



## SPEAKERS' CORNER

by David Cavill

davidcavill@btconnect.com

**“Great discoveries and improvements invariably involve the cooperation of many minds. I may be given credit for having blazed the trail, but when I look at the subsequent developments I feel the credit is due to others rather than to myself “-**

**Alexander Graham Bell**

HAVING WRITTEN just a few days ago that I had not missed Crufts in over 40 years I spoke/wrote rather too soon - I have now!

Angela had decided to go to the NEC only on Friday and Saturday so first thing Thursday morning I was up at 6 o'clock,

# Crufts, I spoke too soon...

took a taxi to Trowbridge station and was between Bristol and Cheltenham at eight when she rang to say she was not feeling well and had tested positive for Covid. I got off at the next stop and started back, feeling fine until later in the day when I, too, began to suffer symptoms which quickly developed into the dreaded infection. It may not be much comfort to those who have suffered the awful effects of this virus, but I can tell you that Angela and I can now empathise with you as well as sympathise.

Any illness makes huge demands on anyone's metabolism but the worst is behind us and we just feel lucky that it has not been as bad as it might have been.

One advantage is that I can settle to Speakers' Corner without the rush that normally accompanies the week of Crufts. And I am pleased to bring you news of a fascinating job opportunity: Crufts will be filling the pages so my article may provide something a little different although, as I hope you will agree, equally important.

You may remember that I and others (Ian Seath and Ronnie Irving among them) have written on a number of occasions about International Partnership for Dogs (IPFD). Its origins were established in 1994 when the Swedish Kennel Club (SKK) began to develop and use the Agria Pet Insurance Database to provide breed-specific statistics on disease and death in dogs. This work was soon supported by Denmark and Norway and eventually by the Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI) as well as many other professional, welfare, academic and other organisations which had been carrying out their own research on issues of health, well

-being, and welfare of dogs under the banner 'Sharing and Caring for Dogs'.

From 2008, kennel clubs across the world came under increasing pressure from charities and lobby groups, the media and governments to improve and expand their health and welfare activities, not just in breeding healthy dogs, but in much broader terms which included legislation, research and imposing more stringent demands on breeders. It was clear that issues affecting the health and welfare of dogs were global in scope and there was recognition that proactive, international collaboration and co-operation were vital.

In 2011, Dr. Brenda Bonnett, who has also featured in Speakers' Corner, made a formal proposal to develop a canine health and welfare information network which would be funded by the Agria-SKK Research Foundation, to capitalise on the strengths of the international canine focused scientific community, through the sharing of information and expertise and the facilitation of on-going collaboration, presenting a 'united front' by bringing all kennel clubs and other relevant organisations together. The objective was to create a sustainable model to accomplish goals and address needs: specifically to enhance the distribution of information that would underpin decision-making, develop and support international partnerships, oversee development of the internet resource (DogWellNet.com) and provide a forum for informed discussion. The result was the establishment of the International Partnership for Dogs (IPFD)

### Working towards international cooperation

At the end of March 2013, funds were allocated for a contract with an IT company to help further develop the platform for the Information Network and to engage Brenda Bonnett to organise, support and direct that work. And in the summer the FCI allocated further funds to continue development and to fund a Project Team to engage other potential partners.

The first meeting of the Board of the International Partnership for Dogs was held in August of that year at the Kennel Club in London. It comprised Pekka Olson (Chair, Sweden), Caroline Kisko (Vice Chair, UK), Eddie Dziuk (USA), Peter Friedrich (Germany), Jean-Pierre Genevois (France), Patricia Olson (USA), Kirsi Sainio (Finland) with Brenda Bonnett (Canada), confirmed as the Chief Executive Officer, and Ulf Uddman (Sweden) as the Chief Financial Officer. It was the beginning of an immense amount of work internationally through further collaborative partners becoming involved, the increasingly important Dog Health Workshops, the DogWellNet Digest, the expansion of the Breed Database and the harmonisation of the already established genetic testing regimes to aid statistical analysis. Effective development continued throughout the Covid crisis as the vast majority of its work has always been done virtually, so the organisation was, and is, well-placed to carry on with minimum disruption. Much of the success of the organisation has been down to Brenda Bonnett. Brenda is a Canadian veterinarian and consulting epidemiologist. Her

research and projects in Europe and North America include the development of national and international programmes with kennel clubs, extensive analysis of animal insurance data, the study of human-animal interactions and pet welfare initiatives as well as being a frequent speaker on topics of animal health, welfare and human animal interactions at scientific meetings.

### The search for a new CEO

Brenda stepped down as CEO in October, 2021 although she continues to share her expertise with the international dog community as IPFD's Veterinary Science Officer. Two months before, Katariina Mäki had joined IPFD as Business and Project Coordinator and assumed the role of Acting CEO in November, 2021.

As an aside, I have a special interest in Katariina Mäki because she has reported on the long term effectiveness of IPFD's work into my own breed, Finnish Spitz. Fifteen years ago, the breed was a typical 'epilepsy breed' and one often taken as an example when talking about breed-specific diseases. Now the situation is quite different, and the breed has less epilepsy than the norm among pedigree dog breeds. This has been achieved through the work of veterinarians and geneticists at Jyväskylä University in Finland, the cooperation of all the Nordic breed associations, breeders, and owners which committed to a breeding strategy, led by the Finnish Breed Association in Finland. This led to the development of a method for calculating what became known as the Epi Index which uses statistical analysis to provide an estimate of a dog's 'epilepsy risk'.

Through IPFD, the techniques used have been applied to other breeds where epilepsy has been a problem.

Some have argued that in so seriously restricting selection in a breed (which it does), breed type will be, and has been lost, but in my view this a price that must be paid in any breed where deleterious traits which have become embedded have to be tackled.

But back to Brenda Bonnett. Her retirement has left a vacancy and there is no doubt that she will be a hard act to follow. The skill set of the invitation to apply for the post runs to two pages and the specific role entails, 'Overall responsibility for IPFD's operations including: operational and strategic management, development and follow-up of strategy, operations, budget and reporting to the Board; high quality delivery of all matters to IPFD's partner organizations; motivating and engaging the entire organization and being an ambassador for IPFD and its values; building and maintaining a strong network among the international dog community, academia, media, politicians and other stakeholders and collaborating with similar activities internationally.' All that and it is a 'part time consultant position'!

I know of a number of suitable candidates based here in the UK and there must be others: I sincerely hope that one is prepared to take on this demanding but vitally important role. For anyone interested, the deadline for submitting applications (via email to pekka.olson@skk.se) is Friday, April 15, 2022.