



[Seitenverzeichnis](#)



[Site map](#)

[home](#)

# My Journey to Benin

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Dr Holt of Nampa, Idaho, USA is a member of Basenji  
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Litter from small native village of Houibatin Litter from villiage of Houibatin  
Villiage Dogs

Marie, as she prefers to be called, was born in 1955 in Salt Lake City, Utah and moved to Boise, Idaho in 1964. She is currently married and has two children and stepchildren. Her majors at the College of Idaho were chemistry

and mathematics, and she studied nuclear chemistry and earned her PhD in nuclear chemistry at the University of California at Berkeley supervised by Nobel Laureate Glenn T Seaborg. Not feeling that what she wanted to do in life was what she was trained to do, Marie decided to further her education and go to medical school. She graduated with an MD at the University of Utah, specializing in diagnostic and neuro-radiology, which requires a knowledge of a wide range of diseases, anatomy, some physiology, pathology, and also an avid interest in putting together pieces of a puzzle.

## Marie's Lifelong Interest in Basenjis

As a young girl, Marie read "Weep No More, My Lady," the short story about a Basenji by James Street. Marie was fascinated by Basenjis. She used to ask to go to the store in Boise, Idaho, with her father, as there was a red and white Basenji who popped up in a house window on their street as they drove. Marie was sure that this was a Basenji, and was so curious and fascinated by this dog that she gathered up her courage and walked to the house one day, knocked on the door and asked if she might possibly meet the dog. A few years ago, Marie met Caryl Fuchs (Xanadu kennels) at a dog show in Boise. Caryl said that this dog was very likely one of her breeding from the old Phemister lines. Marie always wanted to own a Basenji, but her family never had one. They had many dogs and cats while she was growing up, but no Basenjis. In spite of this, she remained "hooked."

Marie recalls her early interest in Basenjis, "When I first became interested in Basenjis as a young teenager, I subscribed to "The Basenji" magazine and wrote to some of the breeders. Two wrote back to me, and one offered to sponsor my application to the BCOA [Basenji Club of America] if I cared to join. However, we didn't have very

many dog shows in Boise, and I wasn't able to attend often. I do recall one outdoor show. I knew nothing about how shows worked, but I seemed to have no problem finding a Basenji over which to drool.

"My mom recently sent some of my old correspondence from that period of time to me, and my favorite souvenir is a reply letter from the American Kennel Club saying that they did not register African imports. (I guess I had been planning this trip for some time...)"

It wasn't until 2006 that Marie was finally able to obtain her lifelong dream of having Basenjis of her own, and she obtained her "Angel," born in November of 2005, from the Ahmahr Nahr breeders in New Mexico (Ch. Ahmahr Nahr's Torquoise Warrior, JC x Ch. Ahmahr Nahr's Layd in M Red, JC). Angel was 1/8th recent-African lineage, and Marie loved Angel's temperament, which she had been told came down from Angel's 1/2 African grandmother, Shakara (Can/Mex Ch. Dharian-Breka's Kmau Shakara), co-bred by Anne Humphreys and Brenda Jones-Greenberg). Because of this temperament, Marie tried to locate another offspring of Shakara's line, and she managed to purchase the only boy from Shakara's November, 2006 litter, a 1/4 African cousin of Angel's that she named "Chip." (Ch. Ahmahr Nahr's El Cerro Ranger x Can/Mex Ch. Dharian - Breka's Kmau Shakara).

## Learning about Benin Basenjis

Marie first began to be interested in the Avongara Basenjis from Zaire, brought to this country in the 1980s. She joined the African Basenji e-mail list and studied more. She began to hear more and more about the Avuvi project to bring native Basenjis to the US from Benin, West Africa. Currently, the project is centering on the Fon area in the south of Benin. She was invited to join the private Avuvi e-mail group. She was promised a

pup from the first mating of pups from the 2004 Benin imports, due to be born in November of 2006, and she acquired the only male in the litter from Susan Patterson, Avuvi Apollo (Avuvi Enagnon [2004 Benin import owned by Anne Humphreys] x Enagon's litter mate, Avuvi Afonhaan). She then purchased Avuvi Kimacho of Elegua (Avuvi Ekanye [2004] Benin import owned by Brenda Jones-Greenberg x Avuvi Hontognon) from the second Avuvi litter bred from 2004 Benin imports, also born in November, 2006.

## The Decision to go to Benin

Marie read as much as she could find about African imports and the African forest Basenji-type hunting dogs. She also studied as much as she could about Benin in West Africa. Robert Dean was the scientist spearheading the Benin Avuvi project. Peace Corps volunteers are pretty active in Benin, and Robert Dean connected with Peace Corp volunteer, Chris Starace, who had a Basenji dog when he was serving in Benin. While serving there, Chris had made close friends with a native of Benin, Nestor Djossou. When they first became friends, Nestor had been a teenager. Robert Dean had seen a number of African Basenjies, and with his contacts in Benin, decided to do a formal importation. He wanted, not show dogs, but typical hunting dogs. To minimize the risk of modern breed pollution, he went to remote villages and got photos of dogs in the villages. He did not go himself. He did all of this with the help of Nestor Djossou, Chris Starace's native friend.

## Nestor's family and neighbors in Allada

Nestor picked out the puppies. Chris helped with translation and made the trip over from the U.S. to pick them up. The whole selection process was by a native man tasked only with picking out

typical dogs from villages with pedigrees for hunting. No weird-looking dogs were desired. The area from which the dogs came was not a tourist area and not very attractive to visitors, because there was no running water and roads that are impassable in rainy season, etc. The area is also impoverished. Only Peace Corps volunteers and other aid workers came in from the outside. By the way, Chris Starace is working on a memoir, and he made a DVD about this area which can be ordered at <http://www.fon-is-fun.org/> Robert Dean later teamed up with Susan Patterson, a long-time Basenji breeder, who wanted a Benin Basenji for herself. Through Robert Dean, Marie met also met Chris Starace. Marie explained her desire to go to Benin: "When the AKC opened the studbook I decided to go to Benin and get some more imports so they would be mature before the studbook closed. I had wanted to go for my own personal reasons, too, to actually see what it was like over there, to see if claims that the provenance of the dogs was authentic, to search for cream-colored Basenjies, and to bring back dogs for myself."

## Benin

According to information from the <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benin>, the country known today as the Republic of Benin, with a population of over 6,000,000 people, was once the powerful Kingdom of Dahomey in West Africa. It was eventually nicknamed the Slave Coast because of the significant slave trafficking through Dahomey of Africans to the Americas, the slave markets of Brazil and the Caribbean. It became a French Colony in the late 1800s, gaining its full independence from France in 1960. The country's current name of Benin was adopted in 1975. It has since seen a series of military coups and has the health and infrastructure problems of its neighbors and of most West African countries. A very poor

African country, much of the interior population is still dependent on subsistence farming; growing beans, corn and yams. Significant cash crops include cotton, cocoa and coffee. Many inhabitants of Benin worked in small, rural cooperatives which typically raised animals; grew corn, pineapples and peanuts for their own consumption or for sale at the market, or made soap. Nearly everyone raised their own goats, chickens and sometimes pigs, and they supplemented the meat with squirrels and bush rats, which are like opossums. Men took care of the animals; woman made and sold things at the market and did a lot of buying for resale at the markets, as well. Marie's Observations of Benin Roads were dirt and were full of pot holes-muddy and highly difficult to travel in the rainy season. The countryside was densely vegetated. One main, paved road would typically wend through the center of town, and a lot of people, including Chris Starace, had to go from place to place via bicycle. Allada, where Chris Starace lived and worked, was a town of about 10,000 people about one hour and a half by "bush taxi" from the main port city and commercial capital of Benin, Cotonou. Local residents lived in mud or cinder-block houses. Water was from cisterns and could be in very short supply in the dry season. One thing I would like to emphasize about Benin is that it is completely "African". Benin has always been composed of many separate tribes which are still in existence today.

## Voudun (voodoo) Parade on Easter (Palm Sunday)

Allada's people are predominantly Fon. [Wikipedia definition of Fon: "Fon (native name Fon gbeè, ...) is part of the Gbe language cluster and belongs to the Volta-Niger branch of the Niger-Congo languages. Fon is spoken mainly in Benin by approximately 1.7 million speakers, by the Fon people."] There were many large, busy port cities

on the African coast before Europeans ever showed up. Countries that were colonized were dealt with in very different fashions from one another. Benin was part of French West Africa. French Northern Africa and French Central Africa were treated very differently from one another and from French West Africa. Additionally, Benin was wedged between English territories. It has a busy port, Cotonou. In French West Africa, 0.1% of the population was European. There were no immigrants of any other kind, and Europeans were not sent to settle this area. The port cities contained a large percentage of the population, with the rest scattered over a broad area. Benin is still very much African. It is not the heterogeneous population I saw in Chile or that one would see in South Africa or Latin America. During slave-trading times, Europeans come in by sea. Some kingdoms in Benin participated in the Slave trade. The king of Porto Novo was a great hero of those times, because he did not participate in the slave trade. The Ashantis were big slave traders, which makes me wonder why people would care to name children after this tribe. The Africans brought slaves to the Europeans at the ports. Today there are missions of every kind in or near Allada, including a mosque. On Palm Sunday and Easter we saw everything from pure white Easter dresses to the finest Western clothing. Alongside the roads one would frequently find voudun (voodoo) offerings. On Easter (Palm Sunday) there was a big voudun parade. There was a statue of Toussaint Louverture in Allada, and many businesses—including our hotel were named after him. He was known as the father of Haiti, because he led the freedom revolution there. We were told he was the grandson of a Haitian slave. His father was from Allada. On the day that his statue was to be dedicated, there was a large turnout of people. The best dancers and craftsmen were there. There were two “ghost dancers” who were very expert,



and each was accompanied by an assistant who prevented the dancer from contacting a living person by touching a stick on the dancer's robe near where it touched the ground. People were selling cold water, which we bought. Many nearby kings came, one at a time, to get the proper entrance. They came in black limousines with a small entourage of attendants, one of whom carried a small parasol against the sun. They were very finely dressed and had hats or crown that have no similarity to formal hats or crowns of the West or any other area of which I know. The arrival of the king of Porto Novo was special to me from the history of this regency. Finally the king of Allada came. Speeches were given that were in very formal French. They were reminiscent of speeches given in American city parks on great occasions. Although many of the cash crops of south Benin are Western, such as pineapple and coffee, they still have palm oil and mangos. The people are also able to find manioc (tapioca) root, hunt smaller game such as field rats, rabbits and the occasional cane rat. They raise some livestock — especially chickens and goats, with an occasional cow or pig. Tomatoes were very much part of the diet. They had an interesting way of raising the small tomato starters — they would weave a small, rectangular, thatch hut with a flat roof to shade the small plants from the sun, the opposite of what we do in a short growing season. These little "boxes" would appear in the cleared areas at the side of the road in the middle of new, wilder growth. Goats, chickens, the occasional duck, pig or cow roamed in the streets of Allada and around the villages. However, I did not see a single dog on the streets except one, who was well-fed and was heading toward a house. The few dogs that I saw in Allada that were not behind doors were in a yard (puppy of Nestor's neighbor) or in the company of their owner (one street stall and one party attendee). I saw an occasional dog

among the villages on the small dirt paths. Mainly, they stayed in the village areas.

## Provenance of Benin Basenjis

Dogs in Africa are not in the wild. They are owned by people, and in Benin were clearly domestic. Dogs in Congo/Sudan that I know of are also owned by people. However, they are subject to far less available resources, as are the people. In Benin the people cannot afford medical care for themselves, or even enough protein. The dogs, while valuable for guarding and hunting, are subject to whatever the people can do for them. The litters that I saw in Benin were two to five in size at three to eight weeks. I imagine that if Mom couldn't take care of more, the excess would die. Also, Moms could become very skinny. If one did try to take care of too many pups and died as a primary or secondary result of poor nutrition, I can see how natural selection would favor bitches with smaller litters.

## Litter from small native village of Houibatin

It is hard to imagine that Benin could have pure-bred dogs, i.e., without "modern dogs" in the pedigree, but once I saw the place and learned some history, there was no doubt whatsoever in my mind that, for now, there are Benin aboriginal dogs there. I have seen poor areas before, for instance in Chile, but never have I seen the poverty that is Allada. It is impossible to imagine how a dog could get from Point A to Point B. He would have to be transported, or walk. Yet, these dogs are real homebodies. I have a couple of holes in my fence in Seattle, Washington. I had to correct the Benin dogs a few times, but they did stop going through those holes. My adults will stray into other yards, but only if Chip digs the hole and goes through first. I had my gate OPEN

by accident, and the Benin pups simply stayed in the backyard all day, or came in the house. The hunters in the small, native village of Lissegazoun said the dogs might stray up to four kilometers to breed. However, I never saw a dog from another village while I was there. One dog followed us all around Lissegazoun. Even though we were on motorbikes he showed up where we were. We never saw him outside Lissegazoun. A dog could get to another village within that four kilometers, but not to Allada, and in any case, there were no dogs on the loose in Allada. Dogs from Allada did not wander down the road to the villages. The only other way to get from place to place would be to be carried. Transportation is very expensive. A motorbike driver may put two other people, plus cargo on a 75cc bike. The biggest bike I saw was 150cc, and I stopped and stared at it. An auto may put two people in the front and four in the back. If he had a station wagon, someone else might crouch in the far back. There might even be room for dinner — a dead pig for example — but it is unheard of for someone to take their dog anywhere. When people go somewhere it is for a reason directly related to making a living or to go to a celebration or other event for people — there would simply be no reason to take a dog. Also, cars or bikes are so far beyond a “junker” status, that it is incredible that they run at all. In dry season, if you can get transportation, you can go somewhere without too much trouble. In the rainy season the roads become very difficult, sometimes impassable, by vehicle. They are also very expensive to the owner so as many passengers and as much cargo as possible are crammed on a bike or into a car. If you want more room you have to pay for the absent passenger.

Another way to transport things is to put them on your head and start walking. This is a task for women and boys. It is used for transporting water from the nearest well. The cisterns were dry while

we were there. The closest thing to running water they had would be a house with an enterprising builder who had gotten some gutter material and draped it around the roof, leading to the cistern. Our hotel had running water, most of the time.

Nestor's family live right in Allada. Yet his parents do not speak French. They still speak only Fon. We financed a well for them. They will make money selling water to people and they will not have to make the treks for water as they used to do.

The wells I saw in the villages were hand powered by women and children. I did see one well in Lissegazoun built by German aid workers that had a motorized pump. It was a Godsend—that was the day of the hunt and I thought I was going to get heat stroke. The pump had lasted for several years, and people in the area are good with motors — otherwise there would be no motorcycle or car taxis. I saw one car dealership in Cotonou.

The region around Allada is agricultural. People farm predominantly by hand. They work for the owner of the land. They make about 20,000 CFA/year. This translates to \$500 a year. Allada has one paved road — the road that goes through town. I saw many buses heading north from the capital of Benin, Cotonou. They did not even slow down in Allada. Also cargo trucks would pass through.

Cotonou has a busy downtown with paved roads. However, some of the residential and other back roads were not paved. When a car would go through mud, if water had been spilled from road construction, for example, you could see an inch of mud on the outside of the tires of every car that passed through. Blue well pipe we financed (since then a pump has been added). Nestor's Family (Nestor 2nd from left, back row Cotonou marketplace

## Recollections of the trip

The trip to Benin almost died before it started. In

February an alert went out that cargo rules had changed for live animals and dead humans— anyone carrying cargo had to have proper credentials. Chris Starace was not interested in transporting dogs, and I had seven to carry. I commandeered my sister and daughter to join the trip. We got them expedited passports, visas and plane tickets. They could only come for a few days, and they had to leave after I had left. The first night in Benin, I stayed at a Western style hotel — there were a few in Cotonou. I met Nestor there and we had drinks — Irish coffee — and a fancy dinner. The prices must have killed him. When my daughter and sister arrived together, they had one night in the same hotel. In Allada we stayed at one of the high-end hotels — the Hibiscus. The bed mattresses were like futons, and smelled a little mouldy from the cotton inside. Coverings were sheets and mosquito netting. We had air conditioning, but after a few days we were not allowed to keep the controls, and when the power went out we found the reset button in the room did not work.

## Hotel accomodations

We had potable running water—or the doxycycline I took for malaria control took care of anything in the water. There was a small bar which served local and imported beers. One morning I saw a bat on the wall. We had a few TV stations, all in French of course. We had a view of the back lot, and my daughter saw a goat butchered there one day. Meals were very good — breakfast was Nescafe, omelette, bread and butter, and fruit. Dinner was a meat entree — fish, chicken-a -la-bicyclette — or beef, and once agouti (cane rat) — with starch (rice, spaghetti, couscous or French Fries), along with sautéed vegetables — usually tomato-based. A bottle of water from the local spring, Possotome, was 300 CFA on the street, up to 800 at stores and restaurants. Doxycycline

makes the skin sensitive, and there were invisible biting insects, especially at dusk. I usually put on sunscreen and some stuff that was almost pure DEET. I never was able to purchase local clothing until just before we left, so I spent the time in jeans, a T-shirt and my river sandals. The red dust got on everything and I usually ended up washing out my jeans once or twice a day for the sweat and the dust. I walked a lot. After a couple of days the motorcycle taxis (kekenon) did not even stop to ask if I wanted a ride. News gets around. There were many roadside merchants. I stayed away from the food but ate a lot of pineapple — it didn't have the "bite" of pineapple we get in the US. I also had some coffee while trying to figure out where the internet cafe was. It was Nescafe, which I learned to love in Chile — they say the Nescafe you get in the US isn't as good as what you get outside the country, but it may be context. Every Beninoise I talked with wanted to give me his or her contact information. They want to get out. They work very hard and don't get much for it. I didn't like paying the Yovo tax (higher prices) mainly because I wanted to place myself closer to the peoples' level. This was difficult because I wanted to give them as much money as I could. I did hear the Yovo song (see <http://www.fon-is-fun.org>) a few times and thought it was hilarious. It made Chris angry! but if I had had to hear it for two years while living on Allada wages I wouldn't be too happy with it either. Telephone service was problematic. One day I had to talk to my husband, but someone else at the hotel had already used up the time allotment for the hotel for that day, so I couldn't. A person could buy time on a cell phone but I couldn't purchase as much as I needed.

Computer-use cafes were common in Cotonou and there was one in Allada. Most people used them for the computers to write something or for work. The internet service was poor in Cotonou and nearly nonexistent in Allada. Any correspondence

was difficult to handle from Allada. Fortunately my husband has a yahoo account, which was recognized in Benin and after about 45 minutes I was able to send him a short e-mail. I also was able to call him once or twice. I even resorted to using the Cotonou hotel when my sister and daughter stayed there — they had much better service there. We made several trips to Cotonou — to pick up Chris, to pick up my sister and daughter, in order to make sure my plane arrangements were settled, and to get cash. Traffic is total chaos, foot and motor. Additionally, some of the road to Cotonou was being worked on. It took about 90 minutes to make the trip. When being carried on a motorbike we dodged through traffic and a car got within a foot of my leg. In a car you must keep the window open or die of the heat. In town, of course, there are merchants everywhere selling stuff. Sometimes they reach right into the car to make sure you can see what they have. When it gets dark, away from Cotonou the road is dark too, except for some roadside stands which have stayed open. They are often lit by candles, except for the “gas stations” which sell gasoline in a variety of random glass bottles. These have electric lighting. There are a relatively high proportion of energy saving fluorescent light bulbs in the rural areas, usually at the end of a long, ratty cord. Nestor’s brother had polio and uses a wheelchair. It is a well-designed machine, powered by a hand-crank about at shoulder level, with a chain. This makes a lot more sense than Western style wheelchairs. He works in leather and made little collars for the dogs.

## Searching for a “Cream” Basenji

I also, not-so-secretly, wanted a certain color dog. In the past, undesirable Basenji colors had been described. One of these was “cream.” Litter from villiage of Houibatin In those days, brindle, fawn and cream meant something different than now in

describing canine color in general. According to Veronica Tudor-Williams, the cream dogs she saw had pink lips and eye-rims. She thought a cream dog with black lips and eye-rims would be attractive. So that undesirable cream would be different from the cream today — a white dog with pale red patches and with black nose and black eye-rims.

I learned, for example, that the genesis of the white German Shepherd was a progenitor dog with recessive red and the proper dilution, even though the modern German Shepherd excludes the White variety. Additionally, I learned that this color, as well as the color of the Samoyed and American Eskimo, required the recessive red color and a dilute, as yet unidentified. From the color genotyping, I knew that we had the potential for the recessive red — in fact, I knew we HAD one recessive red dog (Avuvi Kuoabo). This meant that perhaps there were dogs there that could be cream, as the word cream means NOW— with the dark nose and eye-rims. I had Nestor look specifically for this color, but I emphasized that it MUST be a typical dog, i.e., no sign of odd appearance in the dog, in its parents, or in the village where it was born.

Holding hut for pups at Nestor's family home in Allada I did not think there was any way I would get a dog like that unless I was in on the next import trip. Unfortunately, the other people interested in making a trip ran into Real Life complications, and I had to make the trip on my own, with the lastminute inclusion of my sister and daughter. My plan was to get dogs just as Robert had done — chosen by Nestor from remote villages, with no non-typical dogs - and from litters which were expected to produce good hunters. So, my trip was planned and carried out from March 23 through April 16, 2009. Getting the Dogs Back From Benin I had brought microchips



for the dogs. These were for French customs. They had to be ISO chips, which are not recognized in the US. For the return trip, the Basenjis were microchipped in Benin — with European chips which scanners here do not read. These were supposed to be necessary for French customs in Paris, and the inspector just looked at one passport for the Rabies record and only peeked in one crate I had also bought crates to use. I ordered seven with the metal fasteners which would comply with airline rules. I did not open the crate box until the last minute before the trip — and the hardware was not there! I had decided to spend a night in New York City wandering around town. Instead I found myself running from pet stores to hardware stores for the proper bolts and nuts for the crates. I also picked up some in-cabin pet carriers and better food and water bowls than came with the crates. I was very impressed with a giant machine at JFK for shrink-wrapping luggage and got my stuff shrink wrapped, largely for the entertainment value, but it was probably a good idea for Benin. I also got a small hand tool to help put the crates together. This was confiscated at Charles de Gaulle for being eight inches long — the limit was seven. When Customs at Cotonou, Benin tried to inspect my crate boxes they apparently did not have knives as they tore at the boxes and nearly destroyed them! Fortunately I had packed packing tape which helped with repairs later. The pups stayed at Nestor's parents until they were ready to go home. Keeping them at the hotel was not even a consideration. According to Chris it would never happen — dogs do not belong inside with people. Finding newspaper for the crates was nearly impossible. A paper costs 300 CFA which is beyond most budgets and is only a few pages thick. The hotel had a stack about 18 inches high from 2006 but the manager would not sell them as they were for residents to read. The carriage bolts I had for the crates were almost too

short for the crates. It took a great deal of patience and adrenaline to get the crates together. I also used plastic ties. The puppies were very small. When I got them home they were the size of our 4.7 pound Chihuahua. Also, everyone carried a dog on the plane, so I really only needed two crates! The other five crates are very well traveled. I used Delta/Air France. These airlines allow one to carry as many as three dogs total. That includes in cabin and in baggage, and is independent of the number of carriers. However, pets are extra and every piece of baggage is extra. I had to make sure this was all arranged before leaving Benin for me and for my sister and daughter. The Air France office is in the most modern part of Cotonou and they do have people who speak some English. I speak a little French and that, plus writing down numbers of flights, pets, and costs got us through.

Nevertheless when I reached Salt Lake City, Utah, in the United States, 45 minutes away from home, my connecting flight had left without me, but with my baggage — including Akouedekon and Midomiton. Yeloyisse and I were left behind. I managed to talk the airline into giving us a hotel room for the night. We both ate what was left of the fried peanut butter, and the dog food Nestor had given me. Jennie and Victoria had a worse time. Nestor gave them some fish for the dogs which was poorly tolerated. At one point they had to leave their plane! They were briefly stranded in Boston. Cleaning up a crate in an airport was not easy. I had to do it. The closest thing to a clean-up area is the restroom. I took the stall the furthest from the door, but the trash and paper towels were at the other end. Jennie and Victoria had a similar experience.

On one leg of the flight home the usually silent Yeloyisse began yodeling — LOUDLY. The plane was not yet in the air and a steward was right next

to me. I knew he was going to throw us off! He asked me if the dog was going to keep making this noise and I said casually "Oh, no," and threw a blanket over his bag. Thank goodness he shut up. He still makes this noise, a very clear, carrying sound between a howl and a yodel that sounds exactly like "AAAAAROOOOOOOOOOO." The folks at the vet get to hear it a lot.

The dogs got rabies vaccinations at three months, which was 30 days before they left. They came home covered in ticks and full of worms. One had tapeworms. One had demodex and at least one had some exotic ringworm. In the future I think I would bring some Frontline Plus and some combination wormer to give just before leaving.

## The Benin Dogs Arrive in the US

Upon returning, the vet said that, given their multiple infestations, they were amazingly healthy. They are now killing a giant, toy rat — the uniformly favorite toy of all my Basenjis so far and a very sturdy toy, at that. Well, four or five are killing the toy rat; the others (little tri and mask red) prefer to park in the crates and relax. They seem healthy and active — just not ready to throw themselves at the world quite yet. Little red was like that until today, so...

Maybe they were unsettled when we were in Seattle, and the first few days when they were at the Idaho house. They probably needed a little more time to get used to the different place. They did the same thing when new in Idaho — hung back a little.

Four of them are fairly bold, one is in between, and two hang back a little. The in-between is little red — she is half the size of the biggest one and will not hesitate to take him on — all the little ones are like that. Little Maskie is probably the least forward, and it is CUTE — when I call her to come in, she is the last one to return once I get

her out. She dances sideways toward me, playfully and tail wagging, then retreats, and then we start over. I need some treats — my personality is not quite doing the job... Avuvi Disposition, Temperament and Build Avuvi was the name chosen for dogs descended from Benin imports, the same way that Avongara was used to designate dogs from the 1980s trips to Zaire to bring back native Basenjis and more recently the Lukuru Basenji Project to bring back Basenjis from the Lukuru region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire).

### Thoughts about my Benin Basenjis:

They are very attentive and much less destructive than the domestics. They were properly aloof and good watchdogs. I have since found out that in addition to hunting, the dogs are also used in Benin as watchdogs, and I met only one who would touch me in Benin — and then even she growled. I was cautioned to stay away from all the other dogs. Some were more vocal than others. They are also more affectionate. They can be trained more easily and are more generally obedient. They are better at canine body language. They are not as aggressive, but if attacked, they are quicker and better at fighting. They have not caused any serious injuries — just defended themselves. Angel never has been a biter, but Chip has been harder on dogs than either of the Avuvis — and he has been the instigator of fights. He finally calmed down this year, though, to give him proper credit. After picking on Macho and getting beaten several times, perhaps he has learned his lesson. When Apollo arrived here at eight weeks, he was already a yodeler. He yodeled at both his new dog friends and the cat. His siblings grew to normal size, but he is at least 19 inches and square. He has a very lithe build. Both my Avuvis are narrower side to

side and more gracile (slender) than domestics. They are both short-coupled. Kimacho is a little long in the back — he has a nice body stuck on some undersized legs. They both have 'Excellent' hips and proper gait. Avuvis tend to have longer, looser tails. I saw one double-curl tail in Benin, and it was waving high in the air. They also can pick their tails up properly to curve over their back, but also can let them down straight just as fast. They do not have the "Arf, arf, arf " bark, but some of them do have what anyone would call a "bark," which is more like a very loud siren-like baying which starts out at maximum volume and can lift you right out of a chair. They also have howls and the short single Basenji 'Wuff.' I think the temperaments are like other recent Africans. More varied. More attuned to people. More alert. Much quicker when moving. When not napping, they don't hold still. Everything from gregarious to wary, like the Congo African Basenjis.

They all seem to not care about their relative size when facing another Basenji. They range from very adventurous to cautiously adventurous. My adults are very influenced by pack behaviour — there are things they would never do on their own, but they would follow my ¼ Avongara Chip into all sorts of trouble. They were homebodies. Some of the dogs growled at me or bayed from a distance — at least one came up to me and sniffed my fingers before growling. The pups were all very friendly up until about four months of age, when some "stranger anxiety" started. Many dogs, when they saw me paying attention, turned and melted away into the vegetation.

In this part of Benin, natives did not eat dogs. In fact they were fond of their dogs and kind to them. They might speak loudly to correct a dog, but I never saw anyone strike a dog and I never saw a fearful dog. All the dogs were well-nourished, even the nursing mothers. They were less aggressive to other dogs. They did get into

snarks and they had the same “ridgie” or mohawk when they got snarky. They were very fond of shade — one pup on the hunt was dashing from one shady spot to another. They tended to cave in and lie about at the same temperature ours do — above 90 degrees or so. In Benin, I only saw them leave the ground when they were being fed the agouti innards by the hunters. Even the pups on the hunting trip were dashing between shady spots, as the Benin heat is not popular with either people or dogs. They are more responsive to the dog master’s voice. I have found mine to be more trainable. Mine also house-trained themselves.

This is a story of how one of the pups learned not to mess with chickens. I have many photos of dogs with chickens from my trip and from at least two other areas with no evidence that the one preys on the other. The Djcessou family had a brand new family of chicks late in my visit. The mother hen was leading them around, scratching, and, of course, they went through the dog area. One of the pups got the idea of playing with one of the chicks — which were really tiny, random fluff-balls — and gave a little play pounce. Momma chicken immediately went right AT the puppy, and I think I know why chicks are not chased by Benin dogs. If you have ever lived with chickens, you know they ARE the nearest thing to dinosaurs we have.

I gave pork-chops to ours once, and they were picked to the bone in seconds. Chickens are scary. A face full of (relatively) big, angry mother chicken could put a pup right off the idea of messing with a chicken of ANY size, perhaps for life.

Those chickens have very tiny, hardwired brains, but they do a few things very well, and we know about the excellent memories our dogs have for dangerous events. For instance, Apollo took months to agree to return to the recliner with me AND relax after an emotionally traumatic nail

clipping (he had to hold still). An angry chicken would have put him in a corner for a good while. When the microchips were placed, a large needle was used and a few of the dogs peed on my shirt. When I went to console Yeloyisse, he screamed, ran to the other end of his tie, then turned and charged, biting my hand! He kept up this attitude when I packed him into his cabin bag, which provided no protection. We had 24 hours or more to bond.

So far there have been two Avuvi litters, Avuvi #1 and #2, from the year 2006. I have a pup from each litter. They are challenging in different ways from my domestics. Their personalities have not been shaped by generations of breeding for the perfect American pet or show dog, but for the optimal hunter and camp survivor. A good insight into the "soft" personality can be found on the Basenji Companions' in the article about Basenjis in Zaire. (There are also articles there on Benin and Lukuru Basenji imports at this site, as well.)

The adult Avuvis have the soft personality described in the Basenji Companions' article on the Congo Basenjis of Zaire — they freeze when in trouble or overwhelmed. Macho had to stay overnight at the vets for eating a large amount of macadamia nut cookie dough. The vet tech just snatched him off the table — his ears slid off his head and went back and his eyes got HUGE and he just froze! Though he is my least forward-seeming he is the more adventurous — he worked a long time to get up the nerve to play chase with Chip and Angel, and once he did it, it scared him. Angel chasing him was a little more stimulation than he was happy with, but he is always pushing himself. He is also the "puppy uncle" to the new Avuvis as he was with the Chihuahua. Puppies make Apollo nervous. Macho is quite shy but has a lot of "moxie". Apollo is more extroverted and

NOISY — of all of my dogs, he yodels the most. These are the aloof, one-man-dogs I had read about since childhood — whereas my domestics, greeting strangers joyfully, ears back, are almost always mistaken for Jack Russell Terriers.

They are real pack dogs and do not fight unless absolutely necessary, and then only enough to take care of the threat — usually my bone-headed Chip, who is  $\frac{1}{4}$  African, but several generations along. The shy Macho, whom Chip mistakes for a pushover, turns into a “were-dog.” I think a dog with Chip’s personality might have been taught lessons in Africa either by the people or the other dogs. As pack dogs, however, they can be “led down the garden path,” that is to say, many times they have been caught out in the kind of trouble they would never get into on their own — following Chip and looking properly embarrassed when caught — for example, with the goats on the other side of the fence, or on the dining room table. The cat was fine with them — until Chip returned from Canadian showing. Many African imports are quite friendly with strangers, and the ones I have met from Benin are, too, or are at least accepting. It may be also that white people have selected all the other imports, while the Benin dogs were chosen by Nestor for traits other than temperament.

NONE of the Benin dogs are aggressive — even Macho, who is very shy. When I got him, he had his third home and was still only nine months old. Early on when I had him, I carelessly came up behind him and put a hand on his back. This startled him, his head whipped around, and his muzzle touched my hand, with his mouth open. The boy is QUICK! — but he never came close to nipping, and fear-biting has not been an issue with my dogs, even if they are feeling very shy and jumpy. Apollo can act very aggressive when nervous and may snap if cornered, but also will not attack. Macho was here for months before I



realized he had prick ears, a tail that went straight up over his back and a good, not roached, top-line. Unlike the talkative Apollo, he will only do the short, single "Basenji" bark — when startled, mainly, or as a watchdog. When he is having fun, or when asleep, he will grunt. He has howled once, joining all the other men, when all the Avuvi girls went into season. Apollo has many noises, including a siren-like intruder alert baying that starts at max volume and will lift you out of a sound sleep six inches off the bed. His yodel is very basso and growl-like.

Avuvi female as puppy and he greeted his new buddies at age eight weeks with this yodel when he first moved in. These dogs are very attentive — at first when I had Macho by himself, I had to be careful — if he was on the floor sniffing around while I was in bed, or I even moved, he would pop back up on the bed to see if I needed him for something. They are also very careful. Even as pups they could be left alone in the house. I had a roll of paper towels that survived untouched on the floor for over a week at my Seattle house with the Avuvis loose. I had them alone, one at a time. I don't think Macho actually left the one spot on the bed while I was gone, and for all I know, Apollo only left to greet me at the door. They also seem to come pre-house-broken. When I got Apollo at eight weeks, he held his pee for a cross-country plane trip — and then spent about five minutes peeing when he finally hit the grass. Now that I have imports, I can comment on their temperaments. The boys spent a lot of time ganging up on the men. Only Apollo would react; the rest just looked and walked away. Apollo would pick one put and take him down. Yeloyisse still thinks he has to challenge the adult males all the time. He was very close to his brother Midomiton, who died suddenly, possibly of a tickborne disease. Akouedekon has stopped challenging the men. He was the biggest pup for a

long time, but the rest caught up. Also, he was subdued while he fought tick-borne Ehrlichiosis. When he was through all that, he seemed to have lost his desire to dominate everyone else. One of the bitches, Miflissor, is extremely quiet and retiring. I don't think I have heard a sound from her. She and Minhoudo can share a crate, eating their raw chicken together. Djodoughbe, Minhoudo's sister, is completely different. Once, when the other two girls were done with their chicken, she held off all the other dogs, including the larger boys, in order to dig a leftover bone out of the crate and she then ate it right in front of everyone. I have to keep her from hogging food dishes and other goodies. She will charge out from under my chair and make ferocious noises at anyone she thinks is getting too close. No one pays much attention to this anymore, as she is not a biter. Angel is not a biter, either, but she doesn't like the "lip" Djodoughbe gives her. So, sometimes we get to hear some very loud, fast, hot fights between these two. Neither one of them as even a scratch by the time we break them up. The boy pups did suffer several dominance bites from Apollo. They don't seem to learn! Recently, Minhoudo, who had also been silent, began letting her feelings be known and has begun some assertive behaviours similar to those of her sister. They are very close to one another still. They both act like there is nothing they would rather do than hang out with me, hopefully in close contact, and lick me to death.

## An interview with Dr Rose Marie Holt

By Betsy Polglase, Tewksbury, MA. Copyright 2010.

This article is first printed in Basenji Companions

newsletter. The article was also published in The  
Western Yodel, September-October 2010 15.

Photos courtesy of Dr Rose Marie Holt; for more photos  
of Miflissor, Djodoughbe, Minhoudo, Yeloyisse and  
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