

My name is Diane Bleh, and this is my fourth season showing in TICA. While my journey with the Maine Coon is still relatively new, my journey in the cat fancy began many years ago.

Between **1983 and 1996**, I bred **Persians and Himalayans**, filling our home with beauty, personality, and the joyful chaos that only cats can bring. But life has seasons, and when three of our four children reached their teenage years, I made the difficult decision to step away from breeding and devote my time to raising my family.

Still, once you've lived with cats in your heart and home, that love never truly leaves you.

When I returned to the cat fancy, my journey didn't begin with a Maine Coon—it began with a Bengal in the Alter class. I had always admired the beauty and presence of the Maine Coon, and with the encouragement of my Bengal breeder and show mentor, I was introduced to an amazing Maine Coon Alter named **Maverick**.

Maverick changed everything. Over the next year, he taught me not only how much I could learn from the Maine Coon, but also the art of grooming and presenting this magnificent natural breed. That journey led me to my first Maine Coon queen, **Chemicoons Magnolia of TheresaPurrs**, and my passion for preservation just grew stronger.

Not long after, a close friend introduced me to my Maine Coon mentor, **Teri Matzkin**. Terri has taught me so much about responsible breeding, health, genetics, and most importantly, how to preserve this wonderful breed for the future. She also trusted me with my first Maine Coon stud, **SaraJen Sharp Dressed Man ("Tucker")**, which gave me the chance to keep learning and growing as a preservation breeder. I am always grateful for her guidance, patience, and generosity in sharing her experience.

The American Maine Coon is one of the world's few naturally developed cat breeds. Its strength, beauty, temperament, and hardiness are the result of nature—not human engineering. As preservation breeders and fanciers, our responsibility is to protect those qualities, not replace them.

Today, we are seeing a growing trend in some parts of the world to introduce traits such as new colors and dominant blue eyes through crossbreeding with other breeds. While these traits may appeal to some people, they are not part of the naturally developed Maine Coon. Introducing outside genetics can also bring unintended health concerns and change the characteristics that make the Maine Coon unique.

Mother Nature took centuries to create this incredible breed. When we try to improve on nature simply to produce something rare or different, there can be consequences. Our first responsibility should always be to preserve the health, temperament, structure, and genetic integrity of the Maine Coon, not chase the next trend.

As someone who is still learning every day, I also have the privilege of sharing that knowledge with my grandchildren. They are learning not only how to care for and love these amazing cats, but also why preservation matters. My greatest hope is that one day they will carry on what has been

entrusted to me and continue to protect and preserve this extraordinary breed for generations to come. To me, that is what a true legacy looks like.

Thank you to everyone who has helped me along this journey—especially Maverick, Magnolia, Tucker, Teri, Liz, and the many mentors and preservation breeders who continue to teach me what it truly means to protect this extraordinary natural breed.

As my experience continues to grow, I would be honored to be considered for the **TICA Maine Coon Breed Committee**. I am devoted to listening, learning, and contributing in any way I can to help preserve the integrity, health, and future of this magnificent breed for generations to come.

The Maine Coon has endured for centuries because nature got it right. It is now our responsibility to ensure that future generations inherit the same healthy, majestic, and unmistakable American Maine Coon that first captured our hearts.

Preserve the breed. Protect its health. Honor its history. Leave a legacy for tomorrow.

Sincerely, Diane Bleh