

FOLLOW UP: Last month's Parking Lot Puppies was a cautionary tale about a puppy named Nala. Wonderful news! Nala has been adopted and it looks like she will enjoy a very happy and safe life!

Choosing A Puppy

by Valerie Broadway

If there are plans for a puppy in your future, there are some things that should be considered before making a furry addition to the family. A puppy should not be an impulse decision. Fight the urge to take a "free puppy" from a box in a store parking lot. It's best to not even take a peek because such puppies can be so difficult to resist.

Before meeting any puppies, take time to do some research. Learn about breed characteristics and common health issues. A couple of websites to start the search are www.akc.org and www.yourpurebredpuppy.com. One of the most important things to consider is selecting a breed-type with the same energy level as the family. If they are couch potatoes, a herding breed will drive them crazy, and they will drive the dog crazy in return. If someone is hoping for a running partner, then a Bassett Hound may not be their speed.

Steer clear of buying a puppy from a pet shop. These days most reputable pet stores don't sell puppies and establishments that do are likely getting their "stock" from puppy mills. They are selling substandard puppies at inflated prices. Also, be wary of online puppy-selling websites. Many are smoke and mirror covers for puppy mills. The picturesque photos and videos they post do not reflect the reality of filth and trauma the puppies and their parents really live in.

Some places to find puppies are animal shelters and rescue organizations. As part of the adoption, most shelters and rescue groups include health checks, vaccinations, spay/

neutering, and microchipping. This is a great deal, and more than makes up for the adoption fee. It is not unusual to find purebred dogs in shelters or with rescue organizations. Most breeds also have dedicated rescue groups throughout the country. One of the best ways to know exactly what an individual dog is like is to go through groups who foster the dogs in volunteer's homes.

One benefit of mixed-breed dogs is that they generally have fewer congenital health problems than pure

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breeds. A good place to begin your search for a rescue dog, purebred or mixed, is www.petfinder.com. Enter information based on the breed, age, and sex, and a list of matches are shown from area shelters and rescue groups within the mileage range you specify.

When meeting potential puppies, if possible observe the dynamics of the litter. Puppies should be social and enjoy being held and touched. Notice how they interact with one another. Avoid selecting the bully or bossy one

(usually the biggest and boldest puppy), or the most shy (often the smallest puppy). Picking a "middle-of-the-litter" puppy will help you avoid a puppy that comes pre-programmed with issues. If all of the puppies are noticeably shy or aggressive, continue your search elsewhere.

It greatly benefits puppies to stay with their littermates for a full 8 to 10 weeks. It is during this time puppies learn a lot about social graces that will ultimately make them easier to live with. If possible, develop a relationship with your future puppy by visiting regularly until he/she is old enough to leave the litter. This will help the pup not be so stressed out about the big change that is about to happen.

When purchasing a puppy from a breeder, there are questions to be asked before meeting the puppies. Has the breeder had the dogs screened for common breed-related health problems? Does the breeder offer a health guarantee for their puppies? What happens if puppies get sick soon after they are sold? Does the breeder seem knowledgeable when answering questions? Are the puppies up-to-date on vaccinations and deworming? Ask to see the health records for the puppies and their parents.

Responsible dog breeders will have just as many questions for the buyer. When they truly care about the beings they brought into this world, breeders want to be assured their puppies will be going to wonderful homes to live long happy lives. They may even ask for periodic updates and pictures as the



The Canine Coach BY VALERIE BROADWAY

pups grow up. If breeders questions only revolve around how they are getting paid, that's a sign they don't care much about their puppies.

Before deciding to add a puppy to the family, consider if the household is really ready. It is not a good idea to get a puppy if he/she is going to spend most of the time alone. Puppies don't raise themselves. They need guidance, exercise, play, and companionship. Dogs are social beings and are not happy living alone. In addition, house-training will be almost impossible when a small pup is expected to hold it for hours on end every day.

Tiny, sweet puppies often grow into large, unruly, adolescent dogs. Elderly people and families with very young children often regret getting puppies for this reason. Before you know it, the pups are jumping up, knocking people down, scratching, and nipping. Getting a calmer adult dog may be a better fit in homes with senior citizens or small children.

Be realistic about the time and energy you have to offer any pet. Careful thought and research when selecting a puppy, or dog, is more likely to result in many years of love and happiness with a faithful friend and family member.

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Ollie is a rescued black and white Shih Tzu that turned his passion for helping other pets into a popular advice column. Ask Ollie questions by emailing him at chathamcountyline@gmail.com

DEAR OLLIE,

It's official, I'm finally old.

I didn't really know it until I tried to jump up on to a chair, reach the round, glass table and steal food. Before you

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think, "Bad dog", all dogs steal food and I pride myself on being superior in this mischief but now I just can't. I tried to climb on the kitchen chair, which would get me within striking distance of the turkey dinner, but knocked the chair down instead making quite the clatter. Of course everyone came running. There I was under a chair, trying to disappear from the ruckus but hard to do wearing a bright red harness. My pet parents read in a book with real pages that a harness is safer than a collar for walking senior dogs or dogs are prone to disk problems. So, my pet-dad grabbed me by that harness, lifted me high in the air, said "Bad boy". For a moment, I found myself suspended above the table looking down at a beautiful turkey dinner spread. I felt like an angel. O.K., that description may be a little too poetic. I felt like a very naughty and hungry angel—there, I said it.

Being air born didn't last long. When I was put down, I headed for our front door to be walked or let out but instead, I lost control of my bladder right there in front of everybody. How humiliating is that? After I was cleaned up, my pet mom held

me in her lap and gave me many kisses. She said that aging was not for sissies, she understood because she is getting older too. I have noticed she drops things because of arthritis and gets very upset when she forgets where she put her car keys or my dinner dish. I'm worried about my future and hers too. What can I do?

Kevin, the Tibetan terrier
Chapel Hill

DEAR KEVIN

Well, it is what it is. On life's journey, if you are lucky to live long enough in this world, you will age, it's not an option. However, there are measures that your pet parents can take to make it easier for you. Here are some "Paws for Thoughts" to consider:

1. Visit your veterinarian for a checkup and get all the medicines or natural remedies that will help you age gracefully

2. There are male diapers that you can wear to help with "accidents"

3. If and when you lose your hearing or sight, your sense of smell will get you through the day. Humans use hearing aids and glasses because their sense of smell is not as good as ours

4. Enjoy the things you always have: walks, car rides, snuggles from your pet parents, chasing an occasional squirrel and, my personal favorite, eating a chicken McNugget from the McDonalds drive through.

Good luck Kevin, you are not alone.

Ollie "Love is a four legged word."



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