



# IT'S A DOG-EAT-DOG WORLD OUT THERE AND WE ARE WEARING MILK BONE UNDERWEAR

- "Norm, character on Cheers sitcom"

by Lisa Dubé Forman

On February 10, 2013, the American Kennel Club disseminated the "Get the Facts" email alert in response to a story by the *New York Times* titled, "Safety Concerns Stoke Criticism of Kennel Club" published February 9, 2013. This story was run just before the televising of the 137th Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show and many will agree with my supposition that this story did not happen by chance but rather by design. Perhaps it is another example of opportunistic journalism leading up to the most publicized presentation of our passionate pursuit, the hobby or, in some cases, business of purebred dogs in our country.

The article's premise and the *New York Times* fact checking initiative has been called into question by many. Interestingly, the real name of the story while perhaps revealing the editor's true intentions is run as, "Many Animal Lovers Now See American Kennel Club as an Outlier." This description of the article appears in the url search engine listings while being indexed by the search engine which, in turn, appears in the hyperlink appearing on the NYTimes website. I read through all the 375 comments appearing below the heartbreaking and sensationalized article and my mind is running the gamut of opinions which mostly are reactionary, impetuous statements. Nonetheless, many cherry-picked comments can be seen as protests and used as a tool in the animal rights activist's arsenal against purebred dog breeders but, importantly, aimed directly at the American Kennel Club (AKC).

While reading through the comments, what jumps out at me is a current of underlying hostility that many of these people have for purebred dogs. Yes, I mean our purebred dogs. On the outset, they seem to direct their animosity towards the AKC organization which many of them believe is a vile and immoral organization; but as I read between the lines, it seems their disgust is also for purebred dogs in general. They recount their horrible experiences in

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owning a purebred dog citing health problems and skeletal diseases with the sadly misguided majority agreeing that adopting a dog from a shelter is the solution. Now, we all know there are impostors and 'undercover plants' who will disguise their purposes and real intentions to subjugate and inflame the discussion. There were many comments posted from seemingly average citizens, 'John Q. Public' who expressed their opinions. There are opinions that I find deeply disturbing as they are a reflection on society's ability to rationalize, or a lack of rationale. In the three cited dog abuse cases the journalists reported on, the readers' comments reveal a profound, long entrenched anger directed at the AKC as the culprit. Interestingly, there were just a handful, if that, of comments about the persons responsible for the animal cruelty.

It is fascinating that human nature can be so illogical, almost warped. All the while people were compelled to post comments about the animal abuse focusing their energies on damning the AKC, they neglected the real culprits, the abusers. The animal abuser was the responsible party who obtained or bred a reported 161 Alaskan Malamutes and who starved them nearly to death and was charged with 91 counts of animal cruelty and neglect. Nary a comment was made by readers regarding the married couple who, in total, had a reported 100 dogs seized in horrible condition and were charged with animal cruelty in the second degree. They did not direct their hostility towards the people committing the atrocities. Instead, comment after comment vilified the AKC, conformation dog shows and purebred dog breeders with a few discussing the appearances of many of our breeds today as they cited the German Shepherd, English and French Bulldogs, and Pugs. Interestingly, the NY Times segregate the readers comments into three tabs and it defaults to highlighted 'NYT Picks' with other tabs for 'Readers Picks' and 'All' comments. The alarming issue is that the consensus amongst the Readers appears to be a demand for more legislation over themselves and their neighbors, rather than accepting the fact that individuals are responsible for their own actions.

My assessment of this article is sloppy journalism. There appears to be a ludicrous notion that purebred dog breeders and AKC should be held accountable for all animal abuse cases. A reader from Detroit submitting their online commentary echoed my thoughts. A car manufacturer cannot be held accountable if a consumer buys one of their cars and it is used in a crime. What if a specific model vehicle becomes popular with gangs, would all people who owned that model vehicle be required to dispose of their vehicle because a percentage are being used in crimes? What of the many highly publicized online dating companies and their services? Should they be held responsible if one or more subscribers of the hundreds of thousands or millions are found to be psychotic? Blaming all purebred dog breeders is similar to condemning all subscribers to an online dating service when one of these members is found to have murdered their date. What of the actions of foster parents who are found to have abused children in their care? Should all foster programs throughout the country be dismantled based on the actions of these evil people found guilty of abuse atrocities? What about child adoptions -- using the same argument -- should all pending adoptions across the na-

tion be either delayed or canceled based on documented cases of adoptive parent abuse? The readers speak of intentionally-bred deformed breeds declaring they should be banned. Should we also apply this mentality to middle age couples conceiving over the age of 40 because as a woman ages the risk of delivering a baby with Down Syndrome increases?

Returning to my assertion that responsibility lies with the people using the product or service, it is clear to me that this well-reasoned premise escapes almost all people. Even more disturbing and scary is the realization that these people vote! The point is that the American public is a malleable, propagandized population and, further, I do not believe the AKC is spending their marketing dollars wisely. They are not fighting fire with fire as I have written about previously in *The Canine Chronicle* March 2011 issue. By direct affiliation, we conscientious, reputable, purebred dog breeders suffer as a direct result of AKC's poor grades on performance in team offense and defense.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my article, the AKC prepared a reply and disseminated it amongst a vast number of people to counteract the volley of incomplete information in the portrayal of AKC. When I first read the New York Times article, I was surprised that AKC's Compliance Department employs just nine field agents or inspectors nationwide. From my research this number of nine is down from 2007 where there were 14 field staff traveling across the country conducting inspections. Another victim of austerity measures I assume, nonetheless, unwise in my opinion. This is a department that requires budgeting tenure and should not be subjected to the deleterious effects of economic cutbacks, especially not nowadays with Animal Rights Activists, HSUS, ASPCA, PETA and other like-minded organizations geared up and targeting the AKC and purebred dog breeders. Further, I am concerned with the wisdom of the AKC Communications Director declining to say how many inspections were conducted each year or how many of those were reported to law enforcement. Instead the Director added, "We are proactive in ferreting out animal abuse." This response is easily portrayed as a disconnect with reality and appears as a weak attempt at public relations spin. Public perception can make or break an organization. This interview was a lost public relations opportunity. Frankly, it should be seen as a foul because even a child can conclude that nine inspectors nationwide seems inconsequential and understaffed. Of course, one or more readers picked up on this and vocalized their disbelief at such a small number. By AKC's own data, there appears to be an average of 4,230 annual AKC inspections conducted since 2000. In 2007, the amended AKC Care and Conditions policy stipulates that breeders who register 4 to 6 litters annually with AKC will be randomly selected for inspection. Additionally, annual inspections of all breeders who register 25 or more litters, inspection of pet shops and distributors continue as protocol. As an added incentive for AKC breeders currently inspected who register 7 to 24 litters annually, AKC waives one 18-month inspection cycle for those who pass two consecutive AKC inspections. After the waiver, they will be placed back on an 18-month inspection schedule.

Nonetheless, the public perception is that AKC is not dedi-

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cating all its resources to uncovering AKC registered dog abuse circumstances and they certainly do not buy the spin that the organization is proactive in ferreting out animal abuse, especially when the journalist references court documents to the contrary which is discussed further on. Remarkably though, the public ignores the reality that the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) is responsible for enforcing the Animal Welfare Act, inspecting commercial kennels, uncovering and investigating animal abuse cases, of which it has, by almost all accounts, performed poorly or in many cases has failed miserably.

In his mass email correspondence which was an otherwise well-researched rebuttal, AKC Chairman Alan Kalter provides details omitted from the NYTimes article. However, his ancillary information does not seem proper under the circumstances.

He speaks out about the Williams case, in which the North Carolina couple had their dogs seized. First, the aforementioned article states that according to court documents, the Wilson County officials seized 28 of the Williams' dogs, a majority of them in "poor" condition, suffering from illnesses, injuries and living in "unhealthy conditions." A veterinarian told the court that the rescued dogs had ailments that ranged, "from serious to severe" and that, "most of the injuries appeared to be chronic, having been in existence for a substantial period of time." According to court documents, this was after the AKC had inspected the kennel several months prior citing the 34 giant breeds were in "acceptable condition," with only 2 of the 15 categories marked "needs improvement," for the construction of kennels and signs of "untreated, visible wounds." The AKC inspector found that the Williams kennel overall was, "in compliance with AKC's Care Conditions Policy," even though the dogs did not have access to daily exercise outside their cages and pens. Mr. Kalter's reply lacked sentimentality saying the, "article fails to mention that Mr. and Mrs. Williams were charged in July of 2012 with one count of cruelty, and that charge was subsequently dismissed in September of 2012, based on the judge's determination that the warrant that led to the illegal search of the Williams' home and seizure of their dogs and the filing of the single charge was invalid." In reality, the reason the Judge dismissed the charges was because the Sheriff's office had delayed executing the warrant for a reported 34 days, thereby executing an invalid search. The charges of abuse were dismissed on a technicality.

I am at a loss as to why the AKC did not take an opportunity to own this unfortunate misstep especially since court records documented the recent AKC inspection and rating of the premises. Since 2009, the Wilson County Sheriff's office had received complaints about the Williams' breeding operation and sick puppies as reported in other online news sources. Rather than acknowledge their misstep, thereby losing an opportunity to admit an oversight and express regret, the AKC rebuttal appears very anxious about avoiding further criticism involving this case. Instead, Mr. Kalter does not address the recent AKC kennel inspection but rushes to draw a parallel between the legality of this North Carolina seizure and another case involving Dan Christensen's kennel in Montana. He references the illegal seizure of Christensen's hunting dogs in which the kennel was "raided" by Sheriff's officials, Animal Control and reportedly the HSUS.

Later a judge ruled that the search warrant for this Montana property was obtained under false pretenses, therefore the raid itself was illegal. In this case, the court found that the animal control officer intentionally misled the issuing court by omitting material information in her affidavits and supplemental testimony. The omitted evidence was highly relevant in determining whether the animals were subject to abuse and neglect at the time of issuance of the warrant. Thereby the process determining probable cause for the raid and seizure of the 172 hunting dogs from this property was contaminated.

Not to be misunderstood, I am aware that there are illegal searches and seizures taking place nationwide and have researched the HSUS Animal Rescue Team's tactics raiding private property and liberating 'abused animals' while videotaping footage for fundraising purposes. Just like so many others, I am also keenly aware of the absurd ease of which supposed animal welfare representatives receive training and are deputized to participate in these raids when, in actuality, they have no more qualifications than do school age children. Having said that, 172 is a huge number of dogs to maintain, feed and exercise, just as 34 giant breeds are in the Williams case. This point leads us to the next animal abuse case cited in the NYTimes article that AKC controverts responsibility.

The Mike Chilinski animal abuse case concerning 161 Alaskan Malamutes was another property that had been previously inspected by an AKC Field Agent. AKC President Kalter shares omitted information from the NYTimes piece saying that over 200 marijuana plants were growing on this property at the time of the seizure, a vocation which likely led to the deterioration of Chilinski's kennel and his overall ability to care for his dogs in the two years between his last AKC inspection and the raid of this property. This may very well be, and according to my research in the *Independent Record Newspaper*, Chilinski told authorities he was facing financial hardships and had intended to become a medical marijuana caregiver and his license to do so had lapsed. The AKC Communications Director was quoted as saying Chilinski, who since has been convicted and sentenced to state and federal prison, was inspected in 2008 and 2009 and was found to be in compliance then with about 60 dogs in his kennel. The raid took place in mid-October 2011, because the Sheriff's office had complaints about the cleanliness of the operation dating back two years which was at one point the same period the kennel had been inspected by the AKC and was given an 'in compliance' review. Obviously, there is a marked difference of opinion and controversy between both parties as to the standards of acceptable compliance. This is similar to the stark contrast in opinion in the Williams case in North Carolina with the 34 large and giant breeds. Their kennel rated only two "needs improvements" by the AKC just two months before the raid and seizure of the Great Danes, Mastiffs, and Doberman Pinchers. Was this a case of hoarding and, if so, why wouldn't an experienced inspector recognize this?

I am curious about another possible oversight. Why wasn't Chilinski's kennel inspected for two years? According to the Care and Conditions Policy, for those AKC breeders registering 7 to 24 litters annually and who pass two consecutive AKC inspec-

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tions, AKC will waive one 18-month inspection cycle. After the waiver, they are supposed to be placed back on an 18-month inspection schedule. Even if Chilinski had received a waiver after his being found in compliance from the 2008 and 2009 inspections, he should have been inspected again by AKC at the 18 month mark. Mr. Kalter's states that Chilinski had not been inspected in the two years leading up to the HSUS raid on his property. There is the possibility that the convict stopped registering litters with the AKC, however that would be out of character for him since of his own volition, he was growing marijuana because he was facing financial hardships. We can logically deduce that he was previously profiting off the sales of registered AKC litters for many years and that he would continue doing so for added value and profit while growing illegal agriculture. Conjecture nonetheless, these and other incidents lead me to the sagacity of the Care and Conditions Policy.

Why are we handing out inspection waivers to large or high volume breeding kennels at all? Set aside our matter-of-fact talking points, one of those being the mere act of limiting the number of dogs that may be owned does not and will not automatically result in better dog owners. About inspecting these commercial operations, common sense prevails that the more dogs you have, the more work there is so why are we not inspecting these kennels on a maximum cycle of every 12 months instead of 18 months? Moreover, am I the only person who finds it both reasonable and humane that to win a public relations war without conceding, the AKC should amend their Care and Conditions policy and institute mandatory, cyclical inspections of AKC registered litters from high volume kennels every 6 months! Why and how much of a hardship is it for a high volume kennel to be inspected? This policy appears to be modeled after the USDA inspection process where they provide a laxer inspection cycle for those facilities who have been found in compliance. A reward of some sorts but again, why?

Large numbers of dogs require daily workers to administer regular and required nutrition, care and condition. Sadly, in a number of cases of high volume kennels, the reality is that there are no employees. That being the case, an owner cannot provide humane treatment for every dog, including an adequate and nutritious diet, clean water, clean living conditions, regular veterinary care, kind and responsive human companionship, exercise outside of their cages or pens, and training in appropriate behavior. It is simple arithmetic: to illustrate using the 161 Alaskan Malamutes, providing that there are no employees, one person managing such numbers working daily 16 hours straight -- without a break -- would result in each dog receiving 5.96 minutes of personal care and attention per day. Ergo adhering to the principles of validity, there appears to be an increased risk of adverse conditions and care with a high volume of dogs, therefore expedited inspections are in order. Having said this, it does not mean there are not law abiding, commercial, high volume breeders with acceptable care and conditions who will not protest frequent inspections.

The AKC needs to stage a successful coup brimming with good PR by getting in front of the problem and announcing that all AKC high volume kennels shall be inspected every 6 months.

If a commercial kennel declines then their AKC privileges are suspended or removed. On the outset a loss of revenue but looking more deeply, if such commercial operation is no longer associated with the AKC, the AKC still reaps benefits of untold goodwill and credible deniability from the warmongering animal rights activists. This NYTimes article had an impact because of the AKC's affiliation with these substandard breeders and their AKC registered dogs. It is open season on AKC demonstrated by the references to our organization no less than 42 times in the article's 2,144 word content. Amending the inspection protocols is an actionable policy with the benefits going a long way because as it stands now, it's a dog-eat-dog world out there and we are wearing Milk Bone underwear. What good is the high volume kennels registration monies if we and the AKC do not survive this war? Accept it or not, these extremists are not going away. Yes, we will fight them to the end but why don't we do so judiciously minimizing our casualties? As for the importance of registration revenue, I am very familiar with the topic as I researched the economic issue of already evaporating and continuous declines of annual dog registrations in *The Canine Chronicle* Annual 2012-2013 issue. I believe that another reason for the decline in overall registered dog numbers is because many high volume commercial kennels no longer place value in the AKC registration certificate. This is my theory and is not based on data, which is unattainable. However, I have noted a pervasive thread in the aforementioned comments posted on the NYTimes website. In general, readers comments reveal they have little regard for AKC certificates on their purebred dogs; at best they seem indifferent.

A modification of the inspection policy is a counteraction. It may reduce the force of intensified scrutiny and assault by HSUS. Accelerated inspections can neutralize much of the public hostility and diminish the layover between the "snapshots in time," a phrase AKC Communications Director Peterson used in her interview. But only if cyclical, six-month inspections meet rigorous standards and have teeth. If these are initiated, when the Animal Rescue Teams assails another commercial high-volume kennel liberating dogs from squalor and suffering, hopefully there will be no connection with AKC. The onus will lay with the USDA, and the animal rescue swat teams will not have video footage of AKC registered dogs.

The American Kennel Club's promotion of infallibility is not appropriate nor tenable nowadays and it must reevaluate this position. There are many unscrupulous individuals brokering dogs who are guilty of torturous abuse and neglect. However, we as a group cannot be held accountable for these criminals, and although unfair, indeed purebred dog breeders and the AKC are being held responsible. "He that lieth down with dogs shall rise up with fleas." In modern terms, "You should be cautious of the company you keep. Associating with those of low reputation may not only lower your own but also lead you astray by the faulty assumptions, premises and data of the unscrupulous."

It is time for action as our deepest values contradict one another and our AKC policies.