

## *Finding That Special Puppy (or dog)...*

**By Karen Peak**

### **West Wind Dog Training**

"How much is that doggie in the window...?" goes the old song. "AKC PUPS for sale..." scream the ads in the paper. Rescue groups set up at local pet supply places for adoption fairs. Breeders insist you must go to them for the best pups. How do you know where to turn? Maybe this can shed some light... Please note: this is only a highlight and just some information to help guide you. As a potential puppy buyer, it is *your* responsibility to research dogs, breeds, breeders, rescues, etc. before you commit to a creature that will be in your life for the next fifteen years or so.

#### **PET STORES:**

I advise people to stay FAR AWAY from them. You do not know where their puppies came from and the employees always answer the same: a breeder. Some stores will even say they rescued the pups. You have no way of knowing if they are telling you the truth. You have no way of telling the conditions the pups were in prior to. You cannot see the parents. Puppies cannot be properly socialized when spending their formative weeks in cages in a store.

Pet Store puppies mainly come from puppy mills. However, the stores will insist they only get their pups from caring breeders. No caring, reputable, responsible breeder will ever sell a pup through a pet store. Puppy mills mass produce animals for profit first. Often, the conditions the pups are raised in are substandard at best. Pups may be taken from the dam (mom) far too young (8 weeks is the youngest a pup should be taken and miller will lie about ages they take the pups). Pups do not get the socialization they require at the mill. Often, health care is limited to what is needed to ship the pups to the broker or to the store.

Puppy Mills do not screen their dogs for genetic problems that could be passed to the pups. Millers want to get the most money with the least amount of expenditures. There is no way to tell if the pup you are getting will not develop a problem down the road. Many problems do not show up when the pup is young. Some problems take years. Pet Stores will not give you a lifetime guarantee for the health of the pup. You will be lucky to get 72 hours. Even then, if a problem arises, the store may insist you take the pup to their vet. Would you trust a vet that may work in conjunction with a store? I would question the validity of his diagnosis seriously.

Pet Stores are more concerned with making a sale. Think, is it easier to sell a puppy to make \$800 or sell \$800 in pet products in one day? Easier to sell the puppy... Do you think they will be totally honest?

#### **BACK YARD BREEDERS:**

I cringe when I see ads in the local papers advertising puppies for sale. Many back yard breeders just breed purebred dogs – many just breed dogs. Some BYBs like to create breeds out of ignorance or the desire to make money from a sucker who knows no better. They may not know the standard for the breed and often breed dogs that are not good breed representatives. AKC registration is NOT a Good Housekeeping seal of approval for dogs. All the American Kennel Club does is handle paperwork. What quality the dogs being bred are is up to the integrity of the breeder. So do not be blinded by AKC. In addition, do NOT be blinded by Champions in the background. There is far more to breeding than getting Champion dogs to mate.

Back yard breeders tend not to breed the best quality dogs. It is questionable whether they will test the dogs before breeding for genetic issues. I am not saying you cannot get a sweet pet from a BYB, but do you want to support someone who is not bettering a breed but rather putting out more dogs on the planet without serious concern for quality? Do you want to support someone intentionally breeding crosses? Many reputable breeders started with a backyard litter and probably sold the litter through an ad. However, they have educated themselves about good practices and the importance of bettering a breed and proving they have good dogs. Almost no reputable breeder advertises in the paper when there are pups for sale. Good, reputable breeders go by word of mouth through club members, being contacted after dog shows, recommended by various dog clubs, etc. They have no need to advertise through newspapers.

There is sometimes a fine line between a BYB and a Hobby breeder; this is where personal education as well as a bit of gut instinct is needed.

### **HOBBY BREEDERS:**

Hobby breeders and those involved in the dog world are the safest place to get a puppy. A good breeder will see that their dogs are shown to prove they have good type. They may even compete in other sports to prove their dogs have brains as well. The dogs will be tested for everything possible prior to breeding and will require the same of any dog they breed a dog to. Puppies will be evaluated and properly socialized. Puppies will get required vet care before they go to homes. A reputable breeder will seriously interview prospective puppy buyers. You will be told both the highlights and concerns with the breed. Nothing will be held back. A good breeder will know the background of the dogs in the pedigree and will have researched the breeding long before it is done. A good breeder will help match the best pup to your family and will not hesitate to refuse to sell a pup to anyone they question. A good breeder will also give you a lifetime guarantee on the pup and insist that if for any reason you cannot keep the dog, it comes back. You should also get a written sales contract outlining what the breeder expects (like spay/neuter of a pet puppy). A good breeder cares about the dogs produced and really has a strong desire to improve the breed – not just put more dogs on the planet.

Now, not all hobby breeders are good. Some breed quantity trying for that quality show dog. If you go to a breeder that has dozens of puppies from multiple litters, stop and question. Use your gut instinct... Once again, sometimes there is a fine line between a

good breeder and a not so good one. You have to educate yourself and do research. Some breeders breed quantity for quality or breed not necessarily to correct type but to the "flavor of the month" that seems to be winning in the ring this year. Again, do not be blinded by wins and titles all the time. It is easy to be blinded but you must look at other factors as well – such as health. In general, a reputable and responsible breeder is a good choice if you must have a purebred dog and must have a puppy.

You can find out about such breeders through local kennel and dog breed clubs. There are websites at the bottom for your further information.

### **SHELTERS/RESCUES:**

So many unwanted critters end up here. Many dogs at shelters are purebred. Many more are crosses. There are also many purebred rescues associated with various dog clubs. If you just want a pet and are not too fussy about age, please go to a shelter. Granted, you do not know the background of the animals. However, these animals are in serious need of homes. A good rescue will screen you and help make the best match possible. There will be a spay/neuter agreement, possibly a trial period to make sure the match works and if something should happen and you cannot keep the dog, they will insist it comes back to them. You may not get that little pup, but older pups and adult dogs have so much to offer! In addition, they often sleep through the night and have more bladder control!

Purebreds without papers *can* be registered for certain competitions. Both the AKC (American Kennel Club) and UKC (United Kennel Club) have protocols for this. The UKC will register *mixed breeds* for many types of competition. The United States Dog Agility Association (USDAA) and North American Dog Agility Council (NADAC) will register crosses. So the excuse "I can't do any sport with a mutt or a rescue dog" holds no weight anymore... So please, if you are just looking for a companion or even a competition dog (you cannot do Conformation with a rescue but there are dozens of other canine activities), please remember rescues!

### **Here are some handy websites for more information on dogs and picking them:**

The American Kennel Club – [www.AKC.ORG](http://www.AKC.ORG)

The United Kennel Club – [www.UKCDOGS.COM](http://www.UKCDOGS.COM)

The American Rare Breed Association – [www.ARBA.ORG](http://www.ARBA.ORG)

Info Dog – [www.Infodog.com](http://www.Infodog.com)

Dog Breed Information Center – [www.DogBreedInfo.com](http://www.DogBreedInfo.com)

### **Also, check out**

American Mixed Breed Obedience Registry – [www.AMBORUSA.org](http://www.AMBORUSA.org)

United States Dog Agility Association – [www.USDAA.com](http://www.USDAA.com)

North American Dog Agility Council – [www.NADAC.com](http://www.NADAC.com)

**And before you fall for that puppy in the window, please check out**

No Puppy Mills – [www.NoPuppyMills.com](http://www.NoPuppyMills.com)

**There are literally thousands of websites devoted to dog rescues as well – many breed clubs have rescue personnel associated with them.**