show dogs in the film industry?

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The way Bob and his dad breed the Collies genetically, they're physically a more beautiful dog and for the intelli-

gence, I definitely think I have an edge because of the way they were trained and bred. Remember, in the breeding it applies to the markings like white, ruff and blaze, as well.

Q From the time Lulu was a puppy, how long did you have to work with her before you felt she was comfortable in front of a camera?

A Actually, from the time that she was a puppy, I had taken her with me anywhere and everywhere I could so she was already used to people, noises, animals and all types of circumstances.

When I went on set with David or we did interviews, she came along, so it just kind of went with the territory. It wasn't like I made the decision. It was just gradual as she got accustomed to the situations with people and all of a sudden the focus was on her.

Q Bob Weatherwax and his Father have been training Lassie offspring for over 50 years. Did he ever help you or advise you when you first started training Lulu?

A Not when I first started training her. It was a couple of years afterward. Lulu and I made a visit to see her Dad and brother, and I showed Bob all the tricks that I had taught Lulu and he was impressed especially with her barking to hand singles. Bob said that was a really difficult one to teach a dog and he was really impressed and gave me a major compliment.

Q In Lulu's bio it states that she is a Delta Society Certified Therapy Dog, which gives her entrance to hospitals, nursing homes and other places where a healing presence and friendly face is needed and welcomed. Would you explain this to our readers?

A First she got her A.K.C., "Good Citizen Certificate." They have to go through a test for obedience and attention span. I mean they put the dog through a series of tests with and without the owners or trainers.

She's got that, but I'm about to get Lulu tested to become a "Therapy Dog" and that's so I can take her into nursing homes, senior citizens and children's hospitals. It's been proven scientifically to help healing the patients. The reaction they get from all ages is fantastic. Their eyes light up and you can see the joy in their faces the minute a dog enters the room.

To get certified there is a lot of paper work and even a test before the dog can go out to these different facilities. There are also a lot of organizations like Delta Society, Love on a Leash, among others, that certifies dogs to do this. Lulu is very sensitive to people and again I take that as part of the breeding from Bob Weatherwax.

Q Was Lulu a contestant in the "First Dog Beauty Pageant?"

A She was "Miss Arizona" in the first Doggie Beauty Pageant. They didn't have a Collie for the contest and I met this fellow who had something to do with the dog show and he was so impressed with Lulu and asked if I would like to enter her as "Miss Arizona" and I said, "Well, sure."

It was a fabulous experience. There were 50 some odd dogs with their trainers, an assortment of other people and actually quite a crowd to watch the show.

They had rehearsals and everything was choreographed with the same person who did *Miss Congeniality*. They did have one problem: the surface on the stage was slippery and some of the dogs had trouble walking on it. Lulu did great and it was a very fun show.

Q I think when people see animals on TV or in Film, they just take it for granted when they see how natural the animal looks and how many tricks they do. How much work went into teaching Lulu hand-command and spelling trained tricks?

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