

Local Voices



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Sometimes Love is Not Enough

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This adorable puppy is now a happy healthy well-adjusted adult dog living the good life in the Farmington Valley!

Photos Karen J. Moulton



A family put their dog down this weekend. The dog was not old. The dog did not have cancer. The dog was not hit by a car and severely injured. We may never know why, but the dog attacked three family members. This dog inflicted deep puncture wounds and came back at one family member three times before they were able to get him outside. What provoked the attack? The owner asked the dog to move out of the way.

This dog was bought at 8 weeks old and raised as a family member in their home. He was taken through training classes. He was loved. Yet he attacked the people who loved him. He was not a safe dog to live with and they made the difficult and heart wrenching decision to put him down. The whole family stayed with him when he was euthanized. They feel sad and guilty. His death will haunt them and me. They did not have any options other than to put him down. He was not safe to live with and not safe to rehome.

When you decide to get a puppy, please talk to a trainer/ethical breeder/veterinarian and/or breed rescue club BEFORE you buy a puppy. Ask them where you can find a healthy and stable puppy. Ask them what breeders and places to stay away from.

Look for red flags that the breeder may not have the best interests of their pups or your family in mind. Red flags include:

- Pet stores. Pet store dogs come from large breeding facilities that concentrate on turning out a product (puppies) for profit with little regard for the physical and behavioral health of the animals. NO reputable breeder ever sells their dogs to pet stores.
- The breeder does not interview you or ask for references to see if your family is a good match for one of their dogs. They sell their dogs to anyone.
- Dogs are living in conditions where they are getting minimal human interaction.
- Kennels/living spaces are unclean.
- Dogs never allowed in the home.
- Breeder will not let you see the parents of the litter. The breeder explains that the parents are "protective".
- You see the parents and they appear fearful or aggressive.
- Breeder wants to meet you somewhere such as a parking lot and hand the puppy over to you.
- Pups have not been seen by a veterinarian. No health records given.
- Breeder will let you take a pup under 8 weeks home. This is illegal in Connecticut.
- Selling what they say are 'quality dogs' for a low price. (Though high price is not a guarantee of quality either).
- Telling you the dogs are quality because they are AKC registered. AKC registration does NOT mean quality - it is no more a guarantee of quality than registering your car with the DMV.

Why does all of this matter? It matters because puppies born of parents with aggression/fear and health problems are not going to be good family members. Puppies born via inbreeding are at risk for health and behavioral issues. Love, a good and caring family, training, and wonderful intentions cannot override bad genetics.

My heart breaks when I see another family and dog go through this nightmare of aggression. It is a long dark path to walk. Do your research before you get a puppy. Once you do choose your new family member, seek out the guidance of a trainer who uses positive methods to help you and your pup get started on the road to a great relationship.

Please don't learn the hard way that sometimes love is not enough.