

ACBA: Cavy Show Fancy

ON BEING A MENTOR

Inspired by Peg Smith's VP Message from the Summer, 2001 JACBA

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JACBA Fall 2001

I tripped quite accidentally (or so I try to convince myself!) back into the cavy fancy in October of 1998 while attending a small animal show with a friend who exhibits fancy rats. An announcement was made that the cavy contingent was short of clerks. The rat and mouse show was moving along a little too slowly to hold my attention, so I spent the better part of the day clerking the cavies. Listening to the judge's comments and drooling uncontrollably over some of the beautiful animals on the table, I was sure I needed to have ONE OF EACH!!! Luckily, I noticed a familiar face in the crowd who later put my unbridled enthusiasm to buy, buy, BUY into a manageable perspective.

The familiar face belonged to Jim Touchette. My adult daughters got their first 4-H cavies from him (boy! that dates both Jim and I!). From that day forward, his friendship, guidance, generosity and off-the-wall sense of humor have been the support mechanisms that have helped me to grow in this fancy. Members and friends of the Channel Islands Cavy Breeders in Ventura County, California have also been blessed by Jim's mentorship abilities as he takes time to contact, or to be contacted, about cavy "happenings."

What IS a mentor, really? With heartfelt sincerity and just a splash of humor "Jim-style," I'd like to submit the following list of qualifications:

- 1) Introduce newcomers to other exhibitors to help them feel at home at the shows. (For laughs- try spreading a funny rumor that the "new kid on the block" is really an animal activist here to spy on everyone!).
- 2) Provide quality breeding and show stock that will bring positive feedback to the new fancier.

(If your protégé beats you on the table with your own animal, you can always run around saying, "I bred that animal!").

- 3) Guide beginners toward limiting the number of breeds/varieties they take on at first. (Avoid phrases like, "That #@*! Texel is taking up space in your American pens!").
- 4) Listen to questions and concerns with a sympathetic ear and share your expertise liberally. (Be prepared for late night calls and manic mood swings!).
- 5) Practice "tough love". Encourage effective culling and don't be afraid to point out potential breeding pitfalls along the way. (No, fatty-eye won't heal itself with time no matter HOW cute the pig is!).
- 6) Invite novices to your caviary and show them how to evaluate animals by comparing them for type, color, etc. (No fair ending the session with, "Okay! Now it's time to clean some cages!").
- 7) Last, but not least, embody the "Grasp-the-pebble-from-my-hand-Grasshopper" Theory. When the student can equal the master, your job as a mentor has been done well. ("Is that your boar, or mine?").

If you already have a mentor, go directly to the phone, give them a call and thank them profusely. If you don't have a mentor- find one! If you are a mentor, bless you! Take a well-deserved bow. If you'd like to become a mentor, well, I wrote this piece for you. The smoothest path to success is trodden by those who help others to excel.

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