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#### Part 4

This four-part series on breeder ethics has discussed religious, historical and legal concepts surrounding the dog and its place in modern society. With this foundation, we have examined ethical issues pertaining to breed preservation, the betterment of breeds, overpopulation and the altering of dogs, genetic disease and the purpose of breeds as well as backyard and occasional breeders. Along the way, we will take a look at American Kennel Club statistics, the showing of dogs, sportsmanship, responsibilities of puppy buyers, the need for contracts, the work of rescue groups, the presence of puppy mills and pet stores, the role of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the sales/advertising of dogs, including the Internet marketplace.

All of us "in dogs" started somewhere, and not all of us had the good fortune to grow up in families that were involved with dogs and dog breeding, show or other activities. Author Cargill was born into dogging. When he came home from the hospital, he came home to an Airedale Terrier that was to become his first "baby sitter." Author Thorpe-Vargas' dog life started later.

We have been somewhat hypothetical in the earlier installments (see "To Breed Or Not To Breed: Building An Ethical Framework," "For Pups' Sake: A Breeder's Duty To Pets And People" and "The Ties That Bind: Genetics And The Breeder" in the April, May and June 2001 issues respectively), but in this final article we now concentrate on specific moral issues the ordinary breeder can expect to encounter. You will find that the devil is in the details.

We thought the best way to start was to talk about our own personal experience with breeding and our relationship with our "puppy people." Both authors made many mistakes when getting into the game as novices, and we will use personal examples of some of the ethical issues.

#### Learning A Lesson

Thorpe-Vargas got her first Samoyed (her first dog ever) in 1984. It was a rescue, but her family immediately fell in love with the breed and wanted their very own puppy. They had never had a puppy before and were not dog people. The people they had gotten their rescue from had a Christmas litter, so they bought a bitch puppy from them as a present for their son. These people were one step up from backyard breeders. They did do some showing and rescue, but they bred litters to make money. In preparing to write this article, we found that puppy mills do not make up the bulk of American Kennel Club registrations. According to published AKC statistics, the majority of dog registrations are attributed to those who produce only occasional litters.

This Christmas puppy, call name Shisu, turned out to be Thorpe-Vargas' "foundation bitch," and she was extremely lucky with her choice (for Shisu was free from major genetic defects), although Thorpe-Vargas didn't realize how lucky she was at the time. Shisu came into heat three times between 6 months and 1 year old. Her vet told Thorpe-Vargas either to breed her or fix her as this girl "wanted to be a mother." So, she called Shisu's breeder who said, "I have the perfect choice for a stud. You should breed her to her grandfather."

So they did. The litter decided to arrive on Thanksgiving Day, and the first puppy was breech. With her vet on the phone, Thorpe-Vargas was talked through the process and was able to help Shisu deliver nine puppies, one of which later died. (The family thinks the mother might have stepped on it.) At 6 weeks, Thorpe-Vargas put an ad in the newspaper and sold the puppies to whoever had the money. To this day, she has no idea what happened to those puppies after they were placed.

What is wrong with this picture?

- The people who sold Shisu should have never sold a puppy at Christmastime. Leaving a mother and littermates is probably the most traumatic experience of a puppy's life. All the turmoil and confusion associated with the holidays is not an environment conducive to introducing a puppy to a new household, especially a family that has never owned a puppy before.
  - \* Thorpe-Vargas had no experience with young dogs and did not know what questions to ask. She knew nothing about the breed, hadn't done her "homework" and the breeder had done no genetic testing of her dogs.
  - \* Thorpe-Vargas bred a dog that was too young and had had no genetic testing done. She did not know what genetic diseases were common in her breed and what, if any, testing was available.
  - \* Thorpe-Vargas did not carefully plan the litter, studied no pedigrees and used a sire that was both too closely related and that had not undergone any genetic clearances.
  - \* Thorpe-Vargas was neither physically nor mentally prepared to help whelp the litter, nor did she have the proper equipment, i.e., a whelping box with pig rails. (These rails prevent the puppies from being asphyxiated or squashed to death.) She should have had an experienced breeder with her or, at the very least, assisted at a few whelpings. She put both her dam and puppies at risk because of her inexperience. Fortunately, Shisu turned out to be a very good mother, but if she hadn't, the pups would have been at risk of death or abandonment and then depended on the breeder to hand-raise them.
  - \* Thorpe-Vargas did not have a list of qualified puppy buyers prior to the breeding of her bitch.
  - \* Thorpe-Vargas placed her puppies through an advertisement in the newspaper. She did not require even the most basic criteria of her puppy buyers, such as recommendations regarding their character and responsibility. She did not offer any guarantees nor did she have a puppy contract. (One point in her favor is that she did not sell her puppies to a pet store.)
  - \* Thorpe-Vargas let those puppies go out in the world with no help offered to the new owners and with no way to keep track of them.

Thorpe-Vargas did not breed dogs again for four years. She did a much better job the next time.

Some breeders object to selling puppies over the Internet or through the newspaper. In fact, they decry these practices and call them unethical. Others disagree. One thing we must stress is this: Under no circumstances should one sell puppies to a pet store, auction them off or offer them as prizes in any type of raffle. These sort of events take the control of the sale from the seller and give it to the buyer.

Breeders should avoid any situation in which they have no control over who eventually receives the puppy after they have given careful consideration to the circumstances and have matched the type of dog to the type of buyer. We suspect many who talk down selling over the Internet have actually sold to buyers who were members of chat groups, breed lists, etc. Ethics is a funny business-it used to be unethical for doctors or lawyers to advertise, now it is common and many individuals view it as ethical. We wonder if advertising puppies or expected litters on the Internet will not become accepted as commonplace and ethical in the future.

#### Planning A Breeding

If you are a breeder, the purpose of having a litter is to provide yourself with a dog that you feel will better the breed or at least maintain a high status quo with the best. However, every puppy produced is not a show- or performance-quality dog. One side effect of producing a show or performance dog is that one will always have pet-quality dogs to place. The breeder's responsibility to them is just as significant as it is for the dog or dogs the breeder is keeping-maybe even more so.

Thorpe-Vargas again has an example of what not to do. She bought a bitch puppy from a very well-known kennel. This puppy matched the phenotype of what she wanted to breed, but she came from a litter of six from which only two survived. (Warning bells should have been ringing here.) After this girl reached 2 years of age and had passed her hip and eye exams, she was bred to a dog that was related to her seven generations back. She produced eight healthy puppies, all of which survived. She, however, developed eclampsia, a life-threatening condition involving an imbalance in the blood calcium levels. She was pulled through this situation but shortly after weaning her pups she started to get seriously dog-aggressive. This behavior only worsened when Thorpe-Vargas started to show her again, and she became useless on the sled team. When Thorpe-Vargas complained to the breeder, she was told to return her, which she did.

Within a year of returning her, this dog had finished her championship and had been bred to her father. This bitch should never have been bred again. Her life was put in jeopardy by whelping for a second time, and such close inbreeding practically guarantees an increased probability that she would pass her poor temperament on to her offspring.

One should breed only dogs that have good temperament and good health. If you have performance or working dogs, the next criteria of breeding is to produce dogs that can do the work they were bred to do. A sled dog should want to pull a sled, that is, it should be mentally and physically predisposed to the task.

Granted, not all breeds have jobs that still exist. To illustrate, bull-baiting is now illegal. Does this mean that Bulldogs no longer have a job? Unfortunately, this breed no longer has the conformation required to do its "job," but the loyal, rugged temperament should still be there. So, choosing a mating pair should include not only matching the phenotype or the conformation you want to perpetuate, but also running all available genetic tests and some types of performance tests prior to breeding, too. At the very least, both parents should be mentally stable and have passed some type of temperament test.

### Whelping A Litter

There is a lot to consider when breeding a litter, so those who have never bred dogs should first get a mentor. Although most dogs of most breeds whelp freely and are good mothers, there will always be some that will have problems and may be poor mothers.

Ethical breeders will have properly prepared themselves for the procedure by training with another person experienced in the breed. The ethical breeder also would provide the best medical care possible and see that the dam has had the proper conditioning and nutrition she needs. There are services available that provide access to modern instrumentation and professional contacts during the whelping process. With the equipment and remote telemetry leased out by a breeding service, one can even tell if a puppy is in distress or if the bitch has finished whelping.

At the very least, a close relationship between breeder and vet is essential. Most experienced breeders and vets strongly advise checking for retained puppies by X-raying the bitch within 24 hours or so after the breeder thinks the dam has finished whelping. Many breeders have lost their bitches by neglecting this step.

The proper equipment, including a whelping box, warming pads and an overhead source of heat, is crucial. Remember that puppies have very little capacity for thermal self-regulation. Provide a safe and quiet place for your bitch throughout her pregnancy. Familiar, safe, comfortable and quiet surroundings ease the transition of a first-time mother into her new occupation.

### Placing A Puppy

Before the bitch becomes a mother, however, the breeder should have prospective buyers at the ready. In fact, the breeder should have buyers in line before the breeding even occurs.

A puppy should be thought of as a new addition to the family. Without that type of commitment, prospective puppy owners should be actively discouraged from getting a dog. But commitment alone is insufficient-the breeder has a responsibility to ensure that the potential buyer also has adequate resources and sufficient stability to be able to afford and care for a dog. There should also be a reasonable degree of certainty on the breeder's part that these conditions will continue.

A breeder should not allow owners to set the puppy up for failure-instead, owners should be given reasonable expectations. The breeder should discuss the different stages of puppy growth and what behaviors to expect at these different stages. In fact, some breeders suggest books and quiz prospective puppy buyers on the material.

A dog can be very inconvenient and puppies especially are very destructive. An 8-week-old puppy is probably the equivalent of an 8-month-old human child-they will chew everything. A breeder's job is to mentor puppy buyers and give them the tools needed to get through difficult puppy stages. Talk to them about the dos and don'ts of crating, housetraining, etc. Did we mention that puppies chew everything? Safe chew toys should be provided, but most of them should be given to the puppy only when it can be supervised. Breeders should impress upon the new owner that anything ruined by the puppy is the owner's fault. Anything left out is fair game.

Breeders should discuss ownership responsibilities and training. Some puppies need to be fed more than twice a day. Breeders should actively discourage people who work long hours from getting a puppy unless someone can be there to take it out to eliminate on a regular schedule. Perhaps an older or "rescue" dog would be more suitable for those individuals. Some animals require a firm hand, others a gentle hand. We encourage the gentlest hand consistent with the bravado of the individual animal. Some dogs, even breeds of dogs, will need an "external influence" to intrude on their "I have a mind of my own" mentality and bravado. If they don't get it and discipline is not established early on and maintained throughout the animal's life, there can be serious behavior problems.

One way to get a handle on how new owners will react is to watch them carefully with their own children. Children younger than 5 usually do not have any real concept of how to handle small animals unless they are members of a "doggie" family or are properly supervised. During visits with prospective buyers, breeders should note the guidance parents give or don't give to their children.

Breeders should insist upon some type of personal recommendations. Veterinarians and groomers are usually good contacts. What a breeder needs to determine is the long-term commitment a puppy buyer has. The goal is to find a puppy's "forever home." Dogs grow up and get old. Will these owners get rid of the dog when it gets to be inconvenient or medically costly? Potential owners should be made aware of the genetic diseases the breed is prone to, and medical insurance should be discussed. For a list of topics

that breeders should address, see the "Finding Good Homes" sidebar (ks. lista artikkelin lopussa).

### Making A Commitment

Breeders deal with the public. This is a public known to be capricious, sometimes irrational, sometimes enlightened and sometimes not. With this in mind, breeders are wise to use contracts.

Breeders should look at the contract as a "training tool," and it should include items that one would normally take for granted. Most experienced and ethical breeders include some type of clause about getting the dog back if for any reason the owners are no longer able to keep the animal or if they fail to live up to their obligations. How enforceable is this proviso? It is probably not very enforceable, but it does give buyers something to think about. See the sidebar "Crafting A Contract" for areas to consider (ks. lista artikkelin lopussa).

Not only the new owner has such responsibilities to the puppy-it goes without saying that breeders should take back their own puppies. Situations, however, do change. Financial and health issues arise, not to mention that local dog restrictions (such as those limiting the number of animals on a property) sometimes make it impossible to legally take back a puppy. This is why it is necessary to be so careful when choosing your own puppy buyers. No matter how thorough we think we are, however, circumstances may arise that require the return of a dog.

If you are unable to physically take back the animal, what are your responsibilities? At the very least, you should work with your own breed rescue and provide some monetary recompense. Others to whom the breeder has sold puppies may be able to provide some type of temporary foster care. Puppy people are a wonderful resource if breeders have chosen wisely. What is unconscionable is for breeders to keep producing puppies if they are unable to physically or financially take back what they have created. Ethical breeders, if they really care for their breed, will rescue even others' dogs or will actively and financially support breed rescue efforts.

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In this series we have covered the place of the dog in history, in biology and in our hearts. We have looked at various ethical constructs ranging from "dogs are sentient life forms" to "man has absolute dominion." We have reviewed the differences between animal welfare and animal rights. We believe in domestication, especially when it comes to the dog, but we have not made up our minds yet as to whether the dog domesticated man or man domesticated the dog. We prefer to think they probably co-domesticated each other. Certainly early Homo sapiens did better after partnership with the wolf proto-types of domestic dogs, and, certainly, the domesticated dog did better than its remaining undomesticated wolf counterparts. Arguments can be

made both ways.

Regardless of the moral stances taken, it seems to us that there is a very real responsibility to breed carefully to avoid creating a cadre of genetically sick dogs. We believe the national registries have a part to play in preventing this potential occurrence. Registries will be forced by population genetics realities to modify their views of what constitutes purebred dogs as a group. Breeders will be forced to rethink their understanding of the benefits of line breeding and other such tight inbreeding schemes in favor of assortive matings to preserve genetic diversity. Those involved in breeds with few founders will run up against genetic reality sooner than some others.

It is nearly certain there will be a day of reckoning when the genetic choices made in the past will determine the dogs of the future. With the worldwide movement to ban many breeds of dogs (Germany is up to 42 breeds at the time of this writing), we feel there will be a requirement to emphasize temperament above all else in breeding schemes of the future.

We thank those who have provided input on this series. We did our best to offend no one, knowing full well from our experiences, however, that we probably offended just about everyone who read the series. Breeder ethics is an emotionally charged subject; it is difficult to know right from wrong, moral from immoral, and it is virtually impossible to find a neutral ground acceptable to all.

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Susan and John won the Dog Writers Association of America's Maxwell Medallion and the IAMS® Eukanuba® Canine Health Award for their series of articles on canine genetics that appeared in DOG WORLD. Last year they won the Eukanuba award again for a recent DOG WORLD article on acupuncture, and they were awarded another Maxwell Medallion for their DOG WORLD series on the geriatric dog.

## Crafting A Contract

Why should breeders insist on a written contract? A puppy contract functions as a not-so-gentle reminder of the obligations and requirements of dog ownership. A breeder should assume nothing. The contract just reiterates what has hopefully been discussed ahead of time, such as the following:

Return policies

Guidelines of where the dog will be housed

Exercise requirements

Food requirements and availability of water  
Weight considerations  
Health guarantees offered by the breeder  
Obligations to provide proper immunizations and yearly checkups  
Training requirements

## Finding Good Homes

What questions should a breeder ask a potential puppy buyer? The puppy has no choice about its "forever home," so it is the breeder's obligation to choose wisely on the dog's behalf.

Extensive lists of questions are available on the Internet, and through most responsible breeders, rescue societies and animal shelters. Although they vary in detail, the general thrust of the questions aims to ensure the puppy buyer's understanding and level of commitment. Basic items to be discussed with potential puppy buyers include but are not limited to the following:

History and purpose of the breed  
Reasons to choose or reject this breed-how well does it fit with one's lifestyle?  
Breed characteristics including temperament, activity level, aggressiveness, exercise, grooming and any special nutritional needs  
How well does this breed get along with other domesticated species?  
Spay and neuter considerations  
Choosing a veterinarian  
Needed equipment  
Dogs and children  
Costs of canine ownership  
Potential liabilities of dog ownership  
Amount of time a dog requires  
Training requirements/opportunities  
Availability and advantages of veterinary medical insurance  
Local dog clubs  
Cost of medical care