



Breeders' Briefcase

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Mentors and Mentees Part Two of Three

By Lisa Dubé Forman

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I have always viewed being a breeder as a solemn responsibility. A breeder, a person who produces animals, should be as knowledgeable as possible because their actions have a cause and effect on not only our beloved dogs but on other people as well. In breeding dogs typically there are multiple pups in one litter. Many of these pups are then placed or sold to pet homes. If a breeder has incomplete or limited knowledge of a great many important aspects related to canine breeding such as health concerns, basic genetics, canine anatomy, and muscle physiology their shortcomings can cause much avoidable heartache and turmoil in the pups' new homes. The pet owner's heartbreak and angst can quickly take over when their companion is diagnosed with hip dysplasia, epilepsy, retinal disease, progressive retinal atrophy, or diabetes just to name a few of the hundreds of genetic issues effecting dogs today. These people's lives are directly affected by the breeder's actions.

A well-informed mentee (breeder) would have had the opportunity to have learned from their mentors the importance of research: to become cognizant of basic genetic issues and modes of inheritance. This mentee/

breeder would understand that genes are inherited not qualities. They would be familiar with the limited usefulness of the traditional pedigree and how the multigenerational collection of names is commonly mistaken as contributable heritable characteristics. This belief has led many to believe their litter will inherit all the desired qualities and that the multitiered ancestors will contribute to the progeny's quality. A well-learned mentee would have an understanding regarding the limitations of ancestral genetic contributions and that genetic material becomes heterogeneous through the generations.

Even if there were no inherited devastating health issues involved, a poorly informed, undiscerning breeder has an effect on new pet owner's lives. This breeder may be cultivating a bloodline of dogs that are structurally unsound and incorrect, or that have congenital defects such as poor muscle development. Due in large part to their lack of schooling, this breeder is unaware of the importance of the musculoskeletal system. This, in turn, has an effect on the future dogs they breed and their quality of life. Incorrect angulation and poor assembly cause additional

stress to tendons predisposing dogs to increased injuries to their bones. Inferior muscling or unbalanced muscling increases susceptibility to injury as well. As a result, in many of these cases the issues necessitate a need for pain relievers and anti-inflammatory medications over the course of a dog's lifespan. Let us consider the giant breeds wherein a proportion nowadays are overangulated, "overdone" stem to stern.

In many cases, as these giants mature over years, veteran breeders may agree that an overangulated giant which has a congenital defect of inferior to poor quality muscling may experience a deterioration of its muscle physiology. Overangulation may put a dog more at risk for injury within the bones, joints, muscles, tendons, ligaments, and feet. Some attribute it as an engineering problem. A weakness in the hindquarters which powers the dog is observed and the dog can stumble often and the symptoms progress in severity. Many of us refer to it as "falling apart" and they can do this while in their young adult prime. In some cases these dogs are euthanized as they no longer can get around of their own accord. Dogs which are straight in the pasterns and typically goes hand in hand with incorrect steep shoulder assembly and/or stuck on fronts causes excessive stress placed on the tendons. All of these definitely have an effect on the pet owner who has helplessly fallen head over heels in love with their "best friend" and are heartbroken to either have to maintain their buddy on chemicals and medications for the remainder of the animals life or, worse, euthanize a dog well before its time because the dog could no longer get up to defecate or urinate outside. Would a breeder who

has never been mentored understand all of this having only gleaned their breeding knowledge from exhibiting at dog shows?

Let us face the facts. The time and expense to be mentored is recognized as the cost of doing business. This sacrifice will pay for itself down the road. The sport of dogs is an expensive passion and breed mentoring is just the tip of the financial iceberg. As a parenthetical point, let us consider for a moment the monetary expenses AKC judges have to absorb. I am using judges as an example because the process of becoming an AKC dog show judge is extremely costly depending on what region of the country you reside in.

When applying for additional breeds judges are expected to attend breed seminars, specialties, supported entries, study groups, and workshops or institutes for each breed being applied for. They are expected to have had mentoring/tutoring experience with each breed. The AKC defines it by stating that the judge selects and works with qualified mentors including but not limited to the following opportunities: a) tutoring and guiding the applicant (judge) in breed knowledge over a period of time continuing into the provisional and regular status periods, and b) ongoing continuous kennel visits characterized by hands-on experience with litters of various ages as well as adult dogs.

Judges are expected to have experience judging the breed(s) at futurities, sanctioned matches, sweepstakes assignments, or special attractions. Lastly, they are expected to have had ringside observations with a minimum of 3 ringside observations per breed, including 2 with major

entries. As it typically turns out, most all the breed specific seminars/ study groups/workshops/institutes and finally the breed(s) national specialties that judges require turn out to be located halfway or clear cross-country! Imagine the expenses, time, and effort incurred when applying for more than one breed at a time! It adds up into the tens of thousands of dollars. As an example, in 2009 I attended four (4) breed national specialties not including my own breed's regional specialties and other all-breed shows and, yes, it involved both air and long distance car travel. For those judges approved for only a few breeds the real financial setbacks come into play. After completion and AKC approval for the additional breed's application, the provisional process begins. This

sometimes includes cross country travel to fulfill judging assignments in order to complete your provisional requirements. It is not uncommon for a judge who has judging privileges for just one or two breeds to have to fly 3,000 miles to complete one provisional assignment and then return home the next day.

WCA Housekeeping

Owners of dogs in the WCA Top 10 lists, please make sure the National Office (Ellen Dodge) has a current copy of your dog's ownership on file. Ellen can be reached at 401-782-3725 or wcadodge@cox.net



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