

Melissa Zobell – MoonBaby Australian Shepherds & Miniature American Shepherds



It's fair to say that Melissa Zobell of Fairview, Utah, has spent the majority of her life in the company of Australian Shepherds of all sizes: As a youngster, she moved with her family to a 350-acre ranch in Redlands, California, that was being worked by Basque shepherds. It was those Spanish herdsman who introduced Zobell at age 11 to the sturdy sheepdogs with which they have long been associated.

Today, under her MoonBaby prefix, Zobell breeds both Australian Shepherds and the more diminutive offshoot of the breed, the Miniature American Shepherd, which was recognized by the AKC in 2015. An AKC Breeder of Merit in both breeds, she was the Miniature American Shepherd Club of the United States'

Conformation Breeder of the Year from 2016 to 2018, and was the first, and currently only breeder, to achieve the Platinum level with her MAS.

Here, she talks about kindred spirits, lost lambs and the appeal of weekend warriors.

All in the family: “My family has always been very dog oriented. My stepdad showed Danes, and his mother had Bassets. My mother always had an affinity for Collies because she grew up with a littermate sibling of the original Lassie. I did a lot with 4-H and livestock.”

Live and let live: “There are some people who are just kindred spirits with animals. I was always different. I made my mother give mouth to mouth to a vole I found frozen in the snow. Our family doesn't kill spiders in the house — we take them outside and let them go. I have a big



appreciation for life and living beings. We're all part of a bigger picture.”

In the beginning: “On that Redlands ranch, we had to go up a long dirt driveway almost a mile and a half long. It was lambing season, and my mother and I found a lamb tangled in the barbed wire. We undid it — it was quite wounded — and doctored it up. We looked all around for the herders, but couldn't find them, so we returned the lamb to the pen with the ewes and their lambs. The next day

we got a knock at the door from a man who didn't speak any English. He motioned for us to come out to his truck, and out of the back he pulled out a puppy and handed it to me. That was my first Australian Shepherd."

In the company of friends: "I had a Shetland Pony/Quarter Horse cross that I rode bareback by myself all over those 350 acres. There were rattlesnakes everywhere. I always had my herd of dogs — Great Danes, Collies, rescues from the shelter — and a token goat named Clover that went with me on my rides."

Advice for breeders: "You cannot be kennel blind, and you have to be your own worst critic. I consider myself to be in the construction business, because I'm trying to build better dogs. But breeding is also an art. If you don't have an eye, and convictions, you're never going to get anywhere."



Size schism: "I consider Aussies and Minis to be one of the same. They have the same pedigrees. When Australian Shepherds became AKC recognized, the trend was toward breeding dogs with more bone and size and coat. I've been breeding them down for years and consider myself to be an Aussie breeder who breeds them in two sizes. The Aussies I grew up with were typically 17-inch dogs, and my Minis today are truer to what my Aussies were back then."

Pet peeves: "I see a lot of dogs being put up that are not converging on the move. There is a lot of parallel rear movement and overreaching. So many Minis have no drive at all, and big, round eyes. Look at what the dog is bred to do: You need almond-shaped eyes for protection. And I hate the fact that we are a color breed. Too many people get enamored of it: 'I have to have a blue merle with two blue eyes.'"

Take a chill pill: "I breed my Aussies and Minis to have an off switch. Yes, a breed should do what it was bred to do, but I don't want super high-drive dogs. I want a dog people can live with. I want to breed super weekend warriors: If I want to hike to the top of a mountain today, and if tomorrow it's raining and I want to sit home and eat bonbons, I want them to be OK with both."

Um, have we met? "I want a dog to be alert and protective. The standards for both breeds say 'reserved with strangers.' People often mistake that for fear. It's not a fear thing if they are not everyone's friend."



Forward thinking: “We need to realize the importance of the future of our breed — the people who are novices and junior handlers. We have to be more welcoming to new people. We have to teach them the right way rather than allowing them to be point donors.”

The merits of a Breeder of Merit: “It sets us apart from other breeders. At the end of the day, having someone who is involved in clubs, showing,

doing the recommended genetic tests, at a minimum — those things matter to pet buyers, and they should. It increases their odds that they will have a healthier dog, and that’s why they come to people like us.”

Proud breeder moments: Just a few notable accomplishments... 2017 MASCUSA National Specialty Best Opposite Sex, WD/BOW/Best Puppy, RWB, and AOM. 2017 Royal Canin WB/BOW/BOS. 2018 Westminster BOB. 2018 MASCUSA National Specialty Breeder's Showcase winner. 2018 Royal Canin WD. 2019 USASA National Specialty 2nd in Open Black. And is the breeder of the current #1 Rally Titled Miniature American Shepherd. Melissa is proud that MoonBaby Miniature American and Australian Shepherds not only excel in Conformation but are versatile companions titling in multiple sports in both Companion and Performance events.

