

Insider Secrets to Adopting the Right Dog

A breeder's guide to finding the perfect purebred or rescue dog for your family

by Donna Stanley



Sterling Group Publishing
Columbia Cross Roads, PA

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Published by
Sterling Group Publishing
Columbia Cross Roads, PA 16914
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Cover design by Donna Stanley

Edited by Vicki Adang and Susan Stewart

ISBN: 978-0-9983174-1-0

First edition December 2016

Dedication

To my father who gave me my initial love for dogs. And to Jonathan, who suggested we get that first Labrador.

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Introduction

You've been dreaming of waggly tails and puppy breath on your face for weeks, and finally you can no longer contain yourself. You bolt upright in bed one morning and declare, "I want a puppy!"

You leap from your bed and tiptoe over to your laptop and flip it open. As your fingers soar over the keys typing "breeders of Labrador Retrievers," your palms sweat and you recoil, tucking your hands behind your back. *Wait!* A pang of conscience squirms up your backbone as you whisper, "I have to watch for puppy mills!" Your words quiver with the gravity of a dance with danger.

You slam your computer closed, slip into your blue bathrobe and leather slippers, and head to the coffee maker. A cup of strong joe should jolt you back to reality, causing you to reconsider this emotional Mount Everest you've just gazed upon. Surely the remnants of that dream you had of rolling on the grass in your front yard with your soft, chubby little eight-week-old Fido will fade away into thoughts of your upcoming day. The first sip of fresh ground roasted goodness roars through your blood veins. You close your eyes and sigh.

As you cradle your warm mug between your palms, eyes growing wide as you stare out your kitchen window, the implications of "new puppy" slam the gears from the left side of your brain to the right.

Am I ready to be awakened at midnight to the whimpers of "Mr. Poops A Lot"? Am I prepared to plunge into housebreaking and puppy proofing the house?

Your eyes shift to your living room carpet.

Eh...we've needed to replace that ugly old thing for years.

You blink.

What about those sharp little teeth?

Your eyes wander to Gramma Edmond's curio cabinet with the long, smooth Queen Anne legs.

Gasp!

The tick of the antique wall clock hung above it seems to chant, *No, no, no, no.*

With a sigh, you fall into your favorite leather armchair and switch on the television. Of course, the channel is on Animal Planet. A fluffy ball of white-and-black fur scampers across your screen, and a tiny black nose bumps into the camera filming the segment.

NOOOOO!

Grasping the remote, your shaky index finger hits the Off button. With a sigh, you allow your shoulders to melt into the leather softness behind them.

The bad attitude of that ticking clock is grating on your nerves. You consider yanking the pendulum to a stop.

It's Saturday morning, so you shuffle back to the bedroom to retrieve your laptop and then return to your comfy chair, daring to reopen Pandora's box.

Guilt slams into your conscience as you consider how unpolitically correct you've been, imagining your family and friends blocking you from their social media accounts, one by one, if you don't *first* drive to your local shelter.

Don't shop. Adopt! Right?

Visions of your next-door neighbor's rescue dog relieve your temporary romp with remorse as you picture their three interior doors that have been obliterated by "Charley Chomp." You revel in the mental imagery of the ninety-pound Marmaduke-ish-looking hound dragging Jenny Dawkins down the sidewalk each evening after supper. Your guilty, daily entertainment.

Then there's "Barky Bob," the moto-barker down the street, who sleeps in a garage, thereby amplifying his loud protests by at least 50 percent. Your one obstacle to floating off to Dreamland each evening

Your heart begins to argue with your conscience as you declare, "I'll buy a puppy from a *reputable* breeder, then buy a rescue dog *later* as a companion."

There! You've navigated your dilemma, so you open your laptop once again, quickly deleting your prior search terms. Then you stare at the wall.

What now?

While gazing at the floor, you conjure up images of what a responsible dog breeder looks like. You begin to mentally check off your Dream Breeder list.

Is she a woman?

Oh yes, it's a woman. After all, wouldn't a woman be more nurturing as a puppy mom? You blink and shake your head at your gender-profiling folly.

You think, "She's old in a grandmotherly sort of way," which gives you a warm, fuzzy feeling.

Surely she's been doing this for so long that her pups are flawless and train like geniuses. She must have a great reputation if she's been at it so long.

Your imagination takes you to a large horse farm with groomed fields, white fencing, and giant Clydesdales galloping beside your minivan as you pull up to the breeder's home.

As you drive through the huge stone gate, then approach the large stone Colonial farmhouse; three Labradors lying on the front porch lift their heads. There's no barking as you turn off the car ignition and open your door. As you emerge, the Labradors, one of each color, stand, tails fluttering, anticipating your approach.

You move toward the large red front door, flanked by fresh-cut flowers in antique flowerpots and blue-glazed urns. Each Lab sniffs you gently, melting you with that "you walk on water" gaze.

After clanging the bronze knocker, you lean over and pat each dog on the head. The soft summer breeze brushes your hair. The smell of fresh grass and herbs tickles your nose. A horse whinnies in the background.

Shaking the idyllic scene from your head, you look back at your laptop and type in “responsible Labrador breeders.” Up pops a web page filled with various kennel names. They all sound like “SharLuke”; you realize the kennel names are most likely a mash-up of the names of the couple that owns the kennel.

Quaint.

You click on the first site and are wowed by the impressive photos of dogs standing with their owners alongside another individual holding a large ribbon.

Obviously the judge.

Oh! They show their dogs. That’s good, right? Certainly they must be reputable.

As you click the Back button, your eyes scan the other sites listed on the screen. You click on a link with the search term “reputable breeder” in it and up pops an article written by animal rights advocates hollering “death to all puppy mills” (well, something along those lines). It goes on to explain how strict legislation is needed to control these “breeders out there” that produce diseased puppies and plague consumers with sick pets. It screams, “Buyer beware!”

You glance at the fireplace mantle, and there’s sweet Sammy’s eyes staring back at you from the last photo of him before he passed over the Rainbow Bridge. Your heart hammers as you zip over and tip the picture frame face down.

Oh no! Sammy knows I’m cheating on him! He must be whining at the Pearly Gates right now, his tail tucked between his legs as if I’ve abandoned him. But it’s been four years. Wouldn’t Sam want me to be happy again?

The familiar pang of guilt sits in the pit of your stomach, yet you click out of the article and return to the kennel listings.

The next kennel’s Home page appears, and again you stare at the impressive dogs surrounded with ribbons and all those letters under their names like BISS (*Boy, I’m Seriously Special?*) and WD (*Wing Dinger?*) and BOB (*Is that his nickname? Like, Billy Bob?*). (These are American Kennel Club (AKC) show award designations: BISS – Best in Specialty Show, WD – Winner’s Dog, and BOB – Best of Breed.)

But where are the pictures of the dog’s face? After all, you want that big, blocky head on your Labrador. Why isn’t there a hundred-picture slideshow of just puppies?

You read the kennel’s About page. It includes all kinds of strange terms relating to dog showing that you couldn’t care less about. All you want to know is if they have a stinkin’ litter of cute puppies!

Then you click on the Available Litters button, which takes you to a page that asks you to fill out a three-page questionnaire before the breeders will consider you as a possible adoptive parent for one of their rare canine specimens. (Oh, and that won’t happen for at least another year or so until there’s another litter.)

You realize they want to know more about you than your doctor and lawyer know. You hit Escape. Next site.

Lazy Lane Kennel. Just a half-hour away from where we live.

Now that sounds small and intimate. Even whimsical. I'll call them! And it's not far away. We've got nothing else to do today. I'll go there first. That way I'll know if they're reputable.

You check the wall clock. It's nine o'clock, so you pick up the phone and dial the number on the Contact Us page.

The phone rings three times before a gravelly voice answers, "Hello?" in a you-just-got-me-out-of-bed-on-a-Saturday way.

You expected a voice like Mary Poppins's on the other end. "Do you have any puppies for sale?" you ask tentatively.

A long pause. Then, "Yes."

"Can I come see them?"

"Sure, when do you want to come?" The voice is interrupted with a smoker's cough, causing you to wince.

"How about today?"

"Sure."

That was way too easy. It can't be that easy!

"Is noon OK?"

"Sounds good. Just follow the directions on my website."

You glance down and see the page entitled Directions and click on it.

"Great. See you then."

Three Hours Later

You, your three little ones, and your spouse climb into the minivan; the kids chatter endlessly about a new pup. Your spouse is silent; his (or her) arms crossed over his chest leaves no doubt that this is *your* idea, and you will certainly hear the phrase "I told you so" the first time there's a puddle on the tile floor in the kitchen.

But you've already murmured the "p" word in front of the kids, so there's no turning back now unless you want tears and complaining for the next month.

After a short drive to the outskirts of town, you exit the highway onto a paved road, then in five hundred feet turn into a gravel drive. You roll the windows down to enjoy the fresh air. As you pull over to the right, a weathered sign appears, half hanging on its hinges. "Lazy Lane Labradors" is barely visible because most of the letters have faded and are in need of a fresh coat of paint.

Are they so lazy they can't even hang their sign right? Or give it some fresh paint?

Wait! Is that barking you hear?

A small brown clapboard house comes into view as you squint through the dust rising from the road. The humid air carries the faint smell of...what is it? *Oh!* That smells like something...*dirty.*

Must be a quaint little country farm, of course, so it will be a bit smelly, right?

The closer you get, the stronger the smell of urine and feces gets in the damp, still air of the hazy summer day.

Five Labradors come running from behind the house and jump on your brand-new family van as you come to a halt. The sound of nails screeching down the paint makes you wince. You curse.

From somewhere, the voice you heard on the phone earlier screams, “Shut up! Come over here, you little shits!”

They don’t.

As your spouse rolls his eyes and sends you that “I’m going to kill you” look, you shift the vehicle into Park. Everyone piles out as quickly as possible.

Your nose wrinkles at the acrid smell in the air as you navigate around a rusty old Chevy truck on jacks sitting in the driveway. The whole while you’re resisting the urge to knee at the dogs swarming you. They bark and jump on your clean, pressed khaki pants, leaving long, muddy paw streaks. Not to mention, one just nosed you in the crotch, and you’re trying to smile through the pain as you push your way through the pack of wild dogs.

So much for your Labutopia. Every cell in your body yells, “Get back in the van and drive away. Fast!” But the kids are giddy with excitement and reach the front door before you.

A lady who appears to be in her late sixties is waiting by the door.

“I’m Edith.” She flashes a wide, toothless grin. Her wiry gray hair is flying in all directions.

Is that a tobacco stain on the corner of her mouth?

“H-hello,” you stammer with as much enthusiasm as you can muster, tripping over a loose floorboard on the front porch.

Three more loose Labs squeeze past the woman and proceed to nudge both you and your spouse in the groin. You resist the urge to pat the dog on the head *really* hard.

Passing through the front door, the smell of puppies hits your nose. Not puppy breath—oh no. The stuff that comes *out* of puppies—those little “lawn brownies.”

Tiny barks emanate from another room. For a moment, you forget the foul odor, the smell of tobacco, and the dog that just became a butt sniffer behind you.

Following Edith, you listen as she rattles on and on about how many “bitches and dogs” are in the litter.

Wincing at the “b” word, you continue to follow her. As you round the corner into the kitchen, your eyes start to water from the ammonia smell. Edith leans over a box and begins to pull out puppies, one at a time, by the scruff of their neck, and places them on the floor. They readily wriggle around your ankles, chewing on any shoelace they can find. Two immediately pee on the wooden floorboards, and two others immediately walk

through it and leave trails of wet paw prints across the room. Wanting so badly to pick them up, you withdraw at the thought of hands dripping with “wee-wee,” and you stuff your hands in your pockets.

Edith points to the larger black male pup and barks abruptly, “That one’s a little pisser.”

True—but a horrible sales pitch.

The puppy box is strewn with newspaper, the floor is dirty with puppy kibble scattered everywhere, and the water bowl is murky.

One of the pups escapes into the dining room and takes a dump just within sight.

Well, that explains the smell.

Is that another pile of poop you see on the other side of the tiny dining room?

Gross!

Your spouse shoots you an icy stare that says, “Let’s get the hell out of here!” Yet you know the kids will whine if you leave without a pup. So your mind races to come up with questions that could give you an excuse to leave without a new little bundle of love.

“What kind of OFA hip ratings do the parents of the dogs have?”

“Oh, my vet says they look fine,” Edith replies.

What? I know that hip dysplasia runs in this breed.

“Do the parents have *any* health clearances?” You remove your hands from your pockets and place them on your hips.

“Nahh...I never had no sick or crippled or blind Lab—ever. They’re good to go. Look, they all walk just fine. No limps!”

Doesn’t sound good. I’m off the hook.

Adoption Secrets from a Breeder

OK, so you get the idea. You’ve either been there, done that, or are about to. I’ve heard thousands of horror stories about my clients’ experiences over the years. Sometimes they were unprepared for what they saw or too inexperienced to know what to expect or what questions to ask.

I’ve painted two diametrically opposed scenarios, yet I’m not insinuating that the dream breeder daydream is necessarily better. My goal isn’t to paint a perfect picture of what a reputable breeder looks like, but instead reveal what one truly is. I also explain what a reputable rescue is.

Whether you are considering adopting your dog from a breeder or obtaining a puppy from a shelter, my objective is to give you a guide to finding the right dog for you and your family.

Perhaps you’re one of the fortunate ones who had a pleasant experience adopting your puppy because you found a reputable breeder or shelter. Good for you!

I won't apologize for being a breeder. I've been breeding Labrador retrievers for more than thirty years. My family has also *always* had a rescue dog, and we support our local and national rescue organizations. I'm not looking to convince you that one or the other is better or worse. I merely ask you to keep an open mind as I help you navigate the landscape of obtaining your new canine family member.

But have you ever wondered what it takes for us breeders to do what we do? Do you ever wonder what *my* day looks like? What kind of calls I cringe at? What kind of clients I fear? That one *stupid* question I hear almost *every day* on the phone? And no, the adage "There are no stupid questions" does not apply here. You'll find out why!

I cringe at the horrifying memories of clients coming with kids who swing on my curtains, race their bicycle around my hallways, and squeeze squeaky toys in my face as I'm trying to talk with their parents.

Then there was the couple who had to be escorted from my property...yeah, more on that later.

Oh, and my favorite question of all time (from a couple who bought a pair of labs, one male, one female): "Can she get pregnant from them having casual sex?"

Welcome to my world. Some days I laugh; some days I want to cry. People think I have the best job in the world, and in many ways I do. The dogs are awesome. Some of the people? Eh...not so much.

Did you ever wonder what you say that sends up big red flags to breeders or shelter managers? Wonder why no one will return your calls sometimes? Hoping to figure out what it takes to be a breeder? Want to know the secrets of what to say and what *not* to say? Determined to *not* have the horrifying experience described above? (Believe it or not, I had a similar experience almost thirty years ago, and I remember the impression it left with me. I don't wish it on my worst enemy.)

I've combined the best of my breeder stories with my best advice for becoming a pet parent. The stories and advice are the result of thousands of hours spent with puppies and people. I've seen it all, and now I happily share it with you.

You're about to experience the good, the bad, the funny, and the very ugly. Buckle up and enjoy the ride.

Chapter 1

Adopting Our Ally

As a breeder, I love each and every one of my pups as if they were going to be mine forever. But those dogs aren't my pets, as much as I'd like them to be. So when I decided that my family needed a pet of our own, I broke the rules. Here I share with you why and how we came to adopt our "Ally Dog."

Getting to Know the Pups and Sending Them Home

I am the first pet parent my dogs will ever know. For the first eight weeks of their lives, I watch over them 24/7, just as closely as a first-time mother watches over her newborn. I don't get a lot of sleep. I keep one ear tuned for their cries. I marvel at every one of their firsts.

I have a ritual when their eyes start to open. I pick up each pup, hold her in front of my face, and whisper, "Welcome to the world!"

I get a kick out of their first encounter with a squeak toy, usually a smaller one. After the first brave soul happens upon the toy, and the big *squeeeak* breaks the silence, all the puppies surround the strange alien that has invaded the puppy box. The pups stare, circle, and bark at the loud invader.

After a few hours, each one gingerly approaches the new toy and places a piece of kibble or a rear end on it. By the end of the day, they're pouncing and darting to and fro. I throw the big squeakers for them at this point. Now I laugh at the "squawk, squawk, squawk" emanating from the puppy room.

What fun to watch! What music to my ears!

As they grow, I cuddle them, bathe them, talk to them, sing to them, and introduce them to their new world.

I watch their individual traits develop. A few get nicknames, like *Ed the Fuzz Head*, who got his name because of the way his fur grew like a sideways mohawk on top of his head.

The puppies get to know me too. They are so used to the sound of my voice by the time they leave that when someone calls me to ask a question, the pup goes *berserk* when she hears my voice on the speakerphone or answering machine.

After eight weeks, though, the puppies are so big that I can't possibly spend enough time with each and every one of them. So I look forward to meeting the new family that will take on the 24/7 watch now. Those last days with the pups are bittersweet.

The most difficult adoption days were when my daughter was between three and seven years old. She couldn't understand why the pups had to leave. I pity the folks who came to get pups during that era. Most people felt horrible because not only were they taking the pup from its littermates, but they also had to endure the crying of my sweet little Livvy. Her big blue eyes would swell, and tears seemed to pop right out of them. It broke my heart too.

Livvy's Forever Dog

In 1999 I decided my daughter needed a forever dog to help her through those difficult days.

While attending a ministers' conference in North Carolina, I had a free day to explore the area. I did what I tell everyone *not* to do; I grabbed a copy of the local paper and scoured the pages for a possible canine candidate. I had no money to buy a purebred because we were living on a minister's salary. I found an ad for two terrier-mix puppies, but I noted that an adult terrier-mix was available as well.

To my chagrin, I learned that the six-month-old adult was the mother of the two pups; she was bred, by accident, on her first heat. But I proceeded to ask the breeder (I use that word cautiously!) if I could meet the older dog.

I agreed to meet the woman at a small local grocery store (my first hint that something wasn't quite kosher). I got in my car and drove about forty-five minutes to the rendezvous location. I hadn't told my husband, Jonathan, about my exploits. I hoped the dog wouldn't be some flea-bitten, mangy, ugly mutt (but I was ready to deal with that if I needed to).

As I pulled into the parking lot and got out of the car, a woman hopped out of an old Honda with a dog that appeared to be part schnauzer, yet had a fawn-colored coat.

As is usual for me, I looked deep into this girl's eyes and immediately saw her soul. I can't explain my knack for this sort of thing. I most definitely knew Jonathan wouldn't get it either.

The woman walked the dog on a leash to a patch of grass, and the dog immediately squatted and peed.

She's house-trained!

I listened as the woman described the dog she called "Big Girl" as an oops between a schnauzer and a Jack Russell (yes, she bred both). I handed her a check for \$75, and I took the leash.

I mused over the story about how this dog had spent two weeks in a vet's office after being "attacked" by the other dogs. I noted the scars around her ears and back legs. I brushed off my concerns, and like the mushy heart that I am, I became determined to rehabilitate this poor animal.

As expected, when I presented the dog to Jonathan that evening, he stood aghast at my folly.

"What were you thinking?" Jonathan said with a half-grin.

"But she's so sweet..." I fumbled, grinning as I cradled my new baby in my arms.

Shaking his head, he accepted my pleas, giving me that "we'll see" look.

Our newest family member slept motionless at my side the entire night. I was smitten. She went outside to do her duty like a pro, and I was convinced I'd found a winner.

During the drive home, Jonathan and I batted around names until we finally settled on Ally.

The Sweetest Dog for My Sweetest Girl

I couldn't wait to present Ally to my Olivia. I pictured them growing up together, trotting through our three acres of woods in the Endless Mountains of Pennsylvania.

Although it took some time for Livvy to understand that Ally was her "forever" dog, she immediately bonded with her. They did everything together. Livvy could even walk Ally without Ally pulling on the leash one bit.

Ally was so sensitive and gentle. I'll never forget the day I entered our dining room to discover Ally curled up in her dog bed with Livvy beside her reading her a story. To this day, my heart skips a beat when I recall the scene. Luckily I was able to grab a camera to catch that moment along with many others of the two of them together (below).



A Long, Loving, and Lucky Relationship

So do I believe in rescue? Yes! Was I naïve? Totally! I was one of the lucky ones who stumbled across what some would refer to as a "backyard breeder," yet ended up with a special little dog.

Did Ally have her issues? Absolutely! She was terrified of everything for two months. She sat at the top of our staircase most of that time. Little by little, she became more comfortable and took her spot on the armchair in our living room, which became her favorite spot for more than eleven years.

I later found out Ally had a pretty severe heart murmur, but she lived with us for almost fifteen years. When she finally passed, Livvy realized she'd never known life without her "Ally Dog." It was devastating for all of us.

Chapter 2

Figuring Out Where to Find Your Dog

One of the biggest decisions you will face in your decision to adopt a dog is whether to adopt from a shelter or rescue group or buy a puppy from a breeder. This is also one of the most emotional topics for me to discuss.

Please choose not to support pet stores by not purchasing a puppy from them. Many people acquire their pups from puppy mills. (Later in this chapter, I explain how to identify if a pup comes from a puppy mill.)

Don't go to a pet store and say you "rescued" the pup. If you do this, you contribute to the puppy mill where the dog came from because they have a steady supply of suckers. (Sorry, that may sound harsh, but the idea of rescuing dogs from puppy mills and pet shops boils my blood. The puppy miller or pet shop takes your money and keeps doing what they're doing, thanks to the sucker who thought they did some "noble" thing.)

If you have already decided you want to buy a puppy from a breeder, head to Chapter 3 for some helpful information on how to find the right breeder.

For those of you who are still undecided, this chapter outlines the benefits and downfalls of adoption versus purchasing a purebred puppy (adapted from an article by Victoria Stillwell). I also include information about determining whether a dog is a product of a puppy mill.

Adopting a Shelter or Rescue Dog

The stigma that all shelter dogs are unpredictable or have behavioral issues is simply not true. Many dogs are surrendered to shelters because of a change in family situation, the death of an owner, or abandonment. It's not always because of the dog's behavior, and many shelter dogs have already had some training.

The benefits

- _ You are saving two lives: the life of the dog you adopt and the space that opens up for another dog in the shelter or rescue.
- _ Most dogs will already have all of their initial vet work completed, including a microchip and possibly already be spayed or neutered (see [Chapter 10](#) about early spay or neuter).
- _ If adopting from a rescue group, they will (hopefully) be able to tell you about the dog's personality so there are no surprises when you bring the dog home.
- _ Many adult dogs are already housetrained, saving you a lot of time and training.
- _ Private rescue groups will generally take the dog back if the dog does not work out for some reason.

The challenges

- _ If adopting a dog straight from a shelter, you may not know much about how he will act in your home. It is important to know how to pick the right shelter dog. The dog may have been through many shelters, which poses problems with anxiety and adjustment once in your home. It may take a while for a dog to trust you, especially if he has been abused or neglected.

- _ You may not know the breed background of the dog you pick, although there are many purebred dogs in shelters. (Remember, less than 8 percent of purebred dogs end up in shelters, so don't feel that if you decide to get a purebred that you will be contributing to more unwanted dogs. Most responsible breeders will take a dog back, therefore avoiding the possibility of their dogs ending up in shelters if a dog is not working out in a family.) In fact, why not buy the purebred dog you want and rescue a dog to keep that dog company? Then you have the best of both worlds!
- _ The cost of adopting from a shelter is much lower than the cost of purchasing a puppy from a breeder. However, "retail rescue" is on the rise, and you may run into "puppy flipping" or retail rescues that charge almost as much as a breeder does. Do your research on the rescue you choose. Ask where the pups (or dogs) were acquired and at what age. Ask if they provide trainers for any behavioral issues you may encounter.
- _ Be sure your entire family is prepared to live with a dog from puppyhood to adulthood with several behavioral issues. Some families are well suited for dog adoption and have a gift for it, just like some parents are truly called to adopt a baby. Never feel pressured by others to adopt out of fear. None of us pressures our friends and family to adopt a baby. Not every family is well suited for rescue either.

Additional considerations when working with a breed rescue

If you are interested in a certain breed, you can find either a local or national rescue group. Again, the screening process for selecting a dog is tedious. The dog may have a behavioral issue, or you may encounter similar drawbacks as you would when adopting from a shelter.

Be sure to get a thorough story of the dog's background and why it ended up at the breed rescue. This will help you if you move forward. You'll understand the history and any negative issues that may come up.

Again, watch for retail rescues here. Some breeders rescue a certain breed they have, mark up the price, and then "flip" the dog to you.

Buying a Puppy from a Breeder

If you are considering buying a puppy from a breeder, you need to choose the right breeder. Additionally, your entire family needs to be prepared for the fifteen- to twenty-year responsibility of raising a healthy, well-balanced dog.

The benefits

- _ You will be able to see your puppy's mother and see the environment he was raised in.
- _ Reputable breeders will provide genetic health testing to make sure your dog is less likely to carry any genetic problems.
- _ Your pup will have been well socialized from the day it was born. You will also have the opportunity to mold your puppy into the perfect pet if you are patient and consistent with ongoing proper socialization and training. As a rule, I send home a list of socialization items that take the new puppy up through fourteen weeks old. I call the time from eight weeks to fourteen weeks the "impression stage." What happens during that time will leave a lasting impression on the pup—either good or bad. For instance, the impression stage is not a good time to expose your pup to fireworks.
- _ You know exactly what you are getting in terms of breed. Make sure you find the right breed for your family.

The challenges

- Puppies are a lot of work. Are you prepared for the guaranteed puppy woes: cleaning up accidents, whining, and chewing? (Visit my YouTube channel, “[Endless Mt. Labradors](#),” for tips on getting through these challenges.)
- You are responsible for training your puppy. An untrained puppy quickly grows into an out-of-control adult dog.
- Buying a puppy from a breeder can be expensive. You pay more for a dog that has a myriad of health clearances, well-bred parents, and a great social environment.
- You will be screened by the breeder during the process. Breeders are very concerned about where their pups go. Don’t be offended. Be glad the breeder cares enough to do this.
- If you want to make sure your dog comes from a responsible breeder, look for well-known breeders—often involved in the show dog community—and check references on their website. Head to the American Kennel Club’s website at www.akc.org and search “Breeder of Merit” by state.

Avoiding the Backyard Breeder

Of the 53 million dogs in the United States, about two-thirds come from backyard breeders. They are the single greatest cause of the pet overpopulation crisis in this country. The worst of the backyard breeders sometimes come to the attention of local animal control authorities who may negotiate with a breeder who is keeping dogs in truly deplorable conditions to release at least some of the dogs to a shelter. Shelters then often turn to rescue groups because they know that the dogs—unsocialized and requiring more medical care than most shelters can afford—will have to be euthanized.

A backyard breeder is someone who keeps several dogs and either breeds them deliberately or just lets them breed. Backyard breeders may have a few dogs or many, one breed or several. They usually have no understanding of or concern about the breed standard, genetics, or socializing the dogs, and they may not be able to talk intelligently about the genetic problems common in their breed. They don’t show their dogs, so they will be unfamiliar with the proper structure and temperament as set out by the AKC breed standard for their breed.

Backyard breeders seldom spend the money to do all the health clearances required in their breed. Don’t confuse them with “hobby breeders” (sometimes referred to as “dog fanciers”), who breed small numbers of dogs and care for their dogs well.

A backyard breeder who is successful in selling puppies may decide to expand and become a puppy miller—someone who breeds dogs with profit as the one and only motive and concern. More often, though, backyard breeders simply allow the dogs they have to breed, and they don’t often keep many of the offspring. They frequently end up with too many dogs to care for properly. When you call them, their pups will not all be spoken for by the time they are eight weeks old (thus, needing newspapers and classified ads to sell their pups). Responsible breeders, who have a high demand for their pups, will have a waiting list for their pups.

Backyard breeders rarely have a contract and health guarantee that allows you to return the dog should things not work out. They seldom screen their buyers with a questionnaire because they are desperate to sell their pups. As for registering their dogs, backyard breeders and puppy millers often register their dogs and pups with a registry other than the AKC if they have been inspected and disciplined by the AKC.

Why Pay More for a Pet?

Regardless of where you get your puppy from, you’ll likely have to pay something. Shelters and rescue groups require the payment of adoption fees, which may cover a variety of services, while breeders require payment to cover their expenses. Although price is not necessarily an indicator of quality, this is one instance where bargain hunting may not be in your best interest.

The \$300 puppy: Inexpensive—at first

You read an ad online, your co-worker’s dog whelped a litter, or you saw a puppy in the local pet shop and couldn’t resist its cute face. In any case, you examine the puppy before leaving the premises and she looks OK. You’re just happy you found the puppy at such a great price.

You aren’t given any paperwork from a reputable registry (if any registration papers are provided at all, they’re from someplace called the American Pet Registry International, American Canine Association (ACA), or the Continental Kennel Club).

Ask to see a kennel license. Each county has a maximum number of dogs or pups allowed to be housed and sold by a single household. People who are hiding from county dog law enforcement or inspectors may not be able to produce a kennel license. Be aware of the dog law regulations in the county from which you are obtaining a dog.

You also aren’t told anything about your puppy’s parents (other than Sally was let out one day, and they think Harry got to her; *or* that Sally was mated to Harry because Sally’s owners wanted their kids to experience the miracle of birth; *or* that the pup came from a “professional” breeder).

You’re told little to nothing about your puppy’s vaccination history and little to nothing about proper socialization and nutrition.

It’s obvious that this will be a final decision. You won’t be able to return your puppy, and once you leave, there is no further support.

Your puppy doesn’t exactly look like the breed you wanted either, but you don’t mind. You pay your \$300 and are on your way with your new companion.

However, a few days later, your six-week-old puppy becomes very ill. He won’t eat or play, has terrible diarrhea, and is vomiting. You rush him to the vet to discover he has a potentially life-threatening illness called parvovirus, which could’ve been prevented by vaccines and staying with his mother and littermates for a few more weeks.

Thankfully, you got your puppy to the vet in time, and he pulls through after a week of intensive treatments and hospitalization. You pay around \$1,000. Nevertheless, you are happy your puppy is alive and continue on your merry way.

Your puppy grows and develops with a little more energy than you bargained for and then starts to bite you and anything else he can get his mouth around. You have no idea what to do about it, so you ask the only authority you can think of: your vet. Your vet prescribes medication for the hyperactivity, which slows your puppy down

some but makes him not want to eat on a consistent basis and causes bouts of constipation. So you have your vet prescribe a medication to alleviate your puppy's bowel troubles.

Despite it all, the puppy continues to grow and, by the time he reaches six months of age, you can no longer stand the biting and generally out-of-control behavior of this now 50-pound dog.

Your vet suggests neutering (or spaying for a female puppy) will make all of these behaviors disappear, so you go ahead with the procedure. A month later, your dog is still as rambunctious as ever, but now he's starting to limp. You have your puppy's right front elbow radiographed, and he is diagnosed with OCD (a cartilage disease). You decide to go with your vet's recommendation for surgery because you don't have anyone else to rely on for information or a second opinion. The surgery costs you \$3,000, but your puppy pulls through just fine and is as good as new in a couple of months.

Although your puppy has made it through his first year, it hasn't been without its trials. In fact, this first year has left you with a bad taste for "breeders," and you vow never to buy a puppy from a "breeder" again. You also decide that your puppy has been too expensive for you to handle, especially because he is now almost fully grown and completely destructive. You simply cannot afford to replace any more furniture or handle his obnoxious behavior (he literally knocks you over once or twice a day, and/or he marks everything in the house as well as every tree in the neighborhood on your walks). You make the hard decision to drop him off at the local shelter this weekend.

The \$1,000+ puppy: Expensive in the short term

Your family carefully researches and decides on the perfect breed. You then do some online research to discover a responsible breeder within a four-hour drive of your home.

You visit his website, see that he has a litter planned, fill out an application, talk with the breeder over the phone a few times, visit his home a few times, and finally decide this is the right breeder.

The breeder tells you about the planned litter's parents; explains why he thinks this is an appropriate breeding; provides you with copies of the parents' health clearances, registrations, titles, pictures, pedigrees, and so forth; gives you a tour of his home and property while explaining where certain events happen (such as where the puppies are whelped and kept); and lets you meet and interact with some of his dogs.

It is clear that this breeder works extremely hard, is truly dedicated to his chosen breed, and makes even the toughest decisions in the best interest of his dogs and breed. All of the breeder's breeding stock look and behave in the manner dictated by the breed's written standard. You leave excited and comfortable with your decision. You return home and start preparing for your future new companion.

A few weeks later, you get a phone call and/or email from the breeder announcing the breeding has finally taken place. He continues to update you on at least a weekly basis about how the pregnancy is progressing and some of the mom's quirky daily activities. When the pregnancy has reached the thirty-day mark, the breeder emails you a picture of the ultrasound, which confirms that the mom is, indeed, pregnant, and there are puppies on the way in a little over a month.

You make your commitment by sending the breeder a deposit of \$250. The breeder continues to update you on the progress of the pregnancy.

Then the big day arrives. The puppies are born! The breeder sends you a brief email letting you know that everything went just fine, and mom and puppies (all eight of them) are doing well.

Over the next few weeks, the breeder gives you a weekly update with several pictures of the puppies' and mom's activities. Little Purple Girl is a little bit smaller than her biggest brother, Orange Boy, but she's not letting that stop her from getting to the food dish first.

When the puppies are about five or six weeks old, the breeder offers to let you visit them. As much as you excitedly hound the breeder to know exactly which puppy will be yours, the breeder insists he just doesn't know yet and won't know until after the litter is evaluated because he is keeping the best pick(s) for himself. Although you feel a little disappointed that you don't know which puppy is going to be your little Debbie or Johnny, you understand and leave it up to the breeder to make the best pick for you when the time comes.

Finally, the day arrives when you can pick up your new puppy. You arrive at the breeder's with the rest of the purchase price, \$750 (the total cost of \$1,000 minus your \$250 deposit). The breeder informs you he felt Blue Boy would be the most compatible to your lifestyle, so he is your puppy.

You and the breeder fill out the puppy's AKC registration application, your sales contract (which includes a clause to return the puppy at *any* time during his lifetime for *any* reason), and your puppy's health guarantee (in which the breeder offers you support should major hereditary health ailments arise). You and the breeder also thoroughly go over your puppy's vaccination schedule, socialization, and training and nutritional needs. The breeder then gives you a folder with all of this information in addition to several informative articles about training, socialization, nutrition, and daily care as well as copies of the parents' information (health clearances, pedigrees, etc.), the puppy's microchip information, and an open invitation to call him day or night with any issues or updates.

The breeder gives you enough of the food your puppy has been eating to get you started. You finally get to take him home.

Johnny is a great puppy, and you have a lot of fun with him. You talk with or email his breeder at least monthly to keep him updated as to how Johnny is doing. In return, the breeder supports you whenever you have an issue, no matter how big or small. Once you thought Johnny might have an orthopedic problem; his breeder brought him to one of the best specialists at his own cost; you got not only a second opinion but the most accurate diagnosis. Turns out, Johnny just had a case of pano (growing pains), and nothing was ultimately wrong with his joints. But you'll never forget how his breeder was there for you every step of the way.

As Johnny grows up, you take him to obedience classes, he becomes a well-adjusted member of your family, and everyone loves him. When the sad day comes when Johnny crosses over the Rainbow Bridge, his breeder is every bit as heartbroken as you are.

Ten Signs that a Puppy Is from a Puppy Mill

Adapted from an article by Kristina Lotz originally published on IHeartDogs.com, October 3, 2014, <http://iheartdogs.com/10-signs-that-puppy-is-from-a-puppy-mill/> (accessed October 26, 2016).

According to the [American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals](#) (ASPCA), a puppy mill is “a large-scale commercial dog breeding operation that places profit over the well-being of its dogs—who are often severely neglected—and acts without regard to responsible breeding practices.”

Most people have heard about puppy mills and know they are bad. But what you may not know is how to make sure you don't accidentally buy from one. Here are ten signs to help you determine if the puppy you are considering is from a puppy mill.

No. 1: Out-of-state

Stay away from pet stores when buying a puppy. Be especially worried if those puppies are coming from out of state, particularly Midwest states (Missouri and Illinois are two of the biggest puppy mill states).

Ask the kennel for its state license. If it does not have one, report it to the local dog warden. For instance, in Pennsylvania, where I live, if anyone sells more than twenty pups in a year, they must have a kennel license. This also subjects them to routine surprise inspections that ensure they are adhering to the local dog laws for cleanliness, recordkeeping, health records, and humane conditions.

No. 2: No parents

If the breeder can't let you meet the parents, you should walk away. Not meeting the parents is like buying a car without knowing the make. Don't do it. For all you know, these people didn't breed the puppy but are selling him secondhand for unknown reasons.

No. 3: Let's meet

If you call a breeder and they say, "Let's meet somewhere" when you ask to visit their kennel, it's a puppy mill. Usually they will try to get you to meet in a store parking lot or a park. Unless there are extreme circumstances, there is no reason why you should not see where your puppy was born.

Not only should you visit the site, but whenever possible, you should pick your puppy up in person instead of shipping him cross-country, which can be very traumatic. It also begins a face-to-face relationship between you and your breeder.

If you choose to ship your pup, you won't truly know where your dog is coming from. You could fall prey to a fancy website that a puppy mill may be hiding behind.

Also consider this: You're taking a tiny, scared puppy away from his family, putting him in a box, and shipping him on a loud plane. Think about how traumatic that is, not to mention the health risks of doing so. Many pups arrive with a coccidia infection due to stress. Coccidia parasites lie dormant in your puppy's system and only rear their ugly heads under stress. Riding on a plane, hearing loud, strange noises, and possibly sitting on a hot or cold tarmac if there is a delay create a perfect recipe for GI disaster and perhaps dehydration that could lead to a costly trip to the vet and lots of medication.

No. 4: Several breeds

Reputable breeders focus on one breed, maybe two, *max*. If you find a site offering five different breeds (and their mixes), it's a puppy mill.

No. 5: Multiple litters

When you call the breeder and ask if he has puppies, how does he respond? If he says, "I have one litter coming, but there is already a waiting list," the person is a reputable breeder. If he replies, "Oh yes, I have three litters on the ground and two more on the way," the person is running a puppy mill.

No. 6: Vaccinations

Puppy mills don't like to spend money because it cuts into their profits. So the parents may not be vaccinated (you should ask), and the puppies probably aren't. Or, conversely, they have so many puppies that they lost track of which ones have been vaccinated, and your pup got vaccinated twice.

Puppies less than two months old have not had the chance to build up the defenses they need to fight diseases. Anyone selling a puppy younger than two months old should be reported to the local animal control immediately. Each state has a legal age of sale for puppies.

No. 7: Extreme promises

Be wary about the breeder promising a certain size, temperament, or characteristic that seems extreme. Sometimes the promises are too good to be true. If you can't meet the parents, you won't know what your puppy will grow up to look like.

Stay away from "custom" colors that are not in accordance with the AKC standard for that breed (see www.akc.org). For example, Labradors come in only yellow, chocolate, and black, according to AKC standards. If you are sold a champagne, silver, or charcoal color, you are most likely dealing with someone who breeds only for color and not for temperament or genetic clearances. Use the questions in [Chapter 4](#) when choosing a puppy. The list will help you interview the breeder to be sure you are getting a puppy whose parents have been cleared for genetic issues within that breed.

If you are buying a Labradoodle, for instance, most times you will get to see the mother, but the father may not be on the property. Be sure to ask before you shop if you feel you need to buy one of these pups.

No. 8: Cleanliness

The dog and the breeder's home or kennel should be clean. Puppies from puppy mills are more likely to smell like a kennel and have poor coat quality. If you smell strong urine or feces on the pup, or its coat is sticky, walk away.

No. 9: Contract

Your breeder should care enough about what happens to the puppy that he has a contract protecting both you and him. Reputable breeders have a spay/neuter agreement, breed papers, health contract, and a request that you return the dog to them if it doesn't work out (instead of dumping the dog at a shelter). There may also be many other requirements. That's good. The breeder knows what is best for his breed and his particular bloodline.

No. 10: Too young

Another way puppy mills cut their costs is by giving you the puppy early because then they do not have to feed them, give them shots, and provide other care that costs time and money. Question any breeder who wants to give you the puppy before he is eight weeks old. This is the minimum age you should be taking a puppy from his mother and littermates.

Scientific studies have shown that a dog at eight weeks old is psychologically ready to leave the litter. A puppy who is younger may not be. It's also not good to get a dog after nine to twelve weeks of age if he still has littermates around. This gives the aggressive puppy time to get more aggressive and the shyer puppy time to become more withdrawn. At eight weeks, they enter *your* pack. This is a good thing.

Note: If you do stumble upon or suspect a puppy mill, immediately contact your local animal control or the dog warden who oversees animal welfare in the county the breeder resides in and report it.

Chapter 3

Working with a Breeder

When you decide to work with a breeder, you'll have a better experience if you know what to expect from the relationship.

Relationship? With a breeder? Yes, relationship. When you adopt a dog from a breeder, it's like working with many other professionals. You'll have several conversations before and during the adoption process, and then you and the breeder will likely stay in touch as your puppy grows to adulthood and into her senior years. So you want to choose a breeder who you won't mind keeping in touch with for fifteen or twenty years.

When choosing a puppy, it all starts with the breeder. This chapter explains what you should expect from a top-notch breeder so you can ensure you get a happy, healthy puppy. It also gives you information about how to interact with your breeder or potential breeder so you can have a good working relationship and ensure a better experience for you and your pup!

Before you can choose a breeder, you need to know what breed of dog you want to adopt. Thoroughly research the breed you're interested in to learn about its behavioral traits and potential genetic diseases. Because there are so many wonderful breeds to choose from and each family wants a dog that's suited to their lifestyle, I leave the breed research up to you. (But if you're interested in adopting a Labrador, turn to Chapters 12 and 13 for more details on that delightful breed, which I specialize in.)

What You Should Expect from a Good Breeder

Some breeders are far more honest and ethical in their practices than others. Even breeders who people think are reputable are often not. Sadly, genuinely ethical and reputable breeders are in the minority of breeders as a whole. The following sections cover what you should look for when picking a breeder.

Analyzing a breeder's experience

Everyone has to start somewhere, even breeders. Ideally, you'll find a breeder who has twenty-five to forty years in the breed. Breeders with decades of experience have spent countless hours studying and learning everything possible about the health of the breed, nutrition for the breed, and how the dogs develop.

Read the breeder's website before you contact them. Then when you speak with them, you'll be familiar with their breeding program, their dogs, and their process of screening homes for their puppies. You may even feel like you know them before you meet them.

When you contact a breeder, their response should be timely and professional. A breeder should never tear down other kennels or disparage other breeders to sell you a pup. There is a lot of jealousy between breeders. Trust me. After being in the dog show world for so many years, I've observed this time and time again. Gossiping about others is a character flaw. Look for a breeder with good character.

The breeder should be able to supply pedigrees on their dogs, explaining titles and health clearances three to four generations back. If you don't see a champion in the first three or four generations, you're probably talking

to someone who is just “making puppies.” Good breeders bring in sires with championship titles or show their dogs on a regular basis to be sure their dogs are the “best of the best.” Look for participation trophies and pictures of their dogs at shows as proof of their dedication to the breed.

Ask the breeder what their goals are in breeding. If they don’t say, “to improve the breed and create dogs that meet the AKC breed standard,” then why are they doing it? If they make excuses for why they don’t show their dogs, remember this: Breeders who show their dogs are accountable to their colleagues and the AKC, and their dogs are evaluated by multiple judges for standard and temperament.

Don’t be surprised when a breeder tells you that it will be months before you can get a puppy from them. Reputable breeders always find homes for their pups *far* in advance; the puppies are typically reserved before even being born. Good breeders don’t have to advertise their pups because they’ve built a reputation and people are coming to them for pups. They don’t have to search out customers.

Reputable breeders will require you apply for a pup by providing them with sufficient background information so they can deem whether you will be a good puppy parent. The breeder will interview you, so don’t be surprised if they have as many questions for you as you do for them. They will also offer numerous resources for education and preparation on being a dog owner, and they will continue to support you as you raise your pet.

The breeder should provide references. Their professional handlers are a good source of information. They have done business with them, and in addition to knowing their dogs, the handlers will know the breeder’s business ethics better than anyone.

Reputable breeders are a member of the American Kennel Club Breeder of Merit program (more on this later in the chapter) and have multiple champion dogs in AKC events. They will have a flawless record with the AKC (who inspects their kennel every two years) and a flawless record with the state.

If, while researching breeders, you spot a few complaints in a list of reviews, remember that there are hundreds, perhaps thousands of pleased clients. Don’t believe everything you read. Usually the people who sound off online didn’t get their way or tried to scam a breeder, so their only recourse is to whine.

Also keep in mind that breeders are dealing with living things. Any breeder who claims nothing ever went wrong is lying. If a breeder breeds a litter every other year, they likely won’t have as many complaints. The breeder who breeds five to ten litters a year may have a couple of complaints, but the odds of someone being unhappy are higher. Don’t dismiss such a breeder. Look at how many *good* references you see in comparison to the bad.

Some breeders also become the target of animal-rights extremists who masquerade as disgruntled puppy buyers. If it’s happened to me, it can happen to any other responsible AKC breeder.

Addressing health issues

I can’t stress strongly enough how important it is to talk to a breeder about their dogs’ health. Reputable breeders always do genetic health checks on the breeding parent dogs and examine their family health histories to make sure they won’t pass down defective genetic conditions. You must ask to see proof of these tests. If the breeder has carried out all checks like they should, they will be pleased to show you the proof and won’t give excuses about why they can’t provide them.

A reputable breeder will offer a health guarantee in writing (see [Chapter 9](#)). If they don't, they are probably afraid of what you will find out later. If a breeder won't discuss their dogs' health, find another breeder. Reputable breeders are always willing to talk about any of your concerns.

If you're planning to adopt a dog from a breeder's first litter, ask about health clearances, especially for the hips, elbows, heart, and eyes.

When interviewing any breeder, ask the following questions:

- _ Do you do Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) clearances on hips and elbows? What are the ratings of the parent dogs?
- _ Do you get Canine Eye Registry Foundation (CERF) clearance for eye defects?
- _ Do you do Optigen testing to prevent progressive retinal atrophy (PRA)?
- _ Do you test for heart abnormalities by echo doppler?
- _ (If you are talking with a Labrador breeder) Do you test for exercise-induced collapse (EIC) and narcolepsy (NARC) and hereditary nasal parakeratosis (HNPK)?

If the breeder cannot talk intelligently about these issues, kindly say, "Thank you for your time. Good-bye."

If the breeder says, "My vet says my dog is healthy," but can't provide health clearance certificates from the OFA or CERF, don't risk getting your puppy from the breeder. Without these clearances, your new family member may die early, or you may have to put her down at a young age. Alternatively, you could end up with thousands of dollars in vet bills because of the lack of clearances on the breeder's part.

If you have any doubts about what the breeder tells you about their dogs' health, talk to the breeder's veterinarian; find out if the breeder takes good care of their dogs and does regular genetic screening.

Caring for the newborn pups

After a litter of pups is born, a breeder is responsible for making sure the puppies stay healthy until they go to their new homes. If a breeder lets you see the pups before they're eight weeks old, beware. When people (other than the breeders) handle pups at a young age before their immune systems are mature, the pups can pick up bacteria or viral infections.

Additionally, a reputable breeder would never wean the puppies from the mother too early. Anything before six weeks is far too early and is likely to cause behavioral problems in the offspring.

Finally, a reputable breeder will get all of the puppies fully health checked and vaccinated. You must get proof of this.

Evaluating the kennel

When you visit the breeder, take a look around their home and kennel. Make sure you see where the puppy is living and meet the parents. Consider these questions:

- _ Is it sanitary?
- _ Is there plenty of room for the dogs to run as they would in nature?
- _ Do the puppies play with each other? Are they being properly socialized?
- _ Do the puppies have a variety of toys and activities?

- _ Is the environment peaceful and cheery—not chaotic?
- _ Are the surfaces of the runs safe, not full of large gravel that doesn't clean well?
- _ Are the kennels well drained?
- _ Is there adequate shade?
- _ Are there swimming pools?
- _ Does each dog have a heated sleep area?

This next point is painful but important. When you look at the breeder's home or kennel, do you think that they probably have a large cash reserve should your pup need surgery covered under their health guarantee? Can they afford to provide the best food possible for their canine family?

If a breeder won't let you tour their kennel, they may be hiding something. Or if they want to "meet up at an exit on the highway," *run! Fast!* There's *something* they don't want you to see.

Considering Your Preferences

When it comes to choosing a breeder, you'll have some preferences that have nothing to do with a breeder's background or how they breed and raise their dogs. Here are a few pointers to consider:

- _ **Don't go to the closest breeder.** Why would you want to save a few hours of driving when adopting a canine family member that you'll spend fifteen-plus years with?
- _ **Don't price shop.** You can buy an inexpensive pup at the get-go, but you may end up with a \$5,000–\$10,000 surgery for joint issues, cataracts, or myriad other issues. Sure, you'll pay more to get a dog from a professional breeder, but the advantage is that the professional has done extensive clearances to prevent every possible genetic issue found in their breed.
- _ **Choose someone you like.** After all, you and the breeder may have a fifteen-year relationship.
- _ Lastly, use your heart and the discernment that God gave you. Good luck!

Choosing an AKC Breeder of Merit

You may have seen the badge below on some breeders' websites. This shows that a breeder is an AKC Breeder of Merit. You might be thinking, "So what?" But, truth be told, this helps you narrow down your list of breeders.



In order to be a Breeder of Merit, a breeder has to meet the following standards (taken from the [AKC website](#)):

- **Has a history of at least five years' involvement with AKC events.** I have seventeen years of showing, thirty years of breeding.
- **Earned Conformation, Performance, or Companion event titles on a minimum of four dogs they bred or co-bred.** I have many dogs that have achieved Championship and Grand Championship. Many have been in the top thirty-five in the breed in the United States.
- **Is a member of an AKC club (local or parent club).** It's a very thorough screening process to become accepted. I have been a member of my club for several years and also serve on the board.
- **Certifies that applicable health screenings are performed on breeding stock as recommended by the parent club.** Each breed has its own screening requirements. For Labradors, those health screenings are CERF (eyes), OFA (hips and elbows), Optigen (eyes), PRA (progressive retinal atrophy), EIC (exercise-induced collapse), HNPK (hereditary nasal parakeratosis), NARC (narcolepsy), heart (by echo doppler), and CNM (centronuclear myopathy). Many new health clearances are being created as we speak! As they become available we add those to our process.
- **Demonstrates a commitment to ensuring 100 percent of the puppies produced are AKC registered.**



When a breeder meets all of these standards, it shows that the breeder has a record of caring about health and conformation for generations in their dogs. I guarantee that no puppy mill or backyard breeder is showing their dogs in AKC events; their dogs aren't achieving titles like Grand Champion. I encourage you to look for the AKC badge and ask breeders if they are an AKC Breeder of Merit.



How to Talk to a Breeder

What questions should I ask my breeder? How do I get the breeder to return my phone call? How does a breeder decide who gets a puppy?

If you've asked yourself some of these questions, I offer some answers here.



The number one thing not to ask a breeder

The biggest oops you can make in contacting a breeder is to begin your conversation with “Are you a puppy mill?”

I understand the intent behind this question, but you’re basically insinuating that the breeder has inhumane conditions and doesn’t take proper care of their dogs. So the bottom line: Asking this question is incredibly offensive. In addition, if you *were* contacting a puppy mill, would they admit it? Unlikely.

Puppy mills are to be avoided because of their inhumane conditions and practices and their neglect of the animals (see Chapter 2 for more on steering clear of puppy mills). If a breeder is spending thousands of dollars on health clearances for their dogs, standing by them with health guarantees, putting them in the show ring (and doing well!), and not cutting corners cost-wise, you’ve probably avoided a dreaded puppy mill.

Along the same lines, don’t call someone an “irresponsible dog breeder.” Not only is it insulting, but it’s also a surefire way to make a breeder move *very* slowly in accommodating you. Give the breeder the benefit of the doubt that they will stand by their word and are doing everything in their power to put your dog and your family’s best interest first. You can expect the breeder to grant you the same consideration.

Do your homework before that first conversation

Take the time to read the breeder’s website before contacting them. Breeders spend years building their websites, so you can get many of your questions answered by reading through it. I promise the breeder’s website will answer many of your questions before you even speak with them.

Please don’t be offended when a breeder refers you to their website to gain more knowledge about their breeding program. Breeders can easily take an hour of your time on the phone going into details that are already online. We certainly don’t want to waste your valuable time. Our goal is to educate you before you take your pup home so you are well prepared and ready to spend many, many years with your new puppy love! That’s why breeders put so much time into their websites to make them more than “Here’s our kennel, here are our puppies, here’s how to buy one.”

When it’s finally time to talk with the breeder, be patient! If you keep calling and calling and calling, this insinuates that you’re a high-maintenance client. Please try to restrain yourself. In many cases, breeders have other jobs and responsibilities, so please respect that.

Understand the breeder's limitations

Knowing what health issues breeders can prevent and clear against and what they can't is also important. Be careful of stating something like, "I don't think our last dog came from a reputable breeder. He ended up with a torn ACL." Torn ACLs are *injuries*, not a result of poor breeding.

Unfortunately, cancer is something else that is not easy to rule out. A breeder can track cases of it to see if it may run in a certain line, but otherwise there is no gene to single out this devastating disease as there is for EIC, PRA, CNM, etc. There are too many unknowns with cancer (just like in people).

Something else to never say to a breeder is, "I paid _____ and expected that nothing would go wrong!" If this were the case, there would be no need for a health guarantee.

Remember that the breeder is the expert

Taking advice from a breeder with years of experience in a breed is not a bad idea. They have seen and heard just about everything, and it's all breed specific.

A veterinarian has been trained in general canine health, but they can't know all of the specific health issues and growth rates of each breed. Chances are a breeder has insight into their breed's health and their bloodlines that a vet may be unaware of. Develop a good relationship with your vet and breeder. You and your dog will benefit in the long run.

When you discuss your pup's food with the breeder, don't question the breeder's choices. Most breeders have more education and experience with nutrition than veterinarians do, especially when it comes to the specific breed of dog you're acquiring. A good breeder will recommend you feed your dog a quality dog food (and supplement). Breeders recommend specific foods because they have done the research, educated themselves, know the specific nutritional needs of their dogs, and have experience with those foods.

Breeders also know what allergies their breed is prone to and if the dogs are prone to be overweight—and if so, they can tell you how and why to prevent obesity. Many breeders give a very generous health guarantee. Nine times out of ten, when a dog has a health issue, it is nutritionally related. If you call with a so-called genetic issue and tell your breeder what you are feeding and they believe it may be dietary, don't be defensive. Listen to their advice, change your dog's diet, and save yourself thousands of dollars in vet bills and medications. Yes, that's right—breeders can help you do that!

Realize that breeders are deliberate

Knowing the difference between temperament and personality is *key*. Breeders breed for temperament in *all* of their litters. In asking which litter would have a better temperament, you are essentially implying that a breeder is only breeding certain litters to be well-tempered family dogs. Breeders sculpt their breeding programs by keeping and breeding dogs that exhibit a good temperament.

Good temperament does *not* mean the puppy doesn't require training. *All* puppies need training. Don't say, "I want the puppy that doesn't bark." Or "I want the pup that is (fill in the blank)." Remember, breeders can put all of their dogs' genetics into your dog for temperament and trainability, socialize it for eight weeks—and have the new puppy owner ruin that pup within the first twenty-four hours. *As soon as you walk out of the breeder's door, you are training your pup.*

Respect the breeder's decisions

Owning a breeder's dog (or someone else's—even a rescue) is a privilege. During the screening process, do not act as if you deserve a breeder's pup. If a breeder doesn't think you're a right fit for them or their dogs, don't cry, "Discrimination" or "I'll sue." It simply won't work. The adoption process is grueling, and breeders are very discriminating. If a breeder gets a red flag at any time in the process, they can refuse to let you purchase one of their puppies.

Many breeders turn away first-time dog owners or ones with children (especially if they hear chaos in the background as they speak with you on the phone; they may not want their dogs in that atmosphere). I am not of this mind-set. However, I do spend much more time educating first-time buyers because there is so much to prepare for in getting a new pup.

Think before you cancel your reservation

You find out that one puppy in the litter died, and you want to cancel your reservation. Don't be so hasty.

I read a research article a few years back about survival statistics for puppies. For an undomesticated litter, the mortality rate is over 20 percent. In a domesticated litter, the rate drops to about 10 percent.

Most puppies die from suffocation because of improper presentation when going through the birth canal or because of a problem with the placenta. If you think logically, a puppy who dies of asphyxiation is not going to affect the rest of the litter. The *only* thing that will affect the rest of the litter would be a disease like herpes. But even that can be cured with no effect on the puppy's long-term health if caught early and treated by the breeder.

In thirty years, I've never seen one issue that occurred early in a puppy's life affect it later. So before you assume something illogical about the litter, talk through it with the breeder. You can also talk to your veterinarian.

Know that it takes time to develop a champion

Every year, a couple of people ask me, "Do your puppies have titles? Are they champions?" (Usually the people asking this are from outside the United States and don't understand the process of earning titles in the US.)

The earliest a dog can be shown in conformation is when it's six months old. It's highly unlikely for a dog or bitch to finish its championship title that young. Usually a championship is earned when a dog is between two and three years old; at that age, a dog is more developed and can compete against other champions to earn championship points toward their title.

Selling to Celebrities

I want to end this chapter by demonstrating that no one gets special treatment when it comes to adopting my lovely little Labbies. I've had the opportunity to sell my pups to celebrities, and I don't treat them any differently than I would treat you.

I bet you're thinking, "Oh, how cool to get to meet celebrities who buy your dogs!"

Well, maybe. Let me explain.

There are three types of celebrities, and I've worked with them all. For the sake of those I'm writing about, and because I'm not trying to impress you with names, I'll keep them anonymous.

The first type of celebrity is my favorite. They call me and use their name in a way that I don't really register who they are, nor do they use their name to impress me. These are the best clients. They walk into my house, and I'm screaming inside, "Holy heck! It's a *Famous Person!*"

I try to be sensitive to these kinds of celebrities. They don't want to be fawned over. This impresses me because I get an idea of what kind of owner they will be. It also means they don't expect me to sell them a puppy because of who they are.

I'll admit, Jonathan and I have had a couple of instances when a particular celebrity pulled out of the driveway with one of our puppies while we screamed, "*Oh my gosh!*" (Some jumping up and down on my part was perhaps a part of that exclamation.)

Then there are the celebrities who call and try to impress me with who they are and what they've done: "I've been on *some Top-Rated TV Show*, and I've done *something notable*." All I want to say is, "So what does that have to do with you being worthy of owning one of my pups?"

Finally, there are the celebrities who have their family manager call me. That immediately puts me off. Why can't *you* talk to me? I want to talk to whoever is actually buying the pup. I mean, how do I know that the manager will communicate everything to you that we talk about when we do the paperwork and the checkout part of adopting a puppy? Having someone call on your behalf makes you sound snobby and too good (or too busy?) to take the time to talk to me, learn what I expect from you, and learn what you should expect from me.

Or they have their assistant call me. Same thing. I don't care that you're sending your private jet to get the pup. In the end, you, the owner, are responsible for this dog's well-being. When you put your dog in the hands of someone else, I wonder, "Why are you getting a dog if you will spend so little time with it?"

I've sold pups to famous sportscasters, sports figures, national newscasters, people who sell stuff to famous people (and have a built-in GPS in their body), musicians, and actors. I hate to say it, but half of them did not qualify to own one of my pups. So it's not *who* you are that matters. It's what kind of pet parent you are and if you are willing to partner with me, as the breeder, for the long-term well-being of your new canine family member.

I've sold puppies to a few individuals who if I told you their name, they'd have to kill me. I secretly love this idea. That means the person did a very *thorough* background check on me—they know *everything*—and they chose me. That makes me feel really good. A lot of FBI agents, policemen, and Secret Service officers come to mind, as well as others whose professions are confidential. Yep, they'd have to kill me...and you!

The worst clients are physicians (well, some of them) and veterinarians. They are the worst offenders when it comes to trying to impress me. They always introduce themselves as Dr. So-and-So. I usually reply to them with their first name. If they have a problem with that, then I have a problem with them. This type of person has a "god complex," and if something goes wrong, they're not likely to listen to a dog breeder with more years of experience than their vet. They think they know it *all*. Sorry, but when I run into that type of physician, I don't want to work with them.

The ones who come to me but I don't find out their credentials until they sit at my desk (and perhaps only because I ask) are the ones who have become some of our nearest and dearest friends. Many of them tell me our

education helped change policies and procedures in their practices. That means the world to me. These are the teachable ones. No matter who you are, that characteristic will always win me over as a breeder. Take note.

If you *are* a celebrity, here's how to win me over: Tell me who you are (just your name) and don't send your assistant or your family manager. What I care about is whether you will be a good pet parent. I also like to know if you and your veterinarian are willing to work *with me* as the breeder for the long-term health and well-being of your fur baby. I won't brag publicly about you or make you feel any different than any other person who gets a puppy from me. If you expect otherwise, then I'm probably not the breeder for you. I'd be happy to be friendly with you and engage in conversation merely because I take interest in *all* of my clients. Expect to be treated with the utmost respect and anonymity.

Chapter 4

Picking the Perfect Puppy

Choosing to add a puppy to your home is a huge and rewarding decision. Choosing which breeder to adopt a puppy from is an incredibly important part of this decision (see [Chapter 3](#)). And choosing which puppy to take home... Well, if you've never adopted a puppy before, you're probably feeling overwhelmed.

I remember a weekend when we had a litter of eight pups meet their new families and go on to their forever homes. There were five girls and three boys in the litter. Watching each person interact with the pups and try to make their decision was entertaining, to say the least! I watched every family struggle to decide which puppy was *meant* to be with them—looking, asking for a sign! Because, let's be honest, all of these puppies were exceptionally cute.



It All Starts with the Breeder

Here is the secret to picking the right puppy:

Pick the right breeder.

When most people meet our litters, they discover that our puppies' temperaments are consistent. A reputable breeder *breeds* for temperament; that is, she makes sure her dogs have a friendly, gentle attitude toward all types of people and are well behaved in a variety of situations. It is not like meeting a litter of pups advertised in a newspaper ad, where the spectrum of temperament is all over the place.

Now, the puppies' personalities (that is, whether they're energetic, laid back, or any of a dozen other personality types) may differ, but their personalities will also continue to be shaped and molded in their new homes. Puppies' personalities take shape during the first sixteen weeks of their lives. The breeder spends the first eight weeks training and socializing the pups. Your puppy will spend the next critical eight weeks with you, and you need to continue the training and socializing that the breeder started. The big difference is the environment in

which you work with your new dog. After he's home with you, your puppy will need to adapt to your environment and learn how to behave there.

Selecting Your Pup from the Litter

Everyone has their own method of picking their pup. Some people want my input, and I can tell you which one I would keep based on show potential, which one might make a good service dog, or which one might be suited to be a hunting dog.

Other people let their children pick the puppy (though I'm cautious with this method because Mikey will inevitably decide he likes a different puppy than the one Susie likes!). Most of the time people choose the puppy who seems to stick right around them as they sit and play with the pups. Sometimes a certain set of eyes will forever melt your heart and claim you.

The picture below shows the Wilkinses trying to decide which of the five yellow girls was to be their Gracie. The challenge was more than they anticipated. But they finally, somehow, narrowed it down to one. There was something about the way the puppy they finally chose looked at them and held eye contact when I held up the two girls they were trying to decide between. She stole their hearts.



I often hear that someone is very particular about having “pick of the litter,” or they want to have a choice between pups. To clarify, the *breeder* will always have pick of the litter, unless, for some reason, they are not planning on doing so. They will usually know this by the time you are placing your reservation.

I also take reservations based on color and gender. So if you requested a chocolate female, you may end up with first pick of chocolate females in the litter, or you may end up with last pick of chocolate females in the litter.

The nice thing about getting a pup from an AKC Breeder of Merit is that getting the last pup of the litter is like getting first pick in *any* backyard breeder (BYB) or pet shop litter. And remember, even the last pup needs a family. If that weren't so, we'd have a lot more unwanted pups in this world.

I can't tell you how many times the last pup ended up being, in my opinion, the nicest pup in the litter. It's funny how things turn out that way. But I truly believe that each pup will find its family, and each family will find the pup that was meant to be theirs. (I've even prayed about this particular desire before a litter is ready to go home!)

I have never had someone feel uncomfortable taking the last-pick puppy. I even commonly have people say, “Please don’t make me pick. Just give me a puppy!” This is usually because those people realize there is no wrong choice. And that, folks, is the bottom line.

There is no wrong choice.

(Not when you’ve picked a good breeder.)

Pick the puppy who seems to make her home in your lap. Or can’t stop giving you kisses. Or pulled the puppy collar right out of your back pocket (yes, I’ve seen this happen!). There is no special formula to picking the puppy meant for you. Sometimes it’s a coin toss and you would be perfectly happy with any of the furry loves romping at your feet. Sometimes the puppy doesn’t give you a choice and clearly picks you. I promise that you will love and cherish this pup, and she will live her life with you as though *you* were the one meant for *her*.



Size Genetics: “I Want the Biggest Puppy!”

A dog’s size is based on genetics. It is *not* based on the size of the puppy at eight weeks of age. This is why I tell my clients over and over, *do not* pick your puppy based on the size. *Do not* worry about which puppy is larger and which puppy is smaller. Pups grow and develop at different rates, just like children do. Think about infant birth weights; will a 9-pound baby necessarily be bigger than a 6-pound baby as an adult? Not at all! A bigger puppy does not equal a bigger adult dog.

Pictured below are two black female pups from Erica (Endless Mt.’s Black Sphinx) and GCH Endless Mt.’s Mack Truck, Mackie (one of the largest dogs in our kennel!). The little one, Abbey, was the smallest of the litter. Not all eight-week-old puppies are the same size. Countless factors affect the size of young pups—the richness of mama’s milk, the size of the litter, etc. And like I said, puppies grow at different rates. Abbey was, however, the *biggest* sweetheart! (We all doted on her because she was pocket-sized!)



Below is a picture of Abbey, sent to us by her family, at four months old. As you can see, she is no longer pocket-sized.



When it's time to pick your puppies, remember: *Never* be concerned with the size. We breed in Lab standard, and our pups grow as they should.

The Importance of Paying Attention: Don't Be a Ms. Leaky Mouth

Listening to the instructions given by the breeder or the shelter when picking up your new dog is crucial to making the first weeks, months, and years successful for both you and your new canine family member. Which brings me to an experience I'll never forget.

It's another Saturday, and I'm anticipating the arrival of a woman who is taking a pair of puppies with her—one male, one female. She's super-friendly on the phone and seems wonderfully prepared to provide a stable and love-filled home for two of our babies. It's her arrival that triggers chaos.

A silver SUV with tinted windows arrives, and two men in dark aviators step out of the vehicle along with a sixty-ish woman dressed in a sequined top, white pants, and sandals.

I've already been informed that the puppies will be flown by private jet from my local airport to the future owner's home. It all sounds like stress-free travel for the two pups.

As the woman and the guys with the shades enter my house, the air seems to buzz with an energy I've never experienced. The woman talks loudly and boisterously in her excitement to meet us and her new additions. I'm enthralled, yet somewhat unsettled. I can't quite put my finger on why though.

As she talks, I attempt to jump in and move her to the kitchen. The two gentlemen race around her in the background, handling bags, two pet carriers, and the lady's personal items. I attempt to greet them, but they pretend none of us exists and give a barely noticeable nod.

I manage to get the woman to the puppy room. Thankfully the process of picking out which pups she is taking is uneventful. She chooses two beautiful, very light—almost white—yellow lab pups.

We leave the pups in the puppy room as we proceed to my office where my assistant, Lindy, is waiting to help with the paperwork and instructions for the days, weeks, and months ahead. It usually takes anywhere from a half hour to an hour to go through the last-minute questions and important information such as the AKC registration papers, health record, details regarding the puppy's parents and their health clearances, and recommendations on food and housetraining, as well as tips on further socialization of the pup after it leaves my arms.

As I attempt to get Ms. Leaky Mouth to take a seat in front of my desk, she babbles on and on about her three homes as she flicks her mobile device open and proceeds to show me pictures of *all* of them!

She's talking a mile a minute, and Lindy shoots me a deer-in-the-headlights look. I return it with what I imagine is a *Puss in Boots* cat-eyes type of stare. I search Lindy's face for some sort of encouragement, but she's just as flabbergasted as I am and taken back by the “buzz;” the Sunglass Guys are still rushing here and there doing—I'm not sure what they're doing, to be honest. Meanwhile, Ms. Leaky Mouth is *still* jabbering about her vacation homes and opens her iPad to show us even more photos.

I'm trying desperately to send body language that conveys, “Sit down and listen to me, lady! You've taken up an hour already, and we have another half-hour to go over information regarding the pups. Remember the pups?”

I finally hand the paperwork to Lindy, who begins to fill out the blank sections and necessary information, as I attempt, once again, to refocus Ms. Leaky Mouth.

Honestly, I'm not sure she heard a thing we said. Almost any new idea took her into *Squirrel!* mode.

Here's what I want you to take away from this story: Because this final meeting with the breeder is *so* important to make your puppy's transition from the litter to your new dog pack a smooth one, I implore you to take the

time to listen to whomever is handing you your new dog. It could mean the difference between weeks or months of frustration or weeks and months of an easy transition for you and your new fur baby.

Keeping the Kids Under Control While You Adopt Their New Friend

Children get undeniably excited at the thought of bringing home a new dog. Asking or expecting them to remain calm while they choose a puppy and wait for the paperwork to be completed is unrealistic. But when children behave during this exciting time, I can get you on your way a little faster.

While choosing a puppy, have children sit on the floor. Although a child's instinct is to run while puppy chases, this can end up in tragedy. The puppy may grab the child's pant leg, thus tripping the child, who then falls on her face. Also, having the children sit on the floor provides a less stressful atmosphere for the litter.

If your child runs around and trips over a puppy and breaks its leg, you bought it. Vet bills and all. I have families sign an agreement concerning this if I feel the children may be a little energetic. This sends a clear message to the parents to monitor their children during their visit with me, the litter, and any other dogs in my household. If the parents don't get the hint, they just may leave without a puppy. It is my prerogative, after all, because I own the litter. I make it very clear to each and every potential puppy buyer that no document leading up to the possible sale of a pup is a contract. I also outline the fact that I can change my mind at any time during the screening process—deposit or not—if I do not feel the client is a good match for me or my grand-pups.

When it's time to make the adoption official, leave your children in a room with either you or your spouse or a guardian while the other one goes through the paperwork (health record, registration, training, feeding, and routine schedule for puppy) with the breeder in their office or kennel. This allows for fewer interruptions and a better chance for things to go smoothly when you arrive home.

Finally, be sure the *entire* family reads the Puppy Prep Kit, which you receive when you place your reservation, and the information included in the puppy packet that breeders send home with you and your new addition. (The travel time home is a good time to read all of this to the family, unless you fly in. If that's the case, you'll want to read everything immediately upon arriving home with the pup.) Everyone must be on the same page and using the same training corrections. If this is not enforced, the puppy will become confused and insecure about what is expected from him. Houstraining will also take longer if corrections aren't made consistently.

Am I Crazy to Want Two Puppies?

Many people ask me what I think about getting two puppies at once or adding a second Labrador (or dog) to their family.



Getting two puppies at once

I do advocate adopting two puppies at the same time. After all, dogs are pack animals, so they are happiest with their own kind. It also solves the question of guilt when you are away and can't be with your dog. Adopting two puppies at once also lessens the stress on the pups (no lonely, crying pup in the middle of the night) and on you. You can train both pups at once, instead of training one pup now and another in a year or two.

I probably have a pair of labs go out together in almost every litter because the trend of adopting two puppies has become more popular. Some people are reluctant to get two puppies at the same time because they think the pups will bond to each other and not them. I've had many Labs over twenty-nine years, and I have never found this to be true. Puppies include you *in* their pack. They love you as much as they do their canine counterpart. Labs are sooooo adaptable.

Adding a second Labrador

Some people ask if they should add the same sex or opposite sex when adopting a second Labrador. I can tell you from experience, bringing home a dog of the same sex will only work about 50 percent of the time. The second Lab of the same sex may feel threatened or in competition with the other Lab. However, opposite sex pairings work 100 percent of the time. This rule applies to other breeds as well.

To me, it's not worth the risk of owning two same-sex dogs and having one emerge as the alpha dog. Then you have to make the difficult decision to place or sell one of your dogs. However, that's only my opinion. I must state it because I don't want any of you to experience this heartache. Although it is ultimately your choice, I *do not* recommend having two dogs of the same sex in the same household. But I know this has worked very well for many people, especially if both dogs are raised together or if you add the second dog while the first is still under twenty-four months of age.

If you decide to add a dog to your family and you already have a dog, expect your first dog to go through an adjustment period. Remember when you brought your brand-new baby home and your toddler got *really* jealous? This happens when the child figures out, "Hey, this little thing is getting more attention than *me, me, me!*" To prevent jealousy, you give the toddler attention when the baby is around. Then he learns, "Oh, cool. This baby gets my attention when it shows up. I like this!"

Same thing with dogs. Think of your present dog as the toddler who has to figure out how to relate to this new family member. Everything will work itself out over a two-week period as the dogs establish their pecking order. Please be patient, and let them do this.

It's OK to Love Again

People frequently call me after losing a beloved canine family member and ask about my upcoming litters. They say, "I just lost my (insert pet's name). How long should I wait before getting a puppy?" Many of them seem to feel guilty about even thinking of bringing a new puppy home so soon after their loss. To those of you experiencing this, I'm writing to you.

Losing a dog is one of the most painful times of grief I have ever experienced. And it never gets easier. Each dog is an individual, and each will have his own place in your heart.

Some people feel like they're betraying the dog they just lost by getting a puppy, as if they're trying to replace them. I truly believe that our dogs are family, and they want us to be happy and to both love and be loved. Anyone who has owned a Lab (or has been owned *by* one!) knows that once you have a Lab, it just doesn't feel right to be without one. Dogs know this. They know we need them.



From my Labby heart to yours, *it's OK to love again*. It's OK to open up your heart once more. Someday it will be broken again (though we wish they could live forever), but it will be worth it. *It's always worth it*.

When to expand your family with furry footsteps again is a personal decision. There is no right or wrong amount of time for grieving, but please don't think you've betrayed the dog you just lost! Just because you get a puppy does not mean that you've forgotten or suddenly gotten over your faithful companion.

I've also had people ask if they should get another black Lab or switch it up and get a yellow one this time. Again, a totally personal decision. Some worry they will compare the pup to their other dog if they get the same color or sex. I don't think this happens very often. When you bring your new puppy home, you will find that he is an individual; your new pup will have his own personality and take a new place in your heart.

Dogs are the most selfless creatures on earth. They spend their whole lives wanting us to be happy, and I don't think that changes once they've gone



“...Grieve not, nor speak of me with tears, but laugh and talk of me as if I were beside you...

I loved you so—'twas Heaven here with you.”

—Isla Pachal Richardson

Chapter 5

Bringing Your Fur Baby Home

Congratulations! You are officially a new puppy parent (or soon to be)! This will be, indisputably, one of the most challenging, but rewarding endeavors of your life.

What follows are tips and advice for making your dog's transition from his old home to his new home as easy as possible for him (and you). So best of luck! And well wishes in your new adventure! I promise you, it's *all* worth it!

Puppy Proofing Your Home

Before you bring your puppy home, you should puppy proof your house. This includes removing items that could be hazardous to your curious canine as well as removing items that you don't want him to damage.

If you've had babies or toddlers in your home, you know all about making your home safe for children. The idea isn't much different when you're bringing a puppy home. For those who haven't had children (or if it's been several years since you had toddlers in the house), just get down at a puppy's level and remove or safeguard everything your puppy can possibly see and everything within about 5 feet of the ground. That includes anything on or near chairs, tables, sofas, shelves, and so on. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Here are some things you can do to make sure your home is safe for your new puppy.

- **Secure electrical outlets and cords.** Everything goes in a puppy's mouth. That's how they learn about the world. Make sure electrical cords are secured to baseboards or inaccessible to the pup. Puppies who chew on wires can suffer electric shock or burns, or they can die. The same goes for TV and computer cables.
- **Secure medication bottles and household cleaners in a closed cabinet.** *Childproof* does not mean *puppy proof* because puppies can chew through plastic bottles and containers.
- **Keep your puppy away from toxic plants, both in the house and in the yard.** For a list of indoor plants that are toxic, search for "household plants toxic to dogs" on Google. You can use Google images to see if any on the list match the ones in your home. Here's a list of known harmful outdoor plants that can cause illness from mild to deadly: autumn crocus, azaleas, bleeding heart, buttercups, castor bean, daffodil, Dutchman's breeches, elderberry, foxglove, golden chain, hyacinth, iris, Jack-in-the-pulpit, Japanese yew, larkspur, lily of the valley, mistletoe, narcissus, oleander, poinsettia, rhododendrons, rhubarb, and just about any kind of bulb.
- **Use pesticides and rodent poisons with caution, and make sure the puppy can't get to them.** Rat baits are sometimes mixed with grains and can be attractive to pets. Same with boxes or plastic packages; your puppy could try to play with them and ingest the contents!
- **Don't leave cigarettes or butts on the table or in ashtrays.** Puppies could eat them and get nicotine poisoning. Furthermore, please don't smoke indoors where your dog is. Dogs suffer from secondhand smoke just like children do.

- **Watch out for Christmas ornaments, tinsel, and other decorations.** Broken Christmas balls can lead to nasty cuts, and metallic tinsel can cause poisoning. Other decorations may be toxic as well.
- **Don't leave candles burning where puppies can touch them.** Puppies are curious creatures and can get burned.
- **Don't leave sewing needles or pins out.** Something else for those nosy pups to put in their mouths.
- **Keep the toilet lid down if you use automatic cleaners.** They may be alkaline and tempting for the puppy or dog to drink.
- **Dispose of bones so the puppy can't get to them.** Puppies will be attracted to the smell in the trash can, and ingested bones can be deadly, especially if they are cooked.
- **Make sure antifreeze is out of reach and drippings are cleaned up immediately.** Sweet tasting antifreeze is deadly to pups.
- **In case of an accident, have your veterinarian's phone number posted by the phone or programmed into your cellphone.**

Chances are that you'll miss something, despite doing everything on this list. That's OK. Puppy proofing can be a never-ending process as your dog grows and gets more comfortable exploring his environment.

Puppy's First Days at Home

The first couple of days at home with your new pup will be a magical time—all that cuteness and playfulness and innocence. But soon you'll forget what life was like before you brought your canine companion home because he will begin to feel like a part of your family. However, have patience because it may take him several days to adjust to his new surroundings.

Here are some suggestions that will help your dog make a good transition to life with you.

The best time of day: Chow time

Your puppy is now eating solid food. There is no need to grind food or to add milk or soft dog food. Your dog's breath and dental health will be good throughout his life if you do not feed soft dog food. (See [Chapter 11](#) for more information about what to feed your puppy.)

Up until now, your pup has had food available at all times, but now that you are housetraining (more on that in the next section), you will want to go to a two-times-a-day feeding regimen. A regular feeding schedule creates a predictable potty schedule (within five to ten minutes of feeding time; your pup will have his own exact schedule).

If you work during the day, feed once in the morning, allowing puppy to potty before you leave, and once when arriving home. In such a case, I recommend a doggie day care or a pet sitter to come in at least one to two times a day to check on the pup, play with him, and let him out. If you and your spouse work eight hours a day, that can add up to almost ten hours of alone time for a pup. That's too long! In such a case, I discourage adopting a dog and recommend getting a cat. And always buy a companion so they have company while you are gone.

Training your pup to pee and poop in the right place at the right time

I could write a book on housebreaking alone, but I'm going to give you a few basic suggestions to get you started. If you can concentrate on housetraining during the first two weeks your puppy is home, you won't encounter many problems thereafter. So spend as much time as necessary housetraining during this period.

Take puppy out first thing in morning, after each meal, after naptime, after playing, and just before bedtime.

Praise him when he goes outside, and scold him with a firm “no” when he has an accident in the house. Never shame a dog by rubbing his nose in it! When he eliminates outside, mark the spot, and each time you go out for a potty break, take him to that same spot. He will soon learn to eliminate whenever he is taken out and he smells the familiar smell. (You can train your pup to go in the same area of your yard this way.) After he has gone outside, have a little “party” in the yard (Good puppy! Good boy!), give a gentle pat on head, and let him have the freedom of the house or a confined area such as a kitchen.

A dog crate or kennel will come in handy when you are away for several hours or too busy to watch him. The puppy won’t want to dirty his crate if the crate is small enough that he can’t eliminate in one end and sleep in the other. (For more about using a crate, see [Chapter 6](#).)

Never “free water”—that is, allow your puppy unlimited trips to the water bowl—during housetraining. This is one of the biggest mistakes first-time dog owners make, and it makes housebreaking almost impossible. Scheduled food and water times create predictable potty times and prevent accidents. You may want to add water to puppy’s daily kibble or food until it floats, let it sit for fifteen minutes, then offer it to puppy. This will prevent spills in the crate and allow you to regulate how much water the little one is getting each day.

Ick! When your puppy has the runs

Sometimes your puppy will have a bout with “the runs” after she comes home. This can be due to the stress of new surroundings, new food, and new water. Sometimes the stress of traveling can trigger a bout with diarrhea for a couple days.

If your puppy continues to eat and drink normally, don’t worry. Your problem should solve itself in a few days. Feed white rice until the diarrhea stops, along with bottled water. (Only give bottle spring water such as Aquafina or Poland Spring for the first ten days. Then start mixing it half and half to transfer to your tap or well water. Canines are *very* sensitive to food and water changes.)

Have Pepto-Bismol *on hand* when you get home with your pup. If puppy happens to get runny stool, administer 1/8 of a teaspoon at fifteen-minute intervals for an hour. I wouldn’t administer any more than this. Also, feed about 1/4 cup of canned pumpkin twice a day.

If the diarrhea continues for more than a day, or your puppy is not drinking or eating and is lethargic, then poisoning or coccidia (a bacteria picked up by pups) could be the cause. Take the pup to your vet immediately!

You should also take your puppy to the vet if her stool isn’t the right consistency. A puppy’s stool should be like soft-serve ice cream or firmer (gross, I know...); when it is watery, you should be concerned. If watery stool is observed, you’ll want to intervene immediately with the Pepto-Bismol and canned pumpkin.

Even if your dog isn’t having diarrhea, I recommend taking a stool sample to the vet within the first week of pup being home. Although your pup has been wormed, pups can re-infest themselves, so your puppy may need another dose of wormer. Section off a small area where puppy can go potty during this time so you can then sanitize it. After you get a negative result, remove all the feces and bleach the ground.

Double ick! When your puppy has worms

If your puppy is pooping what looks like spaghetti noodles, she has roundworm, the most common intestinal parasite found in puppies. If you see one or two, maybe three, get some wormer. If she poops nothing *but* spaghetti, that is an infestation; your breeder may have not wormed properly. Many times this can make your pup *very* sick; other times a pup may just have a swollen belly. Most times a dose of Pyrantel or Safeguard will do the job. Your vet will administer the proper treatment for the parasite you may be dealing with. Never give a wormer that your vet or breeder has not recommended.

If your pup or dog has parasites, don't call the breeder and say, "Bad, bad breeder." Please. I know worms may freak you out, but they are common. If your breeder goes to dog shows, travels, or has any outside dogs come for stud service, the breeder's dogs are at risk for getting an infestation. That is why I routinely worm my dogs. And I am proactive with worming my pups every ten days because the adult parasite must be killed *before it can lay eggs*. If you wait fourteen days, the parasite may lay eggs and then your wormer is wasted and won't do its job.

Although nine out of ten fecal floats come back negative for some bacterial parasites (like coccidia and giardia), I still recommend that you take a stool sample to your vet when you take your pup for her first well-puppy visit as soon as you can get an appointment after pup arrives home. Oftentimes test results show a false negative, or if the breeder or vet is looking for coccidia or giardia, two or three floats may be required to confirm its presence. Intestinal worms are easier to spot than bacterial parasites, and some can be seen with the naked eye. It's always safe to err on the side of caution. Pups, like human babies, are very fragile and can become sick very quickly from exhaustion, dehydration, or parasites left untreated.

Getting through the first few nights

The first night in a new home is often the most difficult for a puppy. To make her more comfortable, place a hot water bottle filled with warm water and wrapped in a towel in puppy's crate to simulate another pup.

If you have played with puppy a lot and held her the first day, take off the shirt you have worn and place it in her crate. Familiar smells always comfort a canine. A ticking clock or a clock radio can also be soothing; the ticking sound simulates a heart rhythm, and the radio provides the sound of voices. My pups are raised around calming music, so you may find that playing that genre of music will soothe your pup into a relaxed state and encourage sleep.

Some people advise rubbing a towel or blanket on the mama dog before you take your pup home so she has something with mama's scent. I don't advise this because the pups have been weaned for at least a week before they go home (trust me, with all of those sharp puppy teeth and nails, mama is ready to be done). It's more about being away from their littermates that they have to adjust to. I'd rather that your pup gets accustomed to *your* smell. Continuing to expose your pup to the littermates' or momma's smell just makes her transition more slowly to your home and your smell.

Hang in there as your puppy adjusts to a new sleep routine; it won't be long before your pup will be sleeping through the night. Some soothing music and diffusing some calming essential oils like Calm Puppy Blend can assist in helping your pup begin to sleep through the night immediately. (Find out more about these products at www.essentialoils4pets.com.)

Taking the right approach to training

Bad, unruly dogs are almost always the result of lack of training or inconsistency, neglect, or abuse on the owner's part. I know you don't want to raise an unruly dog, so you need to make time to train your dog to behave properly. In as little as five to ten minutes per day, you can have a well-behaved, happy dog that your family, friends, and relatives can enjoy.

A sharp, loud "no" is sufficient reprimand for a puppy. The dog wants to please you. You can also grab the pup by the scruff of the neck and look him in the eye to reprimand (as an alpha bitch would do in the wild). This also establishes you as the pack leader. But do not overcorrect or bully your pup. I've seen overcorrection turn a confident pup into a fearful pup, who may even act out in aggression. So use good discernment. If in doubt, talk to your breeder or rescue organization about proper correction.

Use a warm, happy voice to praise puppy when he does well. Again, *never use harsh discipline. Don't border on mishandling or abusing your dog!*

If you are unable to be gentle, firm, and patient with your pet, find another home for him. Don't simply give up or reach the point where you abuse or neglect the dog. Be wise, and be kind. If you obtained your pup from a reputable breeder, they will have already told you that they will take the dog back if it needs to be re-homed for any reason. Do this sooner rather than later to prevent bad behavior that your pup will exhibit throughout its lifetime.

Make sure the whole family is consistent with all training methods. Otherwise, your puppy will learn to respect only the person who carries through with discipline! If you do not get everyone on the same page within the first couple of days after your puppy arrives home, you will *not* be able to correct the puppy's bad behavior later.

Stopping bad behavior before it becomes a problem

Your puppy will naturally need to chew while losing baby teeth. Supply him with a Nylabone "pooch pacifier" that he can chew *on* and not chew *apart*. Rawhides teach dogs to chew things apart, so don't use these while your puppy is teething. This will help protect your favorite pair of shoes!

"Play biting" is normal for puppies because this is how littermates play with each other. But this is something you'll want to nip (pun intended) in the bud, especially if your dog will be around young children.

You can correct this unwanted behavior without lots of hitting on the nose or yelling. Here's how: When your pup bites down on your (or your child's) finger, stick your finger (use one with a short nail) far down his throat to trigger his gag reflex. It is humane, yet uncomfortable enough that puppy will think twice next time! For a demonstration, visit my Endless Mt. Labradors YouTube channel and watch the video entitled Breeder Insights: "[Puppy Play Biting](#)" that shows you how to execute this correction. (You'll find numerous helpful videos here that will help you with a puppy or an older dog. Be sure to peruse this educational channel.)

Be careful how you play with your puppy. Limit the amount that children roughhouse with your pup! I don't advise rough play because it can lead to bad habits, such as jumping up on you, biting at clothing, etc. Teach him to enjoy calm, quiet affection. Pet him or stroke him while speaking in a soft soothing voice.

You must remember that if you adopt a Lab, your dog will weigh from 65 to 95 pounds at maturity. Some of the bad habits he learns as a small puppy will certainly not be desirable when he grows older. Don't let him get by with anything as a puppy that you won't want him to do when he is older and much larger.

Getting acquainted with the vet

Your pup will have been wormed and will have received his first vaccine when you pick him up. The next vaccine will be due approximately a month from the date of pick-up. (Check your pup's health record to find out the exact date.) I recommend you take your pup to your vet within the first week for a well-puppy check-up (for your peace of mind and for your own protection). While you're there, make an appointment for his next vaccine.

Also, take a stool sample to your vet during this first visit to double-check that puppy is clear of parasites. Even though breeders worm the pup, sometimes puppies can re-infest themselves. They are not picky about where they step and what they eat sometimes, so breeders want you to double-check that your puppy has a clean bill of health once he arrives at your home and is separated from the rest of the litter.

During your appointment, talk to your veterinarian about flea control. Flea collars, dips, or other preparations should not be used on pups under fifteen weeks. Check with your veterinarian and follow his recommendations for flea control on young dogs. A safe alternative would be a veterinarian- formulated essential oil-based product like All-Natural Flea/Tick (www.essentialoils4pets.com).

Helping Your Kids Adapt to Life with Their New Best Friend

I open my front door, and in front of me stand a mom, dad, and four "littles."

A breeder's first thought is, "Will they be borderline hyper, almost-ADHD kids, or well behaved?" I can't help it. I've screened the parents and the family, but without having a security camera inside the house, I can't *really* know.

Some breeders won't even sell to families with children. I happen to think that children can be great for a dog and vice versa. But when I see a gaggle of kids, my mind switches to lecture mode, and I have an entirely different instructional time for families. What follows are some ways to help ensure that your children and your dog become lifelong friends.

- **Puppies need fifteen to eighteen hours of sleep a day.** If your children exhaust the new puppy, she may begin to vomit or get diarrhea. Treat her like a baby, and give her a safe den (crate) area where she can have her quiet time and somewhere to escape when she needs a nap.
- **Monitor your children's behavior around a puppy.** If they even come close to harassing the pup, sit your child down and have a heart-to-heart. If the child will not stop, remove the puppy and discipline the child. Explain that bullying can be an issue with a puppy just as much as it can be with a playground thug. Remind the child that dog body language is different than a person's, and it can be misinterpreted or dangerous.
- **Stress to your children that your new dog must have a low-key environment in your house, which means no screaming or shouting.** Puppies and dogs pick up on the energy of the household. People don't realize how important this point is, but it can make the difference between a very secure, peaceful, well-adjusted canine family member and one who is out of control—or even fearful.
- **Do not allow children to take toys or food from the puppy.** Teach them to ask for something your dog is holding in his mouth. The phrase "drop it" is a very easy, common command for this. Using this approach will prevent a puppy from becoming toy or food aggressive. Do not let your child taunt a dog with a toy, treat, or food. Scientific studies have shown that dogs understand the concept of fairness and

can figure out when they are being unfairly teased. This tip will also prevent your pup from hiding from a child who taunts or from acting out in a protective or guarding manner.

- **You and your spouse are the alpha male and female, and your children are the siblings or “littermates” in a puppy’s eyes.** That’s OK, but realize that a puppy may take advantage of the kids, assuming they don’t make it toe the line as much as the adults in the house do. This is another reason why everyone needs to be on the same page as far as training and socialization.

Pups and dogs love routine as much as babies do. So make a daily schedule and stick to it. [Chapter 6](#) on crate training will assist you in this effort.

Chapter 6

Crate Training

Adding a puppy to your household can be a wonderful experience, but the relationship can sour before it even begins if the puppy is ruining carpets and chewing up furniture. There is, however, a training tool that will enable you to train your new companion and avoid disaster—a crate! This chapter explains what you need to know about using a crate as part of your puppy’s training.

Crate Basics

Two types of crates are available. The first type is often made of heavy molded plastic or fiberglass and is used by airlines to transport animals. Plastic crates usually come in two parts, top and bottom, and are easy to disassemble and clean. Wire crates, which provide better ventilation, are also available, but they do not provide the privacy and seclusion puppies need when they retreat to their crates for naps. However, a cover placed over a wire crate works if privacy is needed. I prefer using wire crates because they provide better air circulation.

It’s important that you understand that the crate is *not* a cage or jail. A crate is your puppy’s own place—it serves as a natural den or bed, a place to hide special toys or bones, and a refuge in times of stress.

Puppies like to sleep in small, tight places. That’s why they curl up under the bed or scoot under a chair or crawl under the back porch. A crate allows you to use this “den” instinct as a training tool.

Begin by choosing a crate size to suit your dog. I *highly* recommend one that comes with a divider that you can use as your pup grows. You can select a large crate that will eventually accommodate your full-size dog if you don’t want to purchase a small crate now and a larger crate later. If you choose a larger crate that doesn’t have a divider, section it off with boxes or something similar to create a space that allows your pup to stand up, stretch, turn around, and lie down comfortably.

You don’t want the pup to sleep in one end and have room to relieve itself in the other, which is why you create a small space. The purpose behind using a crate is to housetrain the pup by using his natural instinct to keep his bed clean. He may have one or two accidents, but that will be all! While you’re using the crate for housetraining, line it with a folded towel that is easy to launder. Save the crate “bed” for when the dog is occupying the entire crate.

Finally, do not keep a pup’s collar on when placing him in a wire crate. It can catch on the wires when the dog jumps around, creating the possibility of strangulation.

Introducing the Crate

Introduce your pup to the crate by tossing a treat inside while the pup is watching. Say, “(Name), crate!” (or “kennel!”) and urge the puppy inside. Use a sing-song voice. Let the pup grab the treat and come back out. Repeat the action a couple of times. Later, place the puppy’s dinner inside the crate. Let the puppy eat with the door open, coming and going as she pleases. Or, as I do, put the pup in the crate to eat and close door. As soon

as the pup has finished, take her out immediately to the spot you've chosen as the place to eliminate in your yard.

When the pup is comfortable going in and out, toss a treat inside the crate and close the door after the pup goes inside. Wait a couple of minutes and then open the door. Gradually increase the length of time until the puppy is comfortable with the door being closed. Some whining can be expected. But just as we allow babies to "cry it out" and learn to comfort themselves and go to sleep, we must do the same for puppies.

If your pup throws a temper tantrum when you close the door, *do not* let the pup out until she is quiet. If you let the pup out when she carries on, she will learn that temper tantrums work. Instead, tell the pup, "No! Quiet!" in a sharp tone of voice. Covering the crate, if it is a wire crate, can assist in quieting your pup. It will also eliminate distractions.

Put the crate in your bedroom at night so the pup can feel your presence and be reassured that you are near. The pup can be near you for eight hours even though you are sleeping. If the pup is restless, you will be able to hear her and take her outside. If the pup decides she wants to play, just reach over, tap the crate, and say, "No! Quiet!" You'll know after the first couple of nights if the pup is crying because she must go out or if she's just whining to try to get you to let her out.

During the day, place the crate near people in a high-traffic room or the kitchen. Let your pup see and hear the normal sights and sounds of your household.

Following a Schedule

When housetraining a puppy, set up a schedule for the pup's meals, playtime, crate time, and trips outside, and follow it closely. The pup should be taken out to eliminate after waking, after eating, after playing, and about every three hours in between. Within a few days, you'll learn your pup's inner clock.

Here's the routine I recommend to the families who adopt one of my babies:

1. The first thing in the morning, pick up the pup, take her outside to the predetermined place, and mark the spot. (Don't make coffee and wander around the house. Your pup will need to urinate upon waking.) Always take the pup to the designated area so she knows where to eliminate. Allow plenty of time for the morning elimination. If you hurry, she will be more apt to do her job in a rush. Then bring her inside to a small area where you will be.
2. Feed the pup in her crate, then take her out again. Give her plenty of time to take care of business. Sometimes you may need to let the pup out a couple of times until she has finished moving her bowels.
3. Around midmorning, let her out to run. After she eliminates, bring the puppy into the house for an hour or two of "confined freedom" with you. (Watch for the "poopy and pee-pee dance" as a sign the puppy needs to go out. This usually consists of sniffing and turning in circles.) Ringing a bell by the door you use to take the pup out will encourage her to eventually ring that bell to let you know she needs to go out.
4. Around midafternoon, take the puppy out again for a potty trip before putting her back in her crate.
5. Just before dinner, take the dog out to run, and then bring her in for more "confined freedom."
6. Feed dinner no later than 6 p.m. Take the puppy outside again after dinner. Bring her in for some "confined freedom" with you.
7. Take her outside again around 8 p.m., and then one more time before bedtime.

After about two weeks of this routine, the pattern should be set, and you can allow more freedom as puppy becomes more trustworthy—and as her bladder grows! Hopefully, by this time, your pup will have learned how to alert you to her need to go outside.

If you are a working dog owner, don't plan on leaving the pup alone in its crate from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. That is way too long for the pup to be crated. Place the crate in an easy-to-clean area (kitchen, bathroom, laundry room) and confine the puppy in the same room, or hire a neighbor to play with the pup and take it outside. Also, hire a pet sitter to come in periodically during the day to keep up your routine. Or take the puppy to a doggie day care so she can continue housetraining and begin socialization. Pups need stimulation during the day.

If you are at home while housebreaking, feed pup twice a day, knowing that potty time will happen right after or within five minutes of eating and drinking.

Preventing Problems

Puppies don't intentionally get into trouble—it's just that our belongings are so alluring, at least in a pup's eyes. Your couch pillow that has been slightly chewed is a lot of fun when it's shaken and the stuffing flies out! Leather shoes and rawhide chews seem very similar to your pups!

Many of the destructive things pups do can be prevented by using a crate. A puppy can't destroy a pair of \$100 shoes if she is crated when you're not there to supervise. By preventing these problems, you will establish good habits and prevent bad behavior. The pup learns to chew on toys you give her, to sleep in her space, and to be quiet instead of learning to be destructive. (For discover toys that are safe to put in crate, visit my blog entry "Endless Mountain Labradors—Approved Dog Toys" at www.emlabradors.com.)

As an Adult

As your dog matures, she can be given more freedom, but if she does make a mistake, crate her again. You may also find that using the crate at nighttime results in less barking, less whining, or fewer accidents. The dog must prove trustworthy by not chewing and having accidents before you can eliminate the use of the crate. Too much freedom can result in problems.

Your dog will use her crate on her own if she has been trained properly because the crate provides a special place to sleep or to retreat to when needed (in a high-energy household, the crate can provide a much needed haven). Your dog will go there when she is feeling tired or sick. She may even hoard bones and toys there to keep them away from the new baby or puppy.

Security

A crate can also provide your dog with security away from home. If your dog needs to be boarded, send her with her crate. Use the crate at hotels or when flying. Although the surroundings may be foreign, your pup will find comfort in the familiarity of her crate.

Teaching the pup to ride in the crate in the car may also save her from being thrown from a car during a swerve or accident. It also prevents interference with the driver.

If you don't want the hassle of moving the crate in and out of the car, many harnesses are available for your adult dog. These can also create a safe environment for you and your dog while traveling. However, until your puppy is large enough to use a harness, always put her in her crate when traveling by car.

Chapter 7

Socializing: Ensuring Your Pup Will Be Welcome Anywhere

Socializing your pup means the difference between living with a dog who is comfortable in new environments and around new people and living with a dog who is fearful of everyone and everything. If you plan to take your dog out in public or to friends' houses, you'll have an easier time if you've socialized him.

Starting with Socialization Immediately

The first sixteen weeks of a puppy's life are the most formative. Finding a good breeder who properly socializes her litters during the first eight weeks is the most important first step. But your puppy's socialization doesn't end when you take him home.

During the next eight weeks at home with you, your puppy will really come into his own personality as he adapts to his new environment and new family. This stage of socialization is critical to your pup's mental and emotional development.

Here is a checklist of things to expose your puppy to in order to continue his proper socialization:

- _ Touching the feet and toenails
- _ Handling the ears and checking inside them
- _ Touching and squeezing the nose (gently)
- _ Checking the eyes and touching the eyelids
- _ Checking and feeling around the mouth and gums
- _ Gently rolling your puppy over onto his back and rubbing his belly (though if you are going to show your dog in conformation, I don't encourage belly rubbing)
- _ Taking a bath and water in general, and drying off with a towel (or dog dryer used by groomers)
- _ Wearing a cone (I know, it's so pathetic to watch, but it's good to get them used to this early on in case it's needed when they're older)
- _ Wrapping a paw or leg with an elastic bandage
- _ Being held in your lap
- _ Being around a variety of people (people who are tall, have deep voices, speak in high-pitched voices, sport beards, etc.)
- _ Being around babies and children (always supervised)
- _ Being around variously dressed people (people wearing sunglasses, boots, hoods, hats, etc.)
- _ Being around other dogs and different breeds, small and large (again, always supervised and dogs you know. Be cautious of dog parks and strange dogs. There are health and safety concerns. See the "Socialization at Dog Parks Can Go Horribly Wrong" section later in this chapter for the reasons I tell people to avoid dog parks.)
- _ Being around other kinds of animals (cats, rabbits, birds, etc.)

- _ Walking on different surfaces (carpet, tile, wood, sand, etc.)
- _ Standing on a scale (like in the vet's office)
- _ Hearing alarms and sirens, doorbells, fireworks, unusual cellphone rings, the vacuum cleaner, and other loud noises
- _ Being around washing machines and dryers
- _ Taking walks near parks, moving cars, and other distracting and busy environments
- _ Riding in the car
- _ Visiting all sorts of different dog-friendly places (bank drive-through windows, parks, shopping centers, etc.)

This list may seem overwhelming at first, but you'd be surprised how many of these things can be done while playing and interacting with your pup. You can even hang this list on your fridge and check off items during the day as you do them. Try doing two to three items a day, review them with your canine student the next day, then go on to the next two.

Your puppy's personality will develop in part by some inherited traits, but also through learned behaviors. It's nature vs. nurture. Each component plays a role in the growth and development of any pet. The best time to socialize your puppy and teach him correct behavior (the nurture part of nature vs. nurture) is in the first weeks that he's home with you. (For more info, visit my YouTube channel, "Endless Mt. Labradors" and watch "[Nature vs. Nurture.](#)")



Introducing a New Puppy to the Pack

If you haven't already discovered this, you will soon learn that most Labrador homes are multi-Labrador homes! It's true. One just isn't enough! And once you have two, you will never have just one again...

But, for a Lab or any breed of dog, you can't just bring the new puppy home and expect your first dog to welcome the newcomer with open paws. Here's what most people want to know when they become first-time two-dog owners: *What is the best way to introduce the new puppy to our dog at home?*



Here are five things to remember when introducing another dog to the pack at home:

- **Keep the meeting neutral:** As best as you can, introduce the two dogs on neutral ground such as a dog park, a neighbor's house, or the breeder's house. This is more for the older dog than the new puppy. The puppy hasn't yet laid claim anywhere.
- **Take off the leashes:** Dogs feel territorial on a leash. If you let that puppy free and hold onto Fido with a leash, he will feel more threatened than he would if he were loose because he is restrained. It's a natural instinct. Let him sniff it out and just stand right there with them.
- **Show your dog that with the puppy comes attention for him too:** When playing with your new puppy or taking him for a walk, include your first dog too. This teaches your older dog that he will get attention at the same time the puppy does. This will curb the older dog's jealousy.
- **Opposite-sex pairs work best:** As a general rule, I recommend opposite-sex pairings. Male-female pairs work 100 percent of the time! If you have an older male and bring home a male pup, you may experience alpha issues between the two. Same goes for the females (and sometimes even more so!).
- **Let the dogs establish the pecking order:** Be patient with your dogs. They will spend at least two weeks establishing the pecking order in their new pack.

Ultimately, your two Labby loves will become inseparable and the best of buds. Dogs are pack animals and always do well with a companion. Once you start your cycle of a multi-Labby household, you will find the transition for each new dog easier and easier. But also expect the pack rules, roles, and dynamics to change periodically as dogs age and new dogs are introduced.

New puppy Lola (Penny x Scotch) is with her new big brother are pictured below. As you can see, they adjusted quite well.



Here is the email we received from Nick and Lola’s mom, Noelle, with these pictures:

Annastasia,

You were 100% correct about opposite-sex pairings. As you can see, my very dominant 4-year-old male, Nick, is completely tolerant of Miss Lola!

It’s been a perfect match.

Noelle

Socialization at Dog Parks Can Go Horribly Wrong

Dog parks are popular among pet owners. The general thought is to let dogs interact off-leash, play, and socialize. This concept *seems* great. Here’s the problem though...

Playing often turns into *bullying*. And too often, the owner of said bully is not right there to intervene or, worse, chooses not to. Have you ever heard these excuses?

“Oh, they’ll be fine! That’s what dogs do!”

“Your pup’s gotta toughen up!”

“They’re just playing.”

“They’re establishing their roles.”

Yadda, yadda, yadda...



Here’s the problem with all of that nonsense: The pup who’s roughed around can develop long-term behavioral effects of his own. Aggressive behavior can stem from these exact situations. Think about it. The victim is being bullied, ganged up on by multiple dogs sometimes, and nobody’s intervening. He learns that maybe if he gets to the other dog first, if *he* plays the bully role, he won’t get picked on.

It’s important to know the difference between *playing* and *bullying*. Bullying is absolutely not acceptable. If one dog is showing submissive signs and the other isn’t backing down, ***it’s bullying.***

I have to tell you; an aggressive Labrador is rare. When I hear about an aggressive Lab, I wonder if the dog had a bad socialization incident. Here’s the bottom line: Socialization *is* important, and dogs *need* other dogs, but make sure it’s *supervised* socialization. Never be afraid to be protective of your dog.

Instead of socializing your dog at a dog park, invite one of your friends and her canine companion over for a puppy play date. But make sure your puppy has had all of her vaccinations first. If canine friends do come over, make sure their pet parents are meticulous about their dog's health too.

Chapter 8

The Puppies Are Coming!

The Puppies Are Coming!

One of the best parts of my job as a breeder is helping my dogs give birth. I look forward to every new litter of puppies, but every pregnancy is stressful. So many things can go wrong, and I have to be watchful for signs of distress in the momma dog.

This chapter tells the story of when Amy gave birth to her third litter. You'll see what I mean about the miracle of birth being stressful but exciting at the same time.

Is She or Isn't She?

Its four weeks from her birth date, and I stare at Amy's belly trying to ascertain whether she's pregnant or not. I tilt my head to the right and try to make out a "puppy bump." Of course, watching a momma's belly doesn't make a litter suddenly appear, just like staring at a kettle won't make it boil. But I'm so excited, yet nervous.

Did that \$1,500 stud fee for that well-known stud dog pay off? Will I get what I'm hoping for? Will she have enough milk if the litter is big? Will she have a small litter of super-large puppies that will require a C-section? Will she have a hard labor? Easy labor? Will I be up all night?

All the fears and concerns come rushing in, all at once. After thirty years, it's never gotten easier or less stressful.

I check her again a week later, rolling her over on her back, feigning a belly rub, and examine her nipples to see if they are swollen or if I see a bulge in the middle.

They are! And there is!

I do a little dance and sing Amy's song: "Amy...what you wanna do? I think I could 'live' with you for a while...maybe longer if I do..." (Yes, each dog has a version of its own song.)

She thumps her tail against the floor and rolls over, ears back, as she observes my goofy singy-dance.

Making Preparations

I start making mental lists of things I need to remember. I inventory my whelping kit (*whelp* is the fancy term breeders use for "birth"): Oxytocin (to cause contractions, just in case she is pushing for over an hour and I need to get a pup out)...check. Sub-Q fluids and butterfly syringes...check. Dental floss to tie off the umbilical cords...check! Alcohol and a shot glass to dip the umbilical cords in until they fall off...check. Electrolytes for possible fading pups or the dehydrated momma needing a jolt...check. Paper towels and dish towels to dry off the pups as they're born...check. Nonslip gloves to help wiggle a puppy out of the birth canal if it's stuck...check. Probiotic paste to give each pup to boost their immune system and coat their gut with healthy intestinal flora...check. Nutri-drops to give each pup three times a day to provide energy and needed

nutrients...check. Calcium pills to help encourage contractions so I hopefully don't need to use oxytocin...check. Cappuccino packets just in case I need to jolt a puppy (they're like liquid defibrillator paddles)...check.

I then make another mental note that I need to sanitize the whelping box, gather all of the parts, and place them neatly in my whelping room off of my office. I'll need a pad of paper and a pen to write down the exact time of each birth and make notes of any medication I administer so I have a log should the vet need it when deciding if we need to go to a C-section.

I'll also need to order some milk replacer in case it's a large litter and I need to help supplement the pups if momma is running short on milk.

I check to see how many bags of puppy food I have on hand for when the pups begin to be weaned. I also make sure I have plenty of high-protein food for momma so she'll make plenty of rich milk to feed her babies.

I note the breeding dates and calculate her projected earliest birth date and write it on my calendar. I also write a reminder, two weeks before that date, to begin setting up the whelping box and allow Amy to begin nesting before the litter arrives.

I then call the vet's office and plan a puppy count X-ray after Amy is at least forty-five days into her gestation; by that point, the pups will be calcified, and their skeletons will show up nicely on an X-ray. Then I cross off eight weeks—no plans, no long vacations—a schedule that is flexible so I can work around the needs of Amy and her pups.

I begin to dream of puppy breath, little squeals, and tiny grunting noises as they nurse greedily. How I love to rub the soft patch of coat between their nose and just below their eyes—it's baby-butt soft!

If they're black, they'll come out looking like angry little Asian men. If they're yellow, they'll resemble soft yellow marshmallows. If chocolate, I anticipate their dark, glossy coats that will gleam when the light hits them just right.

Crazy, huh? But that's what runs through my mind about as quickly as the time it took you to read that!

Watching and Waiting

As Amy's due date approaches, I become nervous, can hardly sleep, and watch every movement and sound Amy makes so I can witness the first sign of nesting.

During this period, she begins to hide behind couches, squeeze into dark closets, and when the contractions start, she'll scratch at her bed, the rug, or whatever flooring she is on at the time. This is God's way of having Momma Dog prepare a whelping nest or den. I wish I'd had something like that to distract me when I went into labor!

Once the scratching begins, I fill the whelping box with shredded newspaper so Amy has something to move around and feel like she's accomplishing something. I also put her in her whelping box and shut the door so she doesn't begin labor under my bed, behind the house, or in the basement.

Potty Time Adventures

I never let a momma dog out of my sight when she goes out to go potty, and I've been known to carry a flashlight with me at night to make sure that when she squats, nothing comes out "down there" that shouldn't come out.

I learned my lesson several years ago when I let a momma dog go out the back door to relieve herself, but I got distracted in the kitchen with a young Baby Livvy. When I returned to let the momma dog in, I just happened to glance about fifty feet from the back of the house and spotted something flipping beneath the fall leaves by the old maple tree. I darted through the door and found a puppy squirming there, just out of sight except for the slight movement of dead leaves around where it lay.

Another time I took Bunny, the squishiest, cutest yellow Labrador on the planet, out for her potty time after birthing more than a dozen pups. Luckily, I had my flashlight then because when she squatted to urinate, out came number fourteen! Close call! A litter to remember, for sure!

The Big Moment

Amy's contractions begin coming fast and hard. Unlike any other dog I've ever assisted, she is barking during each contraction—this is unusual for a Lab. I've lost count of how many litters I've birthed, but it's usually a very quiet process with short grunts and pushes.

Not this time!

I grab the phone and let Lindy, my assistant, know that Amy's in whelp. She hurries over to observe because she's never seen a litter born. Amy is very familiar with Lindy, so I know it won't make her uncomfortable.

I'm very careful to have a quiet, dim room during whelping. It calms the momma and helps her relax and have her pups. I wonder if that is why labor tends to start at night—much to a breeder's chagrin. But think about it: Things get quiet, the house settles, it darkens...I think that's why.

The first pup is taking its dear old time—which isn't uncommon—but I'm worried because this is Amy's third litter and she's never acted this way before.

Suddenly we see a head trying to emerge, but Amy is having a hard time pushing it out, so I grab the pup behind its shoulders and ever so gently pull.

Lindy reaches in behind me to assist, and Amy bites her arm (not hard, no marks)! In thirty years, this is a first. It's not because she is unfamiliar with Lindy—she's just *super*-stressed.

I don't chastise her because she is clearly in pain. She begins to cry loudly again, and I start to bawl my eyes out.

So here I am, squatting over my Amy. She's crying. I'm crying. Lindy's crying. I finally get a good hold on the pup deep in the birth canal so I don't injure a limb. I've got my rubber glove on with plenty of lubrication, and I disperse it around the puppy's body to help it slip out more easily.

With one last push, the pup shoots out!

I wipe my tears on my sleeve, then help Amy tear the sack. I always work on getting the sack off the pup's head and making sure the pup begins to gasp for air while Momma chews off the umbilical cord and removes the remaining placenta. (You've got only so much time to get oxygen into them before brain damage can result.)

I allow Amy to eat the placenta (I know, it sounds gross) because it contains calcium and helps encourage productive contractions to move the other pups along. Mother Nature planned it this way.

Each puppy presents the same scene but with less crying—and no more biting.

Somewhere near the end, I finally have a moment to grab the bottom cushion off the couch and slide it into the puppy room so I can camp out for the night as I usually do. I cover it with a sheet to protect it from any of the messiness of the birth, grab my pillow and cushy quilt, and close my eyes for a few brief moments.

Lindy goes home, and Jonathan and I arrange shifts during the night watch. He usually takes the late-night hours, and I take the early-morning hours.

Amy ends up with six pups—exactly what we counted on the X-ray. Now she seems to be resting quietly.

I still sleep on the floor beside her, just in case there's a stray pup that decided to hide behind her ribcage during the puppy count X-ray and surprise us. But no more pups arrive. The tension in my neck eases a bit.

First thing the next morning, I announce, "No more litters for Amy! I'm never going through that again!"

And I never did. We spayed her that year, and we are thankful for the pups we kept out of each of her three litters.

Dear Amy is doing great at age nine as I write this: not one gray hair, her eyes are clear, she walks two miles a day—the picture of health. And a soft, warm presence in our lives that keeps us smiling—as she smiles back.

Chapter 9

Taking Charge of Your Pup's Health: Health Guarantees, Contracts, and More

When you adopt a dog from a breeder, you will be required to sign some paperwork, and your breeder will go over several documents that are meant to protect both you and the breeder. The most important document is the health guarantee, which guarantees that your puppy is healthy at the time of adoption and free from any genetic defects.

Introducing Health Guarantees

Health guarantees are a tricky subject. There are as many versions of health guarantees as there are breeders.

For as long as I can remember, when someone purchased a purebred puppy from a pet store or a breeder, that puppy came with a health guarantee. If anything was wrong with the puppy, you could return him for a full refund.

For some, offering the health guarantee is a get-out-of-jail-free card because of the catch—the catch being that the person who purchased the puppy has to return the puppy or dog to get their money back. Of course, the vast majority of people will have fallen in love with the puppy by then and will not give him up for any amount of money.

Although I usually allow people to keep their dog, I want the right to be involved when the dog's quality of life is jeopardized and the owner refuses to intervene for financial or emotional reasons. I want a *humane* decision to be made, not a financial or emotional one.

When some people see that a health guarantee is offered, they think it means the breeder or seller is reputable. No. A health guarantee does not ensure that the puppy was well bred or that the breeder is ethical. It partially depends on the fine print of the health guarantee. Nevertheless, a health guarantee is standard practice when breeding, selling, and purchasing dogs. You should have an opportunity to look at a health guarantee before you sign the paperwork and purchase a puppy, and you should understand its significance and its value.

When researching breeders and trying to purchase a healthy puppy, you should be most concerned about finding someone who is testing their dogs for known health conditions, knows their lines, and can speak intelligently about the risks associated with the breed (both congenital [at birth] and genetic [inherited]). Look for a breeder who scrutinizes any issues that their breed or particular family of dogs is at risk for and can produce proof of measures they take to limit the risk for problems. The key is finding a breeder who is looking for the common and the uncommon health and genetic risks in their breed and then doing what they can to eliminate the chance for problems in their puppies.

The goal as a buyer is to purchase a healthy puppy, not to get your money back when or if the puppy is not healthy. If a breeder says they can assure that your puppy will be healthy—or if they say something like, “I have

been breeding these dogs for twenty years, and they have never had a problem”—then the wise choice would be to politely bow out of the purchase of a puppy from this individual. In other words, run!

I have thought long and hard about the notion that anyone could imply that they, in some way, could actually guarantee health as the term “health guarantee” seems to imply. I have also thought a great deal about what a health guarantee should cover. Therefore, my health guarantee is as much about what it does *not* cover as much as what it does. (I had a customer who tried to use the health guarantee to do *cosmetic surgery* on their dog.)

I know very well that there is no guarantee of good health. Many human couples have no family history of health issues, and they do everything in their power to be certain that their baby is healthy—from taking prenatal vitamins to eating organic to ensuring that their stress levels are low—and yet their children still have a risk for genetic disease. Based on the population structure of the purebred dog, specific breeds have increased risks for certain conditions and decreased risks for others.

I have found that new buyers often do not want to discuss what occurs if something turns out to be wrong with their puppy. I’m not sure if this is because they don’t want to think about it, if they don’t think that anything will happen, or if they are just too excited about their new puppy. (I actually *thank* the ones who take the time to read through my health guarantee.)

I realize that possible health issues and contracts are the last thing people want to think about when they are holding their soft, bouncing bundle of puppy breath, but these documents are important.

A good health guarantee should guarantee two aspects of the puppy’s health: that the puppy is healthy at the time of adoption and that the pup will not develop genetic defects for a certain period of time

Current health

The first aspect of a health guarantee is that the breeder is selling a puppy that is currently healthy. Many states require health certificates issued by a veterinarian before a puppy can be sold. Most breeders and sellers offer a guarantee that the puppy is healthy and free of serious infectious disease.

Many health guarantees also require that the buyer take the puppy to their own veterinarian to be examined within a specified amount of time (most commonly from forty-eight to seventy-two hours), even if the pup was examined by the breeder’s vet and marked as “fit for sale.” This is for the protection of both the buyer and the seller.

When you take your new dog to your own vet, you essentially get a second opinion verifying that the puppy is as healthy as the breeder or seller claims. The veterinarian will make certain that everything looks good and that the appropriate vaccinations have been given for the puppy’s age. The vet can also do another worming if necessary; some pups need another go-round after they’ve left the litter because they tend to re-infest themselves (even after they arrive at your house, puppies can pick up parasites in yards, grass, dirt, standing water, and from other dog’s feces).

The exam protects the breeder because the buyer’s vet must document the puppy’s health. This ensures that the buyer does not take poor care of the puppy or create health issues (for example, changing water or overstressing the pup) and then try to get their money back for a puppy that is sick because of poor care provided by the *new owner*.

Congenital and/or genetic defects

The second aspect of the health guarantee states that the breeder or seller guarantees the puppy against congenital and/or genetic defects for some amount of time. This part of a health guarantee is far more dicey and complex for both the potential buyer and the responsible breeder or seller. This section offers a guarantee against the development of any health and/or genetic defects for anywhere from a year to the dog's lifetime. If the breeder offers a lifetime health guarantee, you can assume the breeder is going to be very conscientious and do their due diligence in any case that may arise.

Again, the best guarantee is a puppy that came from healthy and health-tested parents. A breeder who has done this will be able to provide documentation of health clearances for areas such as hip, elbow, patella, cardiac, or eyes from an organization like the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) or the Canine Eye Registration Foundation (CERF).

Understanding what you're agreeing to

It is wise to do your research and know what health issues are a concern in the breed you are purchasing. You should always discuss these issues with the breeders you are interested in purchasing a puppy from.

Next, check the local dog laws in the state you are acquiring the puppy from. Know your rights as a consumer and the rights of the breeder. Don't come back later claiming you lost your copy of the health guarantee and dog law, or didn't read it.

If you acquire a rescue dog, be sure you clearly understand their requirements. The same goes if you purchase a purebred dog from a breeder. Read the health guarantee and keep it handy in the puppy packet you received with your pup. Keep the contract, health guarantee, health record, and registration papers in the same place in case you need to refer to them.

Don't use the health guarantee as a credit card to get all of your vet expenses paid for. If there's one way to never hear from the breeder or seller again, that would be it.

Don't misuse the guarantee. If your dog falls off of the bed (and you should *never* allow him on a bed, by the way), don't call the breeder and tell them the dog has genetic elbow or hip dysplasia in an attempt to get them to pay your vet bill. If I'm the breeder, trust me, I *will* investigate each claim. If you won't release your dog's records or allow me to speak to your veterinarian, then I know you're hiding something. If I find out you are, you will be charged with fraud. (Do you think this has happened a time or two to me? You bet!)

No breeder I know gives cash refunds. Too many of us have been victims of fraud, so we either offer a replacement puppy or the cost of surgery up to the price of the pup *if* the issue is reparable. Each breeder is different, so be sure you know and understand any contract you sign.

Some breeders require you to return the pup if a severe health issue arises. Each breeder is different. Read the contract and ask questions. Keep up your end if you expect the breeder to keep theirs. Don't "throw out" the contract as soon as something goes wrong and disregard the agreement you made. You surely wouldn't want your breeder to do that, right?

Addressing an issue together

Let me give you a piece of advice just in case an issue does come up; it will save you a lot of grief later. If your first contact with the breeder goes something like the following, you can be sure the breeder will not bend over and do cartwheels for you:

Dear Breeder,

I'm disgusted to tell you that my dog has _____. I thought you were a "responsible breeder." With the huge amount of money I paid, I expected that nothing would go wrong...bad, bad breeder...

No! Be courteous and give them the benefit of the doubt. Please realize that no one purposely tries to sell a defective pup. Remember, *these are living things, not widgets*. If you are polite, the breeder will go to the moon and back for you...quickly. Cooperate with their veterinarian and yours. Don't be defensive and the breeder won't feel a need to be defensive. If nothing ever went wrong, we wouldn't need health guarantees or dog laws. Trust me, your breeder wants to help you should anything arise. Work *together* on this.

Respect the vast amount of experience and knowledge your breeder has of the breed as well as their particular bloodlines. In many cases, we have more experience and knowledge than your veterinarian. Sometimes, we will also be able to assist when western medicine is at a loss. Many of us are very holistic in our approach and will be able to offer many options for treating or preventing certain diseases. Take advantage of our vast knowledge in this area.

Buying a pup from a reputable breeder won't ensure nothing will go wrong, but it greatly reduces the risks that something will. And if something does go awry, the breeder will have the financial means in place to stand behind their guarantee. They won't have already spent the money like a puppy mill or backyard breeder would (trust me here). Yes, you did pay more, and yes, you will be compensated according to the contract if you purchased your puppy from a reputable breeder. Don't expect that from a backyard breeder, pet shop, or puppy mill. If something goes wrong, good luck.

And don't go slandering your breeder on social media. You can be held liable for libel and slander in cyberspace. This is a surefire way to *not* get cooperation from a breeder. In fact, I now include a defamation clause in my contract.

Trust me, if something goes wrong, your breeder will be as upset as you are—if not more so. We are not heartless. In fact, we take great pride in pursuing excellence in everything we do, so we are as surprised as you are when something goes wrong.

Considering Contracts and Registrations

When it's time to sign the purchase agreement, be sure you know what you are signing. Do *you* own the dog, or does the breeder co-own it with you? If the breeder co-owns it with you, brace yourself for possible disaster. Unless you have a very detailed agreement on what each party's responsibilities are, you have too many opportunities for misunderstandings.

Obtain the AKC registration paper (some refer to this as the puppy's "papers") from the breeder when you pick up your pup. (OK, so sometimes we're late sending it in, but that's only once in a blue moon.) Some breeders will send in the registration themselves for each individual puppy and put their name on it as the co-owner without your consent. This is another recipe for disaster. Or the breeder will register the litter as well as each

individual pup in their name, then sign the pup over to you, ensuring that all the pups are registered with the AKC. This isn't wrong, just something some breeders choose to do for many reasons.

If you are obtaining a "full registration" (you have rights to breed the dog), it is quite common for a breeder to want to be a co-owner of that dog to be sure decisions about breeding are done in the proper way and that proper health clearances are obtained before that dog is bred. Most pups from a professional breeder will be registered with the AKC, but will be marked as "limited" registration. Your dog is still registered with the AKC, but it is understood that the dog is to be a pet and not to be bred. This is a way we breeders preserve our breed. We certainly don't want just anyone embarking on the HUGE responsibility of preserving the integrity of the breed.

What to Expect from a Veterinarian

When looking for a veterinarian, many people first consider background, experience, and education. But many other things make a good vet as I have learned in almost thirty years of breeding Labradors.

Vets are primarily trained in diagnosis, pharmaceuticals, anatomy and physiology, and surgery. Many lack training in nutrition (I find this is *most* lacking because nutrition can be the most important issue when looking to solve a problem with your pet's health). Your breeder is *very* knowledgeable about nutrition and the needs for your specific breed.

If you can find a holistic vet, you are *very* lucky. Go online to find networks that list holistic vets in your area. These vets will save you lots of money and will take all medical and holistic disciplines into consideration when looking for answers to your pet's health challenges. They will also use holistic approaches during your dog's ongoing regular well visits and routine vaccinations.

You can look up reviews online of the vets or clinics you're considering taking your dog to. The reviews will give you an idea of how professional, informed, and compassionate the vet is, but remember, usually only the ticked-off people end up venting on social media. So take negative comments with a grain of salt. Get referrals from close friends.

Call your prospective vet and set up an appointment for an interview. This can sometimes catch the vet off guard, but I think more of them are getting used to this. More and more breeders are requiring their clients to review some key things with their vet before taking home one of their pups. I require this of all of my clients.

How does this vet make you *feel*? How do they make your *pet* feel? This is very important, but if that is the *only* thing you like, keep looking and researching. A vet should never be condescending, arrogant, or worse yet, have you leave the office crying (yes, I know people who have had that experience).

Is the veterinarian a good listener? Do they let you offer your opinions and allow you to take part in the research, diagnosis, and treatment options for your pet?

Is the support staff friendly? Helpful? This is important because you will usually deal with them more often than your vet. If you have a bad experience with a receptionist or a vet tech, kindly mention it to your vet. I have done this myself, and the vet was appreciative. He had heard similar complaints, so he knew it was a true concern and was able to address it.

Ask if your vet will do vaccine “titer” tests. These tests will tell you if your pet already has enough immunity to a particular disease and further vaccination is not required. Many scientific studies point to health issues that stem from over-vaccination in pets. If your pet already has immunity to a virus, it is not necessary to vaccinate him on a yearly basis. You can read more about this topic in the articles linked below.

[How Much Money are You Wasting on Pet Vaccines?](#)

[Beware of Over-Vaccinating Your Dog](#)

Rude Dude Who Didn't Have a Clue

Earlier in the chapter, I mentioned that breeders appreciate working with prospective pet parents who are considerate and respectful. The following story offers quite a few examples of behaviors we'd rather not encounter.

It's a Saturday morning, and a few puppies are getting picked up. Anna, my assistant, and I plan to tag team. While one family picks their pup, one of us will take the other to the office to do paperwork and spend time with each new adoptive family so no one feels rushed.

I'm looking forward to this particular morning because most of the people coming have already gotten a puppy from me. That means the stress is off because I get to see old friends and “Endless Mt. family members,” as I affectionately refer to them. I look forward to seeing and hearing about their other dog and enjoying the pictures they show me of my grand-pups,

So this encounter was very unexpected, to say the least.

The first faux pas

The doorbell sounds, and I leap to my feet to get the door while Anna does paperwork with a client. An older couple in their sixties comes in, and we make small talk. Then I go out to meet their other Endless Mt. Labrador who is in the SUV parked in front of my house. I make a fuss over the beautiful dog, beaming with pride at such an amazing specimen.

We then walk through the house down to the puppy playroom and start the “pick a pup” process, which is different for everyone. Some take two minutes to look, point, and say, “That one!” (Maybe they'd been watching that particular pup in the pictures and videos they received as the pups grew and knew which one they favored.)

Other families take as much as thirty minutes to an hour, especially if two adults and four or five children all have to agree on one. (I nonchalantly try to pull the adults aside and recommend they announce, “Mommy has the last word” or something to that effect to make things easier.)

As I stood in the puppy room (affectionately called our Romper Room) with the couple, the guy looks over at a puppy in one of the pens, points, and says, “You're not an English Lab. Look at that skinny muzzle!”

OK. This is wrong on so many levels. First of all, don't *ever* comment on a dog's appearance in front of the owner, even if you are right. It's rather like you pulling back the blanket on your swaddled newborn only to have a person exclaim, “Ugh, its so *ugly!*”

Yeah. Get the picture? Secondly, the pup was about twelve weeks old, which breeders call the “ugly phase.” When pups are about that age, we jokingly say that we wish we could put a bag over their head until they are two years old.

My evil, inward self spat out, “Yeah, that’s what your dog will look like in a few weeks!” The man turned and began chatting with his spouse.

I’ve got your number, buddy! I bet your wife is your only friend...maybe...

At eight weeks—not a day sooner, not a week later—you get a glimpse of what the dog will look like at three to five years old when he’s fully grown. After eight weeks, the puppies grow all weird: the ears first or the feet first or the head elongates long before the rest of the body does. Eventually, genetics take over, and the puppies begin to look like the dog we bred resembling one or both parents. After all, we’ve spent decades breeding carefully to expect consistency and predictability in our bloodlines.

Between eight weeks and eighteen months, many of us breeders wring our hands as we stare at our next future champion and wait, knowing that sooner or later the magic will arrive. A puppy’s development is all based on hormones, so we know we need to let them do their job. It’s just hard to be patient. I can’t tell you how many people have told me to “dump” (sell) a dog in that age range, only to come back later when the dog was between three and five years old and watch him not only earn his championship title, but go on to finish his grand championship. Some of those “unattractive” dogs even rocketed to almost the top 20 in the breed (an accomplishment that, because Labradors are the most popular breed in the United States and the most competitive in the show ring, is *huge*, especially if you can get to that status regularly. I am proud to say we have.).

The head game

This couple is choosing from three or four pups, so I offer to set all the puppies up on the grooming table and stack them to show them the different features on each pup. (Stacking is a way to place a dog so the structure can be easily seen from the side, level position. If you see pictures of dogs in conformation shows, they will be in this position.)

When breeders stack a dog, we are looking for things like a nice length of neck (which contributes to fluid forward movement). We are also looking for things like a nice topline, nice tail set (straight off the back, not coming out as if it’s protruding from the anus. We sometimes refer to this as “roaching” in the rear.). We may look at rib spring, coat, and front shoulder angle. We don’t want to see the rear “cow-hocked” or the front paws turning in or out extremely (this is what breeders call “easty-westy”). (For more information about how to evaluate a pup, check out my YouTube video called, [“How to Choose a Puppy Based on Structure.”](#))

Knowing that these two had one of our labs and had been accustomed to viewing the perfect example of proper structure, I assumed they’d be interested in my input on their new puppy.

Rude Dude says, “Oh, no thanks. You don’t have to stack them. We just want the one with the biggest head.”

Oh brother, “head hunters!” You’d take a cow-hocked dog with a back that looks like a hammock, has a monster of an underbite, but—OH—it has a BIG head! Yeah, one of those kind...

“OK, but do you mind if I do it just for myself?” I suggest.

Secretly I want to force him to get a lesson on structure, plus demonstrate how consistent our dogs are, which I beam with pride about. You would not believe how many show-quality pups I send home as pets. Many breeders hope to at least find *one* pup (maybe two) out of a litter that conforms to the AKC standard, but I always have a hard time choosing because what I produce is so amazing. I have to break down the little things that a pet person doesn't have an eye to see. That's the result of good decisions in litter after litter over many decades.

Much to my relief, Rude Dude's wife is interested in seeing me stack the pups. I go through each one quickly, yet thoroughly. As I do so, Rude Dude stares off into space or at the show pictures and ribbons on the wall.

As I wrap up my evaluation of each puppy, his wife, in the end, picks the one I explain is my pick. Inside I'm *laughing*, thinking, "OK, so you dissed me, but then end up taking my input in the end."

Too funny. I'd love to hear the conversation in the car as they leave.

"We've always done it that way"

We then discuss what food they are feeding, and they mention a food that is presently in the midst of a full-fledged national lawsuit because of the manufacturer's dishonesty regarding the ingredients. When a third party was sent in to investigate, it found that those ingredients claimed to be in the food as represented on the label were, in fact, false.

As I explain this, Rude Dude brushes me off and gives some lame response that amounts to, "Well, we've always fed that food."

Yeah, good logic.

The ignorant comments went on and on. After they left, Anna and I just stood there, aghast at the comments he'd made during the course of just one hour.

If you'd showed up intending to offend me at least every five minutes, I don't think you could have beat him. His flexibility amazed me. He managed to have his foot in his mouth and his head up his arse at the same time.

Breeder knows best

Lesson to puppy buyer: Don't assume you know more than the breeder. At least give us the benefit of the doubt that we probably have a good deal to teach you, especially about our particular bloodlines and our "type."

Don't call our babies ugly to our face. You have *no* idea about the growth pattern of the breed's bloodlines like we do. If we have been at it for decades and have numerous show dogs that prove our success, please honor that.

We know you don't have the knowledge of a sporting group judge, but do some homework ahead of time. Check out the AKC Breed Standard of the breed you are looking to adopt on the AKC website (www.akc.org). Ask the breeder to stack your pup and evaluate it. You'll make their heart leap for joy and impress them at the same time!

Chapter 10

Knowing When to Spay or Neuter

Most people hear that you should spay or neuter your puppy as soon as possible (as young as six months old) so as to diminish the unwanted puppy population. Although there is unfortunately a growing population of unplanned puppies, there are also valid arguments for waiting to spay or neuter a dog. I'm not going to assume you are an irresponsible dog owner, and therefore convince you to spay or neuter early. I'll simply provide the facts and let you make an informed decision.

If you adopt a female puppy, you may also be wondering how to cope with her heat cycles. Never fear! I'll give you some easy tips to help you and your princess survive this natural part of canine life.

I will tell you, though, that none of this information is new. Breeders have been giving out for decades. It's only recently that veterinarians are finally joining our cause in educating the general public. Many veterinarians who have acquired pups from me have told me the education I provided caused them to change their protocol in their practices. So I feel that we are moving in a good direction when it comes to informed decisions regarding this matter.

I'd also like to mention that spaying and neutering too early can also stunt the growth of your dog. Imagine taking the hormones away from an eleven-year-old human boy. Imagine the ramifications! It's the same with our dogs, only they can't tell us about the side effects they are having when their natural hormones are cut off. Many times it manifests itself by numerous trips to the veterinarian for "this and that." Many of these conditions having been exacerbated.

And decades ago when I did not educate my clients, I would get emails saying, "My dog looks nothing like the parents!" I would inquire as to what age they were neutered or spayed, and I'd always be given an age of six to twelve months old.

One of the most poignant examples I can give are two photos of the same dog. The first photo was taken when "Scotch" was between two and three years old. The other is the same dog at five years old. Look at the head. Compare the thickness of the neck and chest, and the overall bone and substance. That is the result of allowing hormones to "do their thing."



There are numerous scientific studies that we all need to know about when making the decision to “fix” our pets. One of my favorite articles is [“Early Spay-Neuter Considerations for the Canine Athlete: One Veterinarian’s Opinion”](#) by Chris Zink DVM, PhD, DACVP.

Dr. Zink’s article provides evidence through a number of recent studies to suggest that veterinarians and owners working with canine athletes should rethink the standard protocol in which all dogs that are not intended for breeding are spayed and neutered at or before six months of age.

Orthopedic considerations

A study by Salmeri in 1991 found that bitches spayed at 7 weeks grew significantly taller than those spayed at 7 months, who were taller than those not spayed, allowing the growth plates to finish growing. A study of 1,444 Golden Retrievers completed in 1998 and 1999 also found bitches and dogs spayed and neutered at less than a year of age were much taller than those spayed or neutered at more than a year of age. Dogs that have been spayed or neutered before puberty can be identified by their longer limbs, lighter bone structure, narrow chests and narrow skulls. When allowed to grow to their full potential, the bone, muscle and substance is allowed to overtake your dog or bitch, allowing it to take full advantage of its own hormones.

Sex hormones are also imperative for achieving proper bone density. These structural and physiological deformities may be the reason why one study showed that spayed and neutered dogs had a higher incidence of CCL rupture. Another recent study showed that dogs spayed or neutered before 5_ months had a significantly higher incidence of hip dysplasia than those spayed or neutered after 5_ months of age.

Cancer considerations

Another study showed that there was a 5 times greater risk of hemangiosarcoma, one of the three most common cancers in dogs, in spayed bitches than intact bitches and a 2.4 times greater risk of hemangiosarcoma in neutered dogs as compared to intact males. A study of 3,218 dogs demonstrated that dogs that were neutered before a year of age had a significantly increased chance of developing bone cancer. A separate study showed that neutered dogs had a two-fold higher risk of developing bone cancer. This debunked the common belief that neutering dogs helps prevent prostate cancer. One study suggests that neutering provides no benefit. There’s a slightly increased risk of mammary cancer in female dogs after one heat cycle, and an increased risk with each subsequent heat. As a breeder, I’ve been able to watch both dogs and bitches live out full lives without spaying or neutering. I have not seen any increase in testicular cancer or mammary cancer. But I do recommend spaying my girls after they have had a few litters, and have only seen one benign instance of a mammary tumor. I did choose to spay that girl at the time that the tumor was removed. She was seven years old.

Behavioral considerations

A recent report of the American Kennel Club Canine Health Foundation reported significantly more behavioral problems in spayed and neutered bitches and dogs. The most commonly observed behavioral problem in spayed females was fearful behavior, and the most common problem in males was aggression.

Other health considerations

A number of studies have shown that there can be an increase in the incidence of female urinary incontinence in dogs spayed early. Neutering also has been associated with an increased likelihood of urethral sphincter incontinence in males. This problem is an inconvenience and is not life-threatening. But it may require a dog being on medications all of its life as a result.

A health survey of several thousand Golden Retrievers showed that spayed or neutered dogs were more likely to develop hypothyroidism. This study shows similarities with the results of another study in which neutering and spaying was determined to be the most significant gender-associated risk factor for development of hypothyroidism.

Infectious diseases is also more common in dogs that were spayed or neutered at 24 weeks or less in stead of waiting until after 24 months. In addition, the AKC-CHF report demonstrated a higher incidence of adverse reactions to vaccines in neutered dogs as compared to intact.

Some of you may be asking, “How can we prevent the production of unwanted dogs while still leaving the gonads to produce the hormones that are so important to canine growth and development?” One alternative would be to perform vasectomies in males and tubal ligation in females, to be followed after maturity by ovariectomy in females to prevent mammary cancer and pyometra. This is becoming more and more common, and I predict it will become commonplace.

Also, I have noticed that neutering or spaying never takes away the urge to “hump” or “mark” in neither males nor females. The only difference I’ve observed is that females make a much larger “mark” than males. And since I owned a spayed terrier (Ally), who was spayed at seven months old, I can testify that this did not curtail her urge to mark or to hump. In fact, she did it occasionally. And, she did it at times when a new dog or bitch was around, as she felt a need to “mark her territory.” She also used to hump my daughter when she was about three years old. Most likely she was communicating her “dominance.” It was rather humorous, and only lasted a few weeks.

My Recommendation for Spaying or Neutering

I recommend not spaying or neutering before your dog is eighteen to twenty-four months old because the growth plates are not finished growing until that time. If you spay or neuter earlier than that, your dog will have unstable joints and be more susceptible to cruciate ligament tears, ACL issues, hyperextension, hip dysplasia, and elbow dysplasia.

And remember, altering hormones causes shedding (ask any woman who has had a hysterectomy; hair loss is a side effect).

If you’re interested in finding out more about the effects of spaying or neutering on your dog’s health, check out the many research articles available online.

And here’s a great video to watch on this subject. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enPCZA1WFKY>

Help! My Dog Is in Heat!

Female dogs go through their first heat cycle when they’re between nine and fourteen months old, on average. Just like people, not every dog is the same, nor on the same cycle. She will consequently come into heat every six months (again, on average) after that. I recommend waiting to spay your female dog until she is at least eighteen to twenty-four months old. This means you should be prepared to go through, likely, two heat cycles with her.

I promise you—it will not be the end of the world.

The outer signs of a dog in heat consist of swelling of the vulva and a vaginal discharge (or spotting). She may become *super*-playful. Bright red blood is usually the sign of the early stages of a dog's heat cycle.

Here are some tips on surviving your girl's heat cycle:

- **Mark the calendar.** As soon as your female is showing signs of being in heat, mark it on your calendar. This is Day 1. The full cycle is approximately twenty-one days. Even if your dog does not bleed that whole time (as some taper off), exercise caution for the whole period. Roughly six to seven months after Day 1, you should expect the next heat cycle.
- **Maintain close supervision.** It's not as easy as you think to have an "oops" breeding. When your female is in heat, you simply need to be on top of supervision (hopefully you always are anyway!). If your yard is not fenced in, be sure you're outside when she is. If she needs a good walk, drive her to the nearest school track or enclosed park. Do not walk her there and back because you'll leave a scent trail back to your own yard. If that happens, every male dog in the neighborhood will come sniffing around. And of course, skip the dog park during these few weeks!
- **Mask her scent.** Liquid chlorophyll is a natural deodorizer. If you have a male dog in your house or next door (even neutered dogs may be drawn to her!), you can give her liquid chlorophyll to cover up her scent and help Fido simmer. Pour it right into her water. This also helps with bad breath! It literally deodorizes her entire body! (You can find this product on Amazon—I like the unflavored one—or you can find a product called Digestion Blend at www.essentialoils4pets.com that contains liquid chlorophyll.)
- **Make cleanup easier.** Female dogs do bleed during their heats, though it's not often heavy. You'll tend to see a spot here and there and usually after she's been lying down for a while. If your house is mostly tiled or hardwood floors, cleanup is much easier. If you have carpet, however, you may want to invest in puppy diapers to help save your floors. Shop for doggy panties on Amazon or at your local pet store.

Below is a picture of Libby (Paige x Hero) in her big girl panties.



So there you have it.

Everyone is always so nervous in the beginning to go through this with their girl, but afterward they always tell me it wasn't as bad as they thought it would be.

Please don't let your fear of taking care of a dog in heat influence your decision to spay at an earlier age than recommended.

Trust me, for the sake of your dog's overall health and development, it's *completely* worth it to put on your big girl panties and clean up a little mess.

Chapter 11

Feeding Your Dog a Healthy Diet

I've been involved in nutrition since 1991. I started out doing nutritional counseling for humans. Then, in 1992, I began to apply what I know about nutrients and diet to our canine counterparts. I immersed myself in books by holistic veterinarians and attended seminars about canine nutrition. With all of that information, I came up with a canine diet that I believe has worked tremendously well over the past twenty-four years. I've used the dogs in my kennel as my test group of sorts. Much of the research we have on human nutrition comes from the information we have on animals, after all.

Before veterinary medicine was available to the majority of Americans, farmers and those involved in animal husbandry used nutrition not only to keep their animals healthy, but to treat and prevent disease. And because they didn't have the means to use expensive pharmaceuticals, they had to learn how to use plants and herbs to keep their herds and pets at optimal health. And they succeeded.

I embrace Western medicine, but I also take into account all of the other disciplines available. If we don't consider them all, I believe we miss out on the many different methods available to help our pets thrive.

Recognizing the Need for Your Dog to Eat Well

Due to all of the dog food recalls in recent years and the slow degradation of ingredients, I felt that this chapter needed to be included in this book. After all, you invested in a well-bred dog, so you want him to have optimal health. When you feed the dog the best diet you can afford, you save yourself vet expenses and unnecessary treatments, surgeries, and pharmaceuticals that a kibble-fed dog will need; dogs who eat commercial kibble often experience kidney and liver failure and a weakened immune system. Most dog food manufacturers have cut out high-quality meat sources and added more soy, corn, corn meal, and many legumes that are not species appropriate. These ingredients can wreak havoc on your dog's hormones and thyroid. The GMOs (genetically modified organisms) in these ingredients can also do great damage to your pet's organs and body systems.



If you adopt a rescue dog, he may have eaten a subpar diet all of his life. You will want to begin to build up his immune system and resolve any allergies or skin or coat issues that may be plaguing the dog, especially if he has been a victim of neglect and malnutrition.

With the increase of ticks in the United States, Lyme disease has become an epidemic. Many who question the safety of the vaccine for this disease are still hesitant to use it. Yet almost 80 percent of the dogs tested for Lyme have the disease. I recently had a veterinarian do a Lyme test on all of the dogs in my kennel. He was shocked and surprised, as I was, at the minute percentage that tested positive. And of the four that did, two had such a mild case that the vet didn't even recommend the routine doxycycline treatment for them!

I can honestly say the various holistic methods I use have given my dogs' immune systems an advantage over most pets in the United States. Of that I am proud. And what I've learned, I long to share with others.

If I only told you how to find the perfect dog but not how to keep that dog in perfect health, I would be doing you a disservice. I've provided supplemental information in this chapter's endnotes if you'd like more information about canine nutrition.

Realizing the Benefits of Supplements

I've always been a little ahead of my time. Just as humans were discovering the benefits of vitamins and supplements in their diet, I came across a company by the name of NuVet Labs. I had found a supplement, formulated by a veterinarian, that was full of dietary nutrients based on herbs and plants. At the time, most Americans were unaware of how their pets' health could be improved. Details about how pet food was manufactured and what was in it was limited. Most people bought whatever brand of food had the coolest commercials. After all, that's pretty much all we had to go on back then.

But because I was keenly aware of the lack of information dog owners had about the nutritional content of dog food, I decided to recommend NuVet Canine Plus to my clients. I visited the company headquarters in California and met the owner and staff first. I didn't want to recommend anything that I had not thoroughly researched. I wanted to know what set this particular supplement apart from others on the market.

As soon as I began to give this easy-to-administer, chewable tablet to my dogs, I immediately noticed a few things: Their coats were shinier, they didn't shed as much (or not at all), and their immune systems improved.

If one of my dogs went out on the dog show circuit and the rest of the dogs that attended the same shows contracted kennel cough or some other respiratory sickness that tends to be prevalent at dog shows, my dogs would come home and cough for a day or two and then stop. And the illness never spread to the other dogs in my kennel. Some of my show dogs avoided it all together. So, from then on, I was sure each dog traveled with their NuVet.

I had another reason I wanted to make sure all of the dogs being adopted from my kennel had the best nutritional information possible. Because I provide such a generous health guarantee, I didn't want uneducated people taking my pups home, feeding them some food that was the equivalent of dog Twinkies, and then complaining that their dog had skin and coat issues (or allergies). Skin and coat issues are the first signs of poor nutrition or a lack of optimal ingredients in the food. Good nutrition results in a healthy coat and skin and an all-around healthy dog.

Later, we were asked by NuVet to design a breeder education program. I believe they still use some of the tips we gave them all those years ago. Thank you, Blake Kirschbaum, for your dedication to producing quality supplements for pets all these years and for carrying on the vision your dad had for your product.

Now as I travel to dog shows, I giggle at the number of NuVet bottles I see sitting on grooming tables and in other areas around the grounds. I guess everyone else caught on as well. To learn more: https://www.nuvetlabs.com/order_new2/nuvet-plus-wafers.asp

If you really want to make sure your puppy gets a healthy start to life, you can add a probiotic to pup's diet for four weeks. The probiotic will help boost her immune system. (I love the one available through Life's Abundance. You can simply empty the capsule onto the food. Life's Abundance food also includes a probiotic—the only one that is guaranteed “live” in the industry, which is one of the reasons I recommend this food. See the following section.)

Choosing the Right Food

After using NuVet Canine Plus for several months, I noticed my dogs' litters were bigger, the momma dogs had more milk, and my stud dogs' sperm count went up. NuVet had my *full* attention

As a result, I started researching all the premium dog foods on the market as well, thinking, “There must be a way to educate new dog owners about the proper food to feed their dogs.”

I did an Internet search, and two companies popped up that met my requirements. One I recommended for years, and the other one was fairly new at the time—Life's Abundance. Life's Abundance was new, so we chose the other company because it had been around longer. They have since closed, and when they did, we quickly searched to see if Life's Abundance was still around. It was!

Off we went to Florida to visit all the department heads; talk with Dr. Jane Bicks, the veterinarian who formulated the food; and grill them about every detail that I believed was necessary to know about a food I would feed my own dogs. And because people ask me just about every day what dog food I feed, I felt a *huge* responsibility to pass along good education and recommend a great food with a fabulous staff behind it (which now includes two staff veterinarians). Life's Abundance's food actually *exceeded* my expectations, and we made the change immediately.

Because changing a dog's food can cause a lot of GI distress (unlike in humans), I decided to do a “quick change” instead of mixing the two foods over a couple of weeks. So I fasted all of the dogs one day and began feeding the new food the next morning. They had a seamless transition—and lo and behold, there wasn't as much poop to pick up! (That told me their bodies were absorbing most of the nutrients.)

I've also tried Life's Abundance's treats and have been *so* impressed with the quality and pricing. Having bought raw/freeze-dried treats from a regional raw diet distributor for a time, I knew how expensive these could be, and I think Life's Abundance has the same premium quality, yet better pricing.

Considering a Raw Diet

My education on dog nutrition further developed as I began to read books by Dr. Ian Billinghurst, a world-renowned veterinarian from Australia who did decades of research feeding pets a raw/paleo diet. The first book of Dr. Billinghurst's I read was *Give Your Dog a Bone*. I absolutely gobbled it up. I read snippets of it to Jonathan as we traveled by car one summer, and so often we'd look at each other and say, “Wow! That makes so much sense. Why couldn't we have known this fifteen years ago?”

I then read Dr. Billinghurst's book *Grow Your Pup with Bones*, enjoying every paragraph on every page. I finally understood why so many dogs who'd won world records for long lifespan came from Australia or Europe. They'd learned to feed a species-appropriate diet long before we Americans caught on—and we'd missed out on so much.

I hired a woman who was willing to instruct and mentor me through feeding a raw diet. At first, I drove all over the Northeast gathering protein sources and spent hours and hours mixing and storing. I paid through the nose for a bunch of freezers.

After two years of that, it became exhausting. I realized that if I used the BARF World multi-mix patties, which were created based on Dr. Billinghurst's research, I'd be paying the same amount because I would be saving on all the travel expenses, time, and electric to run the freezers. Better yet, I don't have to mix it all. It comes premade in patties that look like large hamburgers. It's as easy to feed as a kibble diet.

Right now, I'm feeding a diet of Life's Abundance All Life Stages in the evening and raw diet in the morning. Half of the dogs' diets come from the kibble, and half comes from the multi-mix raw patties. I'd love to feed all raw, but with more than a dozen Labradors, it can get pretty pricey! Life's Abundance also provides breeder bags, which makes it much more cost-effective to feed it, along with the raw diet, to my entire kennel.

Being Water Aware

You know that all living things need water to live. But when it comes to adopting a puppy, not only do you have to make sure he gets enough water, you also have to make sure he doesn't have any ill effects when he begins drinking the water at his new home. Let me explain.

Dogs and puppies are more sensitive to water and food changes than we humans are.

So when a breeder tells you to gradually switch your puppy from the water at his original home to the water at his new home, *pay attention*. It's not that your water is bad. It's that your water is different. Puppies' bodies get used to the parasites, microbes, and minerals in one source of water; if you change the source of water suddenly, you will have a lot of runny poops. And if you're trying to crate train or housebreak, this can create a very messy and stinky situation.

Sometimes a change in water can lead to diarrhea. Puppies are *very* fragile, like babies, and can quickly get dehydrated if you don't address the diarrhea. I send home very clear details as to how to deal with this.

Serious consequences of dehydration

As an example of how serious diarrhea can be, let me tell you about a lady and her daughter and their puppy.

The owner calls and tells me their puppy died. Period. End of story. I'm flabbergasted.

So I called the vet and asked about the patient. The receptionist told me the owner has told them they are not allowed to disclose the puppy's health records.

All together now: *Hmmmm...*

Yeah, that got my curiosity and suspicion going.

Many nastygrams later (from the owner), I decide I have to involve my lawyer if I'm going to get the information I need. Of course, I'm upset, a bit angry, and very, very frustrated that I can't find out why one of my sweet babies *died*. I'm beside myself with worry.

My lawyer sent to the veterinarian outlining our need, under Pennsylvania's dog law, to review the records before I can refund any money or replace the dog.

I got a call from the vet a couple days later. She explains that the owner brought the dog in soon after it got home because it had some diarrhea. The owner went of town and left her teenage daughter in charge of the pup. For some reason, the girl never took the puppy back to the vet and told the vet later that she thought if she just "loved it and held it," the pup would get better. The pup died of severe dehydration while the mother was gone. I was so disgusted that I filed charges of neglect. I was absolutely *sick* over it.

So if you wonder why breeders take *so* much time educating you about your puppy and make you sign a sheet that says you will call us, or a vet, if your pup is throwing up or has the runs, *this* is why.

I also recall a medical doctor who took a little chocolate pup home. Even though I told him to feed only *bottled spring water* for the first ten days and slowly transfer the puppy to his water, he totally blew me off.

After the poor puppy suffered an intussusception (a condition in which the bowel folds over on itself) due to excessive diarrhea, he called me, furious about his sick pup. I asked him about the water the pup was given. He became very defensive as he told me that the "Culligan Man" told him that his water was "as good as spring water." Clearly it wasn't.

Moral of the story: *Always listen to your breeder!*

Treating diarrhea

Now you understand why I make sure everyone has bottled water when they pick up their pup. Don't risk your puppy's health by thinking you know better. Puppies can go down so fast.

If your pup does have trouble with switching from one type of water to another, he may get sick. Never allow your dog or puppy to vomit or have runny (watery) stool for more than twelve hours. If your pup vomits repeatedly or experiences diarrhea, administer some canned pumpkin (about 1/4 cup two times a day) and 1/8 to 1/4 teaspoon of the "pink stuff" (Pepto-Bismol) or Children's Imodium A-D.

Call your vet if this goes on more than twelve hours. The vet may do a stool sample to be sure the diarrhea isn't caused by worms, bacteria, or a parasite. Even though breeders worm their pups, pups can get re-infested easily because they don't exactly watch where they walk or what they put in their mouths. The vet may give you metronidazole if giardia is found or Ponazuril if coccidia is suspected. (For more on treating worms, bacteria, and parasites, flip to [Chapter 5](#).)

And no, if your puppy has any of the above, it doesn't mean the breeder is a puppy mill. It means that lots of dogs drink from puddles, play in the dirt, interact with other dogs, and sniff or lick anything that interests them while on a walk with you. All of these can be sources of worms, parasites, or bacteria.

Nutrition Resources

Life's Abundance: www.lifesabundance.com (use affiliate code # 20210230)

BARF World International: www.barfworld.com (use affiliate code # 1079)

NuVet Plus (Nuvet Canine Plus supplement): www.nuvet.com (use affiliate code # 58768)

Chapter 12

Meet the Labrador Retriever

When you're deciding what kind of dog to adopt, it's wise to research different breeds and their traits. After you know the basics of what you want—a big dog? one with lots of energy? a working dog?—you can rule out some breeds and focus on others.

Here I introduce you to the Labrador Retriever. I have bred Labs for more than thirty years, and I couldn't ask for a better dog for my family. If you're interested in adopting a Lab, read on. If you know that a Lab isn't for you, I wish you the best of luck in finding the perfect dog for your situation.

American or English? The History of the Labrador

Because so many people ask me, “What's the difference between the English and the American (field) Labs?”, I want to give you an explanation and some history. There is such a big difference in build as well as temperament that the AKC has, at times, considered splitting the breed.

If you are looking strictly for a dog for field trial competition, go for the American field dog. They are athletic, tall, lanky, and thin, but they can have *very* hyper, high-strung personalities; because of this, they are not always well suited to being an indoor family dog. (Not *every* American lab will be this way; I'm only talking in general.)

On the other hand, English Labs are very blocky, stocky, and shorter in build, but they should still maintain good movement and agility in the field. English Labs are sweet, quiet, mellow, lovely dogs. They retain their natural instinct to retrieve and use their noses, but English Labs are much more controllable in the field and will be your family companion after a day of hunting.

One of the reasons Endless Mt. Labradors stresses the all-purpose English Lab is because I strive to develop *all* of the best qualities of the Labrador. I do not sacrifice one trait in order to emphasize another. If anything, I focus on temperament because a dog can be beautiful in conformation and have a lovely pedigree, but if it does not pass my temperament test, it is out of my breeding criteria.

The Labrador was originally bred to be able to navigate and swim in the icy waters off of Newfoundland and off the shores of Labrador (a cliffside town). The dogs have a thick undercoat, which shields them from the extremes of cold and heat. Labs first appeared in English maritime towns that were engaged in the fishing industry.

Today, the Lab is the most popular breed in the United States because of its versatility, sporting ability, and its reputation as a loyal companion. Labs have few health problems if bred by a reputable breeder who is selective and screens for defects in their breeding stock.

Labs are also wonderfully maintenance free—no need for grooming, brushing, or trips to the doggie beauty salon. Just clip their nails occasionally (at least every other week) and give them a bath every two to three

months if they mainly live indoors. (Labs are non-oily dogs, seldom ever stinky, and rarely need bathing.) Do not over-bathe because it will cause flaking and may dull the coat.

Labs are very sensitive to food allergies, which may affect their coat and skin (raw sores may erupt if they are not fed the appropriate food; see [Chapter 11](#)). Feed only breeder-recommended foods and appropriate supplements. It will save you the headache and heartache of many trips to the vet for simple nutritional needs that specifically pertain to Labs.



How Large Is a Labrador?

While English labs are stocky and thick boned with a broad skull and muzzle, they are shorter legged and shorter bodied than their American counterparts, in general, which are taller and longer.



Males will be a bit bigger than females when full grown. The females range from 65 to 75 pounds on average, and males grow to be closer to 80 to 90 pounds. Some larger males may be 95 pounds at a filled-out weight, but more than 100 pounds is above standard. I never expect any of my Labradors to exceed 90 to 95 pounds.

It's critical to keep your dog at a lower weight, especially during those important first twenty-four months when the puppy's joints and growth plates are still developing. If a dog becomes overweight during this time, the excess weight can lead to arthritis and joint damage.

If you are wondering if your dog is at a good weight, contact the breeder and send them pictures. They know best how their bloodlines develop and grow, and can provide good input. And no, English labs are not "fat." Be sure you are not mistaking bone and substance for fat. You should be able to feel your dog's ribs but not see them. There should be no fat just above where the tail comes off the body, and your dog should have a waist if you look at him from above.

Many people contact me looking for a big male and mention their last dog weighed 100 pounds, 120 pounds, and even 175 pounds! These dogs could have been more of an American and English-blended Labrador or simply grossly obese. Or they could have been what I call the "old-style American Lab," which were bred until

the late 1980s or early 1990s. Traditionally, however, an English Labrador will not be over 95 pounds if it is conforming to the AKC breed standard (see [Appendix A](#)).

Sicily, weighing in at about 68 pounds at adulthood, is pictured below.



Another important thing to remember about size genetics is that the biggest puppy in the litter at eight weeks old does not the biggest dog in the litter make.

One advantage of not being *too* big is the dog's lifespan. A giant or larger breed dog tends to have a seven- to nine-year lifespan, whereas English labs live twelve to fifteen years, in general. If fed a raw diet like BARF, the dog should live another five years.

Ultimately, a Lab is a great option for someone who is worried about having a huge dog around the house but wants a canine with a big-dog temperament and personality—in other words, a big love mush. Technically, Labs are considered a medium-sized dog; a Great Dane or Newfoundland would be considered a large dog.

A great shot of Romeo is below, when he weighed 85 to 90 pounds.



I Hear All Chocolate Labs Are Hyper and All Yellow Labs Are Dumb and Blah, Blah...

I am surprised at how often I get asked this question: "Is one color better than another, temperament-wise?" Or someone says, "I hear all chocolates are hyper," or "My Uncle Barney says all yellows are mellow." Well, let's talk science instead of wives' tales.

It reminds me of the statement I heard once that "All large labs are calmer." Talk about bad science. It's not even logical. It's all genetics. I could show you more than fifty large (100-plus pounds) American field Labs that were the most hyper, most obnoxious dogs I ever made contact with.

Regarding color, it's like saying, "All blondes (human) are dumb, and all redheads have a bad temper." You can see the absurdity of that statement. It's *all* genetics. You can't even go from experience.

You probably have seen a lot of terribly hyper chocolate Labs, I have seen terribly hyper Labs—black, chocolate, *and* yellow. Remember, Labradors are the most popular dog in the United States, and everyone and their brother can breed a litter of Labs and sell them (with no regard to temperament, genetic soundness, or conformation). That results in irresponsibility in breeding, so you will see more poorly bred labs than any other breed. Chocolates, being the rarest in the breed, are more often bred for coat color alone, which is why you may see more poorly bred ones in your travels.

I breed for good temperament, proper conformation, and genetic soundness in *all* of my Labs, no matter what color. And concerning chocolates, I once had an AKC show judge tell one of my clients, “Don’t buy a chocolate from any breeder in the U.S. other than Endless Mt. Labradors or _____ Labradors.” Interesting... We both had, predominately, chocolates and blacks carrying chocolate in our kennels.

Oh, and I must address the pigment issue. All Labs should have *dark* pigment around their eyes, lips, and nose, not pink or liver colored. This most often occurs when someone breeds a yellow to chocolate (the first no-no in Lab breeding!). Or they breed a chocolate (carrying yellow) to another chocolate carrying yellow.

A Meeting Gone Wrong

The doorbell brings me to my senses, and I pull myself away from answering email on a Saturday morning. I often schedule kennel visits for people who don’t feel comfortable meeting me for the first time when picking up their puppy, but want to meet my dogs and me beforehand. (This is strangely rare; most of my clients do come sight unseen. They’ve met one of my dogs, researched Endless Mt. Labradors thoroughly and by elimination chose us, or received a reference from a veterinarian or friend.)

As I amble toward the front door, I briefly regret giving up my Saturday for this one kennel visit. The clients, to my disgust, have arrived more than two hours late.

Upon opening our seven-foot wooden front door, I see a couple, both dressed in light-wash jeans, black turtlenecks, black shoes, and matching leather jackets.

Definitely New Yorkers. They all come dressed exactly the same way. And if they wear glasses, they usually sport black-rimmed glasses as well. Why is that? I’ll have to ask a NYC resident sometime.

I invite them in, shake hands, and exchange names and pleasantries.

No apology for being late? Seriously? OK, that’s one strike against you because being late is one of my pet peeves. If you had called ahead or had an accident or something—no problem.

“Come right on in,” I say as I begin to walk through the house to my office where many of my ribbons, trophies, show pictures, and awards are displayed.

As we pause in my office, the gentleman asks, “How long have you been doing this?”

“About—”

Before I can utter another syllable, I’m interrupted by the woman, who asks, “So do you show your own dogs?” Their backs to me, they are now staring at a show picture of one my dogs.

“Well, I have a full-time show handler who—”

One of them cuts me off again. “Oh, look, it’s Romeo!”

“Yes, he’s—”

“Oh, and here’s Mackie!” The woman moves to another picture, having cut me off again. By this time, I’m not going to answer the next question and just see what they do.

I wait, my heart thumping at their rudeness. I’m sure if I were a red-faced angry person, I’d be crimson by now with smoke spewing out of my ears.

Come on and ask me the next question that you don’t REALLY want the answer to.

I’ve found that the only way to deal with absurdly rude people is by keeping my sense of humor. So when they ask the next question, I ignore them, turn, and walk into the next room, which is our puppy room.

I know, this is a stupid game, but—what fun! Humor keeps me sane.

Hurrying before they can say another word, I explain, “So this our puppy room where our puppies are born. It’s located right beside my office so I can check on them throughout the day and jump up at the slightest whimper or cry.”

I smile inwardly, reveling in how I’ve just dealt them a dose of their own rudeness.

I rush to the next room, the puppy playroom, which is downstairs beneath the puppy room. I listen to them trail behind, and I begin again. “And this is our puppy playroom, where you would meet your puppy if you picked him or her up.”

I purposely leave out the phrase “where you will meet” because they’ve already showed me they could not care less about what I have to say or what I think.

If there is an issue with a puppy someday, they probably won’t listen to a thing I say.

That’s a quick way to get on my shit list.

Before they can ask a question, I whisk them out the door to the kennel. I decide to conduct the shortest kennel visit ever. I chuckle inwardly as they trot behind me, trying to keep up with my very brisk pace.

We stride over the large back lawn, down the short lane toward the 4,000-square-foot kennel behind our home. I walk as fast as I can so I’m far out front, and I secretly hope they won’t make small talk or ask another question.

A few Labs bark out a short greeting, and I begin to talk to the dogs because it’s better than talking to Mr. and Mrs. I-Don’t-Give-A-Damn-What-You-Say.

As we round the corner to the first play area, the couple lean over, their backs to me, and stare directly into the eyes of the first dog they encounter. I wait for the bark and growl—staring into the eyes of a strange dog is a threat in doggie body language, especially if you do it silently without some sort of sing-songy greeting or petting.

“HRRUFF!” Mackie exclaims.

“This dog seems rather aggressive. Is he a mean dog?” one of them says.

Classic.

Are you kidding me?

My heart begins to pound again, and I say, “Please don’t stare at my dogs that way. They read that as a challenge, especially if you don’t talk to them.”

They move to the next Lab and proceed to do the same thing.

My eyes are about to pop out of my head, like one of those dolls you squeeze and their eyeballs bulge out.

They continue to stare and don’t look at me or acknowledge my correction.

I turn and walk back to the house, internally laughing at them as I realize they probably won’t notice I’ve left for quite a while because they are in their own world.

I walk into the house and Jonathan asks, “Where did they go? Did they leave already?”

I relay the events of the past fifteen minutes. He shakes his head and puts his hands on his hips. “No way!”

“Yep, they can just leave on their own. I’ll just watch to make sure they leave without stealing a dog on the way out.”

Jonathan storms out the back door and strides toward the kennel.

When I ask him later what he told them, he replies, “I informed them that they were not ready for a dog and that we would like them to leave immediately since they don’t seem to understand how to listen to the instructions of the breeder nor respect her enough to listen to her answers to their questions.” Having said that, he turned around and huffed back to the house, leaving them standing there to see themselves out.

He adds that the expressions on their faces were *priceless*. I wish I’d seen them.

We both laugh at the whole situation to this day. And when we have a couple show up with the black/denim thing going on, we silently look at each other with a knowing look. But luckily, that was the only time I’ve had to order someone to leave our property in the past thirty years. I hope I never have to do it again.

When you visit a kennel or breeder, do everything you can to make the meeting go well. Be on time. Be respectful. Have your questions prepared ahead of time. Show respect for the dogs. Greet them, pet them, and talk to them. Heck, pick up a ball and play a short game of fetch. It will put both of you at ease.

Chapter 13

Specific Health Conditions Found in Labrador Retrievers

This is one of the most difficult chapters to write because it's where I'm most vulnerable. I've been at this breeding stuff for three decades, and I've probably seen it all. Yet every time I think I've seen it all, I get a curveball.

One of my best traits—which can also be one of my worst—is being a people pleaser. I hate to let someone down. I've never become thick-skinned after all these years. I admire those who have the gift of letting things roll off their back. I just can't. But I'm getting better.

Breeders have feelings too—*gasp!* And I must tell you, I do everything humanly possible to reduce the likelihood of something going wrong with one of my puppies. I do more health testing than any other breeder I know. And I'm pickier about the results, too.

Certain genetic defects affect Labradors. Hip and elbow dysplasia run rampant. Retinal folds, cataracts, and retinal issues are also a problem. Exercise induced collapse (EIC) is rare, but it's in the breed. Before I even breed a dog, it has gone through \$2,000 to \$3,000 worth of genetic testing. And from those tests, I only take the highest possible score. I've learned through experience that if I settle for a “passed by the skin of its teeth” result, it will crop up later to bite me in the rear end.

Hip Dysplasia in Labradors

While dysplasia is not as prevalent in Labrador retrievers as it is in the giant breeds, such as Newfoundlands and Irish Wolfhounds, for example, Labs are still a larger breed that have the potential to develop this debilitating disease. The first one picture shows a dog with excellent hips.



The second picture shows a dog with hip dysplasia.



Genetic factors for dysplasia

On one hand, there are certainly genetic factors when it comes to both hip and elbow dysplasia. If you search online for “What to ask a breeder before buying a Labrador puppy,” any good advice guide will tell you to ask if they screen their dogs using the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) guidelines for hips and elbows. All of the breeding dogs at Endless Mt. Labradors have clearances with the OFA before breeding, and everyone has an either a “Good” or “Excellent” rating. I don’t take the chance with a “Fair” rating.

Not only does it help to see the clearances for your puppy’s parents, but knowing that a breeder can show a history of OFA clearances through, at the very least, three generations can also put your mind at ease. If there is a family history of dysplasia in your dog’s lines, they will have a higher predisposition for the ailment.

An example of an OFA clearance certificate is shown below.

ORTHOPEDIC FOUNDATION FOR ANIMALS, INC.

ENDLESS MT'S SCOTLAND YARD
registration name

SR53264202
registration no.

LABRADOR RETRIEVER
breed

M
sex

YELLOW
color

11/15/2008
date of birth

050 304 040
tattoo/microchip/DNA profile

24
age at evaluation in months

1395727
application number

LR-190114E24M-VPI
O.F.A. NUMBER

12/1/2010
date of report

*This number issued with the right to correct or
revoke by the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals.*



A Not-For-Profit Organization

Based upon the radiograph submitted the consensus was that no evidence of hip dysplasia was recognized

The hip joint conformation was evaluated as: EXCELLENT

owner

DONNA L. STANLEY

G.G. Keller, D.V.M.

G.G. KELLER, D.V.M., M.S., DACVR
CHIEF OF VETERINARY SERVICES

www.offa.org

Environmental and lifestyle factors for dysplasia

In addition to the genetic influence, other factors come into play when dealing with hip dysplasia:

Exercise: The first is exercise. This doesn't mean you shouldn't exercise a pup. On the contrary, regular puppy play and natural exercise out in the yard or at the park is good for your pup. It promotes joint movement and strength building. However, you should limit your puppy's exercise until she is physically mature. This means you should not run or jump a puppy at a young age. From time to time, people ask me whether their new pup can be their running partner. Absolutely not. Anything more than a brisk walk down the street and back is probably too much for your puppy.

Forcing a puppy to exercise any more than she would normally do is generally a bad idea. Jumping to catch a Frisbee, jumping on the bed, and jumping off the bed (Argh!) are all high-impact actions for a developing puppy. Swimming is a great low-impact exercise for dogs of any age. In fact, it's highly encouraged! And generally, you won't have a problem getting a Lab in the water! If you are throwing a tennis ball for fifteen to twenty minutes as your dog lunges and turns repeatedly, that is too much exercise for a Lab under twenty-four months old. Jumping repeatedly into a pool is too much exercise. Think of how pups would play in the wild; a couple of runs in a circle, some tumbling on the ground with each other, a tug of war with a stick, then a rest.

Stairs: The general consensus is that daily stair use is not good for your Labby's joints, especially as a young puppy. If you can carry your pup up and down the stairs as opposed to them climbing the stairs, do it. Some people don't allow their Labs on the upstairs floor where their bedrooms are for this reason. You may be thinking, "But Rufus likes to cuddle with me at bedtime." Well, weigh your options: Cuddle with Rufus in your bed for only eight years potentially? Or cuddle with Rufus downstairs for more than ten years?

Do not allow your dog to do more than four to five steps to get outdoors. If you have a steep stairway to your backyard, take your pup out the front door. I cannot stress enough how important this is. Dogs put

approximately 70 percent of their weight on their front elbows as they go down steps. If you have them pounding down several flights of stairs several times a day, that's a sure-fire way to create elbow dysplasia in your dog. If you add an extra 10 to 15 pounds to that, you can almost bet on having a dog with severe elbow dysplasia, which can lead to lameness and early arthritis and possible surgery. Your responsibility, as the owner, is to properly manage your dog's health. Your actions are just as important as all the work your breeder does and health clearances she puts in place to reduce the chances of joint issues.

- **Injuries:** Obviously your goal is that your Lab never has any injuries. But realistically, on the off chance that your clumsy adolescent pup falls down the steps (another reason to be cautious of stairs) or takes a serious tumble somewhere else, any injury can affect him for the rest of his life.
- **Rapid growth:** Some studies have shown that puppies who grow too fast may have a higher risk of developing dysplasia. This is why I caution people on feeding super-high protein puppy foods for large-breed dogs because it can promote rapid growth. Another effect of this is panosteitis or, to put it simply, growing pains. This is why I recommend feeding an all-life stage food from Life's Abundance and keeping your Lab's weight on the low end.
- **Weight maintenance:** If your dog is overweight, she is putting more pressure on her bones and joints than is healthy for her. Maintaining a healthy weight is a good idea for your Lab's overall health. Look at what you are feeding your pup. So many commercial dog foods have ingredients and fillers that you wouldn't believe. If in doubt about the best food for your dog, talk with your breeder or read Chapter 11. My website (www.emlabradors.com) offers many blog entries to help you in this area.

HNPK: A Genetic Issue that Is Unsightly and Unpleasant for Your Lab

If you've never seen hereditary nasal parakeratosis (HNPK) before, it is quite startling. I had never seen it until a dog I had bought from a breeder friend (outside my breeding lines) started showing signs. His nose, pictured below, was constantly crusty with large, raised bumps.



As soon as I saw it, I refused to breed him because I suspected HNPCK. The condition has gotten progressively worse, and I have not found anything to cure it. I've since neutered him, and we will love him as a family pet, despite this genetic defect. The breeder was notified and has taken any dogs that are carriers out of her program.

HNPCK is an inherited skin disorder observed in Labrador Retrievers. The first symptoms appear between six months and one year of age and present as crusty scales on the nose pad. Painful fissures may also occur, leading to chronic irritation and inflammation of the nasal skin. Although the disease isn't life-threatening, it is persistent and requires continuous applications of moisturizers and antibiotics to the dog's nose to alleviate symptoms. There is no treatment and no cure.

In order for the disease to occur, a puppy must inherit two copies of the mutation, one from each parent. At Endless Mt. Labradors, I screen all of my breeding stock. I have not come up with a carrier yet, but if I do, I won't breed that dog to another carrier so as to avoid producing affected offspring.

Asking Breeders about Health Clearances

As show breeders have continued to breed for the ever coveted big ribbon, they often ignore *very* important health clearances that affect their dogs. When they ignore genetic conditions, show breeders spread these conditions further into the Labrador population. It's one of the many pet peeves I have with show breeders. They claim, "I don't breed for pets, so I don't need to do _____ health clearance." But after selecting their show picks from their litters, guess where the rest go? As *pets*. And why would you subject your pet to the pain or disease of a known genetic defect? Makes no sense to me.

Responsible breeders are now clearing for conditions such as HNPCK. If you don't see mentions of health clearances on a breeder's website, *ask!* I've listed many health conditions in this book so you will know what to ask about, can be well-informed, and will sound well educated when you talk to your prospective breeder. Because puppy mills, backyard breeders, and breeders of Labradoodles and Lab mixes don't generally spend

the money for expensive health clearances like HNPCK, you may adopt a dog carrying this grotesque disease. If the breeder is not clearing for it, don't get a pup from them! And don't buy one claiming you've "rescued" it! When people get a dog from a puppy mill, they cause puppy mills to proliferate. The puppy miller sold all of his pups, so he proceeds to breed again...and it goes on and on.

Dealing with Dishonest Clients

Even though breeders go to great lengths to clear their breeding stock and seek to have at least three to five generations of health clearances in their dogs' pedigrees, things can still go wrong. Dogs are not widgets—they are *living things*. And genetics are a strange monster. I always say, "If I could promise you nothing will ever go wrong, then I wouldn't need a health guarantee."

I don't have any witty stories here, only horror stories. I apologize. (See? There's my people-pleasing side coming out again.) The following story reveals how some people try to use genetic defects to their advantage. (I won't use names to protect the guilty.) My assistant calls from my office. "Donna, I just got an email you should see." Her voice sounds a bit strained, and my heart drops as I wonder what I'm about to discover.

"This client claims her dog has elbow dysplasia and wants her money back."

My first emotion is concern and worry. I physically feel sick. My heart rate begins to rise.

I enter the office, lean over the desk, and read the email. After finishing, I type a letter to the client communicating my concern and asking for the vet records.

I receive a response that includes phrases like, "I spent a lot for this dog so I would not have to deal with this! I thought you were a reputable breeder!" and many other unpleasant things I won't repeat.

I usually sit and pray and ask God what to do when I get *any* type of bad news.

Something nudges me to pick up the phone and call the veterinarian listed on the vet records that the client sent. Surprisingly, the receptionist puts me right through.

Imagine that!

A woman says, "Hello?"

"Yes, I'm calling regarding a patient of yours (I give the dog and owner's names) and would like to talk to you about the diagnosis."

"Sure, how can I help?"

I sink back into my living room sofa and summarize the email I received. Before I can finish, the vet cuts me off.

"W-Wait, they said what?"

"Elbow dysplasia," I repeat.

"Oh no, that dog fell off a bed and busted up its leg."

"You're *kidding* me?" I respond, unable to hide my disgust.

She's as surprised as I am. "Well, I examined that dog, and it was an injury. I think you're dealing with possible fraud. I'm very disappointed in my client!"

Hmmm... I thank her for her time and hang up. My heart is beating wildly now. I'm angry.

I immediately email the client. "Your vet says the dog fell off the bed." I then add a short lecture on how she lied to me and tried to use my health guarantee to pay for her vet bill.

I've since learned to always follow up with a phone call to the examining veterinarian. Lesson learned.

But can you believe this has happened to me quite a few times?

Clients like this one are the exception rather than the rule. But these situations make breeders a bit skeptical when we get phone calls or nasty emails, then find out a client has been trying to take advantage of us. It's sad to think that people can fake it so well through my long and exhaustive screening process, only to surprise me later with their deceitful actions. Trust me, I look for a red flag anywhere I can find it. Unfortunately, some people do horrible things. And I can't exactly do a psychological and criminal screening on each of my clients. How I wish I could!

I'd be a liar if I told you nothing ever went wrong with my pups. Although I'd say I have about a 99 percent success rate in the long-term health of my pups, I've had the occasional toxic crescendo of genes creep up now and again. Usually it happens when I go outside of my bloodlines, but it's also happened between Dog X and Dog Y who have every single health clearance and have produced wonderfully healthy pups in past litters. All of a sudden, the allele goes crazy-bad somewhere, and the dogs end up with cleft palettes, bites that are off, joint issues, or something like mega-esophagus, a rare yet deadly defect.

Because of this, I'm very cautious about the boys I breed my girls to, especially if I didn't breed the stud dog. I'm not just concerned about possible new health issues creeping into my kennel; I also fear the temperament not being what I'm looking for. So I rely on my wonderful show handler, Kathryn Mines, to assist me in these selections, especially if I have not personally met a boy I'm considering as a "date" for one of my girls.

Chapter 14

Dogs and Their People Make the Best Friends

I have had the absolute pleasure of meeting hundreds of people over the past thirty years whom I consider extended family. You can't imagine the joy that all of these people have brought to my life. Having been a breeder for so long, I can honestly say that, besides the dogs themselves, the relationships with the adoptive families are the best part of what I do.

When we travel, we try to stop and say hello to one of my grandbabies if their pet parents are in the area. We've stayed in their homes, had them to our house, enjoyed dinners with them, and kept in touch, made possible by the wonderful world of social media. If you've ever met a Labrador, you know they love every person they meet. I have a theory that Labrador people also tend to be very social and warm. But I'll further say that true dog people, in general, are a blast to be around.

A Bond Like No Other

I believe that many people have been drawn to canines because they've had traumatic experiences in their life, and they find that dogs are loyal, predictable, forgiving, and accepting. I happen to be one of those people, having grown up with a very abusive father. Although I wasn't allowed to have a pet growing up, I would go around to all the neighbors who had dogs and offer to pet sit or walk their dogs. Back then I never considered that someday people would charge for such a thing.

I shared my most intimate feelings with those precious animals and received kisses, hugs, and unconditional love from them. When I wasn't spending time with the neighbors' dogs, I was volunteering at the local horse stable, which provided a safe haven of horses—and horse people. Sitting in the hayloft was my favorite time of day. To this day, the smell of saddle leather and horse manure (yes, really!) conjures fond memories.

My mom always said, "You can have as many dogs as you want when you grow up and have your own place!" And that's exactly what I did. I've always had a rescue dog, and our lives have revolved around Labradors since the second year of our marriage.

In 2001, I began showing my dogs in conformation at AKC events, and since then, we've continued to be surrounded with wagging tails, dog kisses, and puppy breath. In 2008, we moved to our present location—102 acres of Lab Utopia—planned with our Labs in mind. Not only do I get to experience the company of these wonderful canines, but I also live on the top of a knoll in the Endless Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania. We can look out over thirty miles of rolling hills and mountain vistas, hike through the woods of hardwood and hemlock trees, and splash in the water of our serene Labrador Lake.

Relationships Matter

We've been lucky enough to have many of our adoptive families come back to Endless Mt. Labradors for a visit. It's as fun as having family or old friends over to chat and hang out. Many of these friendships have turned into lifelong relationships with second and third generations of families coming back to adopt their Endless Mt. Labrador. Some of these clients have become our investment manager, a business partner, or a partner in supporting pet rescues and charities all over the country.

I also try to maintain relationships with our puppy buyers so if a life circumstance makes it impossible for someone to keep a dog they adopted from me, I can help find the best possible new home for the dog. The interview process for the new owners is just as stringent as when the original owners first picked up their pup. This screening helps assure the surrendering owners that I will find a great home for their pet, and then I allow them a part in the re-homing process. Having this system in place also prevents my Labs from ending up in a rescue or shelter situation. Any reputable breeder will do this for their clients. If they don't, I'd wonder if they

truly care for the lifelong well-being of every single pup they produce. An accessible breeder can be a wonderful resource for new puppy owners. Their input and experience in the breed will be invaluable as you go through life with your new canine companion. Many times a simple email to your breeder can save you hundreds of dollars in vet fees simply because of their vast amount of knowledge and practical experience. So feel free to ask a potential breeder if you can contact them on a regular basis if needed. Look for one who fosters long-term relationships. Find out if they have a community of people who frequent their Facebook page or other social media platforms.

From Clients to Close Friends

After we dropped off our daughter for her first year of college, Jonathan and I had the wonderful experience of spending time with another set of parents who have two of our Labs; they had also just dropped off their first child for her first year of college. What a joy to spend time with two individuals who knew exactly how we felt. There were many unspoken words during those two days we spent in each other's company, but we all knew what those words were. We love you, Karen and Peter Marmaras.

Another dear friend began a Facebook page for his Endless Mt. Labrador (Moses: Dog with a Blog). Moses had a following of more than a thousand people within just months. I look forward to the video clips and photos of his antics. Last year we visited Moses and his "daddy" and gained another lifelong friend. Thank you, Randy Mills, for inspiring me with your incredible story of overcoming physical obstacles and your ever present positive attitude. You're awesome.

Bud and Alice Roberts, you have become so precious to us, not only because you have two of my grandkids, but because you donate so much of your time to rescues and shelters. Bud, your instinct for training and communicating with dogs is second to none. Alice, you are such a lovely person, and Bud is so lucky to get to travel all over the country with you as you give your time and money to dogs and adoptive families that need your expertise.

Boogie and Jill Yates, not only do we appreciate your help and input as veterinarians, but thank you for opening your home to Heath and allowing him to visit his "harem" here occasionally. Your friendship and your professional help have been priceless to us. And I'll never be able to call Heath by name without thinking of the adorable way your daughter said his name when she was little—"Heaf!" John and Lisa Konopka, the pictures you share of Timber are hilarious and amazing. Lisa, your creativity astounds me. Timber has to be one of the most photographed chocolate Labs ever! And your costumes are so creative. Thank you for being another member of our extended family. You guys are awesome! (And "Go Pens!")

The best clients are those who stay in touch on a regular basis or even weekly through social media. I never pressure anyone to do this, but I'm thrilled at how many do! I try to share every note we get from our EML family on the "Testimonials" page of our website (www.emlabradors.com). When I tried to print that page out one time, I realized it would be more than 150 pages long! What a great legacy of dogs, accomplishments, awards, families, and memories. I add each new letter and photo to that page as I can. I can't possibly thank all of you who are our extended family. But a huge *hug* and thanks go out to all of our Endless Mt. Labradors family and friends! You're the *best*!

Happy Memories

I must share one more story.

My phone rings late one Friday night.

I pick it up, and a young man's voice says, "Hello? Donna? It's so-and-so." (He says his name, which I can't recall.) "Hi! I'll be seeing you tomorrow, right?"

"Yes, but I have a favor to ask."

Curious, I say, "Sure, what is it?"

"Well, I'd like to propose to my girlfriend when we get the pup tomorrow."

“Really? That’s awesome! How do you plan to do that?” I respond.

“I was wondering if I could distract her while you tie the engagement ring around the pup’s neck when she’s not looking.”

“Oh, of course! Yes! Yes!” Although I have no idea how we’ll pull this off.

“Great! When we arrive, we’ll play with the litter. I’ll give you a strand of green ribbon and the ring when I come in.”

“I’m all in!” I exclaim, unable to hide how giddy I am at the idea.

I tell Jonathan the entire plan, and we wait anxiously for the next morning. And yes, the camera is ready to go.

When they finally arrive, the young man with blond hair and a buzz cut slips the ring and ribbon into my hand, and our adventure begins.

They proceed to play with the pups downstairs. All the while, I’m wondering how I’m going to get the ring around the pup’s neck after they choose which one is theirs. If she holds him like she won’t let him go, this will be challenge!

Jonathan and I whisper to each other, plotting our next move.

As they ascend the stairs into the kitchen, I offer to hold the pup while they do the paperwork at the kitchen table with Jonathan.

Brilliant!

I wander to my office at the back of the house and hastily loop the ribbon with the ring around the neck of this precious little yellow (white) male pup.

As I re-enter the kitchen, the young man gets down on his knee, gazing at his love—a beautiful brunette girl with gold-rimmed glasses. She looks at him suspiciously.

I hand him the pup as he’s kneeling, and he asks her to marry him. Of course she says yes!

She doesn’t see the ring right away, so after he’s finished, he points to it. She begins to sob, her hands covering her mouth. And yes, I treasure their photo, which hangs on my wall to this day.



I often wonder how that couple is doing. I hope and pray they are still together and have had many children. And, of course, I can't help but imagine their kids romping with a gentle, giant yellow Labrador. It doesn't get any better than that.

If that couple is reading this, please call me. I want to see pictures of you, your family, and the dog. And, of course, reminisce about that special day. Jonathan and I loved being co-conspirators. We'll never forget sharing that moment with you both.

Post Script

The Power of Love

Over the last thirty years, I've met hundreds of people, yet certain ones are ingrained in my memory forever. Let me share one of my most touching stories.

I open the door to a man in his late fifties or early sixties. I invite him in and pop downstairs to grab his puppy, then jog up the stairs to the main floor. As I hand him the pup, he envelops it in a gentle hug, the puppy's head leaning on his shoulder.

Huge tears well up in his eyes. He'd just lost his yellow Lab of fourteen years. He now embraced his new (and maybe last) canine companion.

Of course, tears begin to flow down my cheeks as I stand speechless, watching a grown man crumble in soft, joy-filled sobs. No doubt, a bit of his old buddy was reflected in those brown puppy eyes.

Tears flow yet again as I retell the story; the words on my computer screen blur.

And yes, I caught that magical moment on film. I had my old camera handy in the junk drawer in our kitchen, ready for each and every kid moment and dog moment.

These are the moments we live for, the moments that fan the flame in a breeder's heart. We have the privilege of observing the wonder of a new relationship. Each time a family enters our house, we say so long to another life that will bless a family as a lifetime companion, a babysitter to their children, a companion to a widowed man, a friend to an only child, a shoulder to cry on, and a belly to scratch. Priceless...I really do have the best job in the world.

Appendix A

AKC Official Standard for the Labrador Retriever

General Appearance: The Labrador Retriever is a strongly built, medium-sized, short-coupled dog possessing a sound, athletic, well-balanced conformation that enables it to function as a retrieving gun dog; the substance and soundness to hunt waterfowl or upland game for long hours under difficult conditions; the character and quality to win in the show ring; and the temperament to be a family companion. Physical features and mental characteristics should denote a dog bred to perform as an efficient retriever of game with a stable temperament suitable for a variety of pursuits beyond the hunting environment.

The most distinguishing characteristics of the Labrador Retriever are its short, dense, weather-resistant coat; an “otter” tail; a clean-cut head with broad back skull and moderate stop; powerful jaws; and its kind, friendly eyes, expressing character, intelligence, and good temperament.

Above all, a Labrador Retriever must be well balanced, enabling it to move in the show ring or work in the field with little or no effort. The typical Labrador possesses style and quality without over-refinement, and substance without lumber or cloddiness. The Labrador is bred primarily as a working gun dog; structure and soundness are of great importance.

Size, Proportion, and Substance: *Size:* The height at the withers for a dog is 22_ to 24_ inches; for a bitch is 21_ to 23_ inches. Any variance greater than one-half inch above or below these heights is a disqualification. Approximate weight of dogs and bitches in working condition: dogs 65 to 80 pounds; bitches 55 to 70 pounds. The minimum height ranges shall not apply to dogs or bitches under twelve months of age.

Proportion: Short-coupled; length from the point of the shoulder to the point of the rump is equal to or slightly longer than the distance from the withers to the ground. Distance from the elbow to the ground should be equal to one half of the height at the withers. The brisket should extend to the elbows, but not perceptibly deeper. The body must be of sufficient length to permit a straight, free, and efficient stride; but the dog should never appear low and long or tall and leggy in outline.

Substance: Substance and bone proportionate to the overall dog. Light, “weedy” individuals are definitely incorrect; equally objectionable are cloddy, lumbering specimens. Labrador Retrievers shall be shown in working condition well muscled and without excess fat.

Head: The skull should be wide and well developed but without exaggeration. The skull and foreface should be on parallel planes and of approximately equal length. There should be a moderate stop with the brow slightly pronounced so the skull is not in a straight line with the nose. The brow ridges aid in defining the stop. The head should be clean-cut and free from fleshy cheeks; the bony structure of the skull is chiseled beneath the eye with no prominence in the cheek. The skull may show some median line; the occipital bone is not conspicuous in mature dogs. Lips should not be squared off or pendulous, but fall away in a curve toward the throat. A wedge-shape head or a head long and narrow in muzzle and back skull is incorrect as are massive, cheeky heads. The jaws are powerful and free from snippiness; the muzzle is neither long and narrow nor short and stubby.

The nose should be wide and the nostrils well developed. The nose should be black on black or yellow dogs and brown on chocolates. Nose color fading to a lighter shade is not a fault. A thoroughly pink nose or one lacking in any pigment is a disqualification.

The teeth should be strong and regular with a scissors bite; the lower teeth just behind, but touching the inner side of the upper incisors. A level bite is acceptable, but not desirable. Undershot, overshot, or misaligned teeth are serious faults. Full dentition is preferred. Missing molars or premolars are serious faults.

The ears should hang moderately close to the head, set rather far back and somewhat low on the skull, slightly above eye level. Ears should not be large and heavy, but in proportion with the skull and reach to the inside of the eye when pulled forward.

Kind, friendly eyes imparting good temperament, intelligence, and alertness are a hallmark of the breed. They should be of medium size, set well apart, and neither protruding nor deep set. Eye color should be brown in black and yellow Labradors and brown or hazel in chocolates. Black or yellow eyes give a harsh expression and are undesirable. Small eyes, set close together, or round, prominent eyes are not typical of the breed. Eye rims are black in black and yellow Labradors and brown in chocolates. Eye rims without pigmentation are a disqualification.

Neck, Topline, and Body: The neck should be of proper length to allow the dog to retrieve game easily. It should be muscular and free from throatiness. The neck should rise strongly from the shoulders with a moderate arch. A short, thick neck or an “ewe” neck is incorrect.

The back is strong, and the topline is level from the withers to the croup when standing or moving. However, the loin should show evidence of flexibility for athletic endeavor.

The Labrador body should be short-coupled with good spring of ribs tapering to a moderately wide chest. The Labrador should not be narrow chested, giving the appearance of hollowness between the front legs, nor should it have a wide-spreading, bulldog-like front. Correct chest conformation will result in tapering between the front legs that allows unrestricted forelimb movement. Chest breadth that is either too wide or too narrow for efficient movement and stamina is incorrect. Slab-sided individuals are not typical of the breed; equally objectionable are rotund or barrel-chested specimens. The underline is almost straight with little or no tuck-up in mature animals. Loins should be short, wide, and strong, extending to well-developed, powerful hindquarters. When viewed from the side, the Labrador Retriever shows a well-developed, but not exaggerated forechest.

The tail is a distinguishing feature of the breed. It should be very thick at the base, gradually tapering toward the tip, of medium length, and extending no longer than to the hock. The tail should be free from feathering and clothed thickly all around with the Labrador’s short, dense coat, thus having that peculiar rounded appearance that has been described as the “otter” tail. The tail should follow the topline in repose or when in motion. It may be carried gaily but should not curl over the back. Extremely short tails or long, thin tails are serious faults. The tail completes the balance of the Labrador by giving it a flowing line from the top of the head to the tip of the tail. Docking or otherwise altering the length or natural carriage of the tail is a disqualification.

Forequarters: Forequarters should be muscular, well-coordinated, and balanced with the hindquarters.

The shoulders are well laid-back, long, and sloping, forming an angle with the upper arm of approximately 90 degrees that permits the dog to move his forelegs in an easy manner with strong forward reach. Ideally, the length of the shoulder blade should equal the length of the upper arm. Straight shoulder blades, short upper arms, or heavily muscled or loaded shoulders, all restricting free movement, are incorrect.

When viewed from the front, the front legs should be straight with good, strong bone. Too much bone is as undesirable as too little bone, and short-legged, heavy-boned individuals are not typical of the breed. Viewed from the side, the elbows should be directly under the withers, and the front legs should be perpendicular to the ground and well under the body. The elbows should be close to the ribs without looseness. Tied-in elbows or being “out at the elbows” interfere with free movement and are serious faults. Pasterns should be strong and short and should slope slightly from the perpendicular line of the leg.

Feet are strong and compact with well-arched toes and well-developed pads. Dew claws may be removed. Splayed feet, hare feet, knuckling over, or feet turning in or out are serious faults.

Hindquarters: The Labrador’s hindquarters are broad, muscular, and well developed from the hip to the hock with well-turned stifles and strong, short hocks. Viewed from the rear, the hind legs are straight and parallel. Viewed from the side, the angulation of the rear legs is in balance with the front. The hind legs are strongly boned, muscled with moderate angulation at the stifle, and powerful, clearly defined thighs. The stifle is strong,

and there is no slippage of the patellae while in motion or when standing. The hock joints are strong, well let down, and do not slip or hyperextend while in motion or when standing.

Angulation of both stifle and hock joint is such as to achieve the optimal balance of drive and traction. When standing, the rear toes are only slightly behind the point of the rump. Over-angulation produces a sloping topline not typical of the breed. Feet are strong and compact with well-arched toes and well-developed pads. Cowhocks, spread hocks, sickle hocks, and over-angulation are serious structural defects and are to be faulted.

Coat: The coat is a distinctive feature of the Labrador Retriever. It should be short, straight, and very dense, giving a fairly hard feeling to the hand. The Labrador should have a soft, weather-resistant undercoat that provides protection from water, cold, and all types of ground cover. A slight wave down the back is permissible. Woolly coats; soft, silky coats; and sparse, slick coats are not typical of the breed and should be severely penalized.

Color: The Labrador Retriever coat colors are black, yellow, and chocolate. Any other color or a combination of colors is a disqualification. A small white spot on the chest is permissible, but not desirable. White hairs from aging or scarring are not to be misinterpreted as brindling.

- Blacks are all black. A black with brindle markings or a black with tan markings is a disqualification.
- Yellows may range in color from fox-red to light cream with variations in shading on the ears, back, and underparts of the dog.
- Chocolates can vary in shade from light to dark chocolate. Chocolate with brindle or tan markings is a disqualification.

Movement: Movement of the Labrador Retriever should be free and effortless.

When watching a dog move toward oneself, there should be no sign of elbows out. Rather, the elbows should be held neatly to the body with the legs not too close together. Moving straight forward without pacing or weaving, the legs should form straight lines with all parts moving in the same plane.

Upon viewing the dog from the rear, one should have the impression that the hind legs move as nearly as possible in a parallel line with the front legs. The hocks should do their full share of the work, flexing well, giving the appearance of power and strength.

When viewed from the side, the shoulders should move freely and effortlessly, and the foreleg should reach forward close to the ground with extension. A short, choppy movement or high knee action indicates a straight shoulder; paddling indicates long, weak pasterns; and a short, stilted rear gait indicates a straight rear assembly; all are serious faults.

Movement faults interfering with performance, including weaving, side-winding, crossing over, high knee action, paddling, and short, choppy movement should be severely penalized.

Temperament: True Labrador Retriever temperament is as much a hallmark of the breed as the “otter” tail. The ideal disposition is one of a kindly, outgoing, tractable nature; eager to please and nonaggressive toward man or animal.

The Labrador has much that appeals to people; his gentle ways, intelligence, and adaptability make him an ideal dog. Aggressiveness toward humans or other animals or any evidence of shyness in an adult should be severely penalized.

Disqualifications:

1. Any deviation from the height prescribed in the Standard.
2. A thoroughly pink nose or one lacking in any pigment.
3. Eye rims without pigment.

4. Docking or otherwise altering the length or natural carriage of the tail.
5. Any other color or a combination of colors other than black, yellow, or chocolate as described in the Standard.

Appendix B

AKC Code of Sportsmanship

The sport of purebred dog competitive events dates prior to 1884, the year of the AKC's birth. Shared values of those involved in the sport include principles of sportsmanship. They are practiced in all sectors of our sport: conformation, performance, and companion. Many believe that these principles of sportsmanship are the prime reason why our sport has thrived for more than one hundred years. With the belief that it is useful to periodically articulate the fundamentals of our sport, this code is presented.

- _ Sportsmen respect the history, traditions, and integrity of the sport of purebred dogs.
- _ Sportsmen commit themselves to values of fair play, honesty, courtesy, and vigorous competition as well as winning and losing with grace.
- _ Sportsmen refuse to compromise their commitment and obligation to the sport of purebred dogs by injecting personal advantage or consideration into their decisions or behavior.
- _ The sportsman judge judges only on the merits of the dogs and considers no other factors.
- _ The sportsman judge or exhibitor accepts constructive criticism.
- _ The sportsman exhibitor declines to enter or exhibit under a judge where it might reasonably appear that the judge's placements could be based on something other than the merits of the dogs.
- _ Sportsman exhibitor refuses to compromise the impartiality of a judge.
- _ The sportsman respects the AKC bylaws, rules, regulations, and policies governing the sport of purebred dogs.
- _ Sportsmen find that vigorous competition and civility are not inconsistent and are able to appreciate the merit of their competition and the effort of competitors.
- _ Sportsmen welcome, encourage, and support newcomers to the sport.
- _ Sportsmen will deal fairly with all those who trade with them.
- _ Sportsmen are willing to share honest and open appraisals of both the strengths and weaknesses of their breeding stock.
- _ Sportsmen spurn any opportunity to take personal advantage of positions offered or bestowed upon them.
- _ Sportsmen always consider as paramount the welfare of their dog.
- _ Sportsmen refuse to embarrass the sport, the American Kennel Club, or themselves while taking part in the sport.