

Expanding my lifetime experience
By ELIZABETH ANNAND

I just discovered something very disturbing. I had no idea where pet stores got their supplies of puppies. This whole question popped up when I learned a woman I know recently purchased a pet store puppy. It was very expensive, and I said, "You know, if you just want a purebred dog, you don't need to go to the pet store and pay half again as much for the same purebred from an actual breeder." Later on, it occurred to me that I could say what I wanted about pet store puppies, but I really did not know anything about them. All I knew was purely intuitive; buying a pet store puppy just seemed like a patently bad idea. That argument would not hold up in a serious debate. So, I decided to go find out exactly what it would be like to buy a pet store puppy.

There is a puppy, kitten, lizard, bird, ferret, rabbit, etc. (you name it) store within walking distance of my job. (Occasionally on a lunch break, I will wander in the store with one of my dogs to look at the ferrets, rabbits, rodents, etc. The dogs find the animals interesting, and it is often beneficial to the dog to expose them to one more public place. Bear in mind, I *never* buy anything; not so much as a single treat - although the bunnies are tempting.) Today, I walked in the store and asked about a puppy purchase. It was a rather strange experience.

Puppies are guaranteed here for three years. You can return the puppy within two weeks of purchase. Very few puppies are eligible for AKC registration. Most are under some registries I have never heard of; American Pet Registry, Canine Club of America? The puppies come with a 5-generation pedigree and a certificate that identifies the breeder and the parents. This certificate also indicates their up-to-date health history (vaccinations, wormers, etc.).

I asked if they had any GSDs, and it turns out they had a 12-week-old female. I asked to see the certificate and the pedigree. I did not recognize the breeder's name, but I saw a few notable names in the sire's line of the pedigree. I then asked to see the puppy. I played with her for about 5 minutes, and turned her back over to the store clerk. I am not an experienced puppy examiner, so there was little I could see that was disturbing other than she kind of had an ugly face (the only thing I can judge and it is all a matter of personal taste). Overall, she was a pleasant pup and appeared perfectly healthy. She did not stink, her skin looked good, and her eyes and ears were clean. She responded to voice and eye contact appropriately, as far as I could tell.

I asked about the breeders and how the store (which turns out to be one of a very large chain of stores located all over the country) gets all these puppies. The clerk was able to answer most - but not all - of my questions. For certain, the national chain has contracts with these breeders. The breeders are only located in the Midwest (of all things). What is not so certain is what happens to these pups from the time they leave the breeders until they arrive in the local pet shop. I am assuming trucks go to these places, pick up litters, take them to central warehouses where the puppies are inventoried before being shipped around the country.

My next question is this - how did this pup end up here? Was her pedigree real? I guess the scenario could go something like this: Person No. 1 could buy a pup from Person No. 2, who violated a sale agreement with a fancy kennel by failing to spay/neuter. So, there may be no AKC, CKC or UKC papers, but Person No. 1 and Person No. 2 could just be milling out pups and selling them to pet shops.

How can we better educate the public about the problems that this creates? This puts everyone involved in the breed at risk. What is a dog lover to do?

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