

Who Will Pay the Piper?

by Barbara Lee Williams

Every German Shepherd Dog, American and German, carries some undesirable genes, and some even carry deadly diseases in their genes. It is impossible to expect or demand perfection from anything, be it canine or human. That is true, but with the canines, breeders are controlling the breedings through their selections of mates, and as breeders they are obligated to exercise every precaution to prevent the introduction of deadly or debilitating diseases to their breed's gene pool.

When deadly genes are encountered in a breeding, responsible breeders must take every step required to stop those genes from passing on to future generations. Such genes should be announced as existing in a particular breeding to the fancy at large, so that everyone can take heed and control the spread of these undesirable and often dangerous genes.

In the whelping box, even when we do our homework (and study the pedigrees, often only barely scratching the surface) and indulge our fantasies of the expected progeny, full of the praises and recommendations of the Stud Dog owners who elaborate further with High praise from his previous litters, if such exist.

Or listen to the Breeder's glowing words of the close to perfect progeny of those Sires and Dams and Siblings, of the dam of our expected litter.

We embark upon this Grand Adventure, certain we can expect miraculously wonderful progeny and we have prepared for any and all emergencies or unexpected set-backs!

But we are what we are and that is all that we are, to paraphrase Popeye's famous statement: "I am what I am and that's all that I am."

What we truly and honestly and bare-bones are is just this: great dreamers and gamblers and deeply thoughtful and serious students and dilettantes and an entire mish mash of human beings, working to create the perfect purebred dog of our choice.

In this case, our choice is the German Shepherd Dog, which, like all intelligent life forms, is basically made up of an extremely complex genetic galaxy full of twists and surprises.

A few dedicated students understand the most basic genetic calculations based on Mendel's study. We can sometimes quote the most obvious of these, make some sense of them, and feel rather full of ourselves for our

knowledge. That same knowledge can often throw us incredibly amazing curves in the whelping box, giving rise to such comments as:

My stud dog has never produced that problem; it must be coming from your bitch.

Where in the devil did that come from?

Which one of the parents is responsible for that?

Call that stud dog owner and demand an explanation!!!

Our Champion Sweetie Pie never produced that problem before!

So...Enter the Dragon (aka the Human Owner quotient) the fragile, ever-vulnerable Human Ego seeks and demands immediate recognition and awards and adoration and absolution of any crimes or culpability, or responsibility.

What they really know exists genetically in their breeding stock or is produced by their past, present or future Mr. Wonderfuls, usually will never see the light of day, or be spoken or even whispered of, covered up as soon as it surfaces.

It will be hidden and protected forever in the deep recesses of their guilt and crimes against the Breed as they are excusing the terrible genetic whelping box revelation as a 'quirk,' a totally 'unknown presence' whose 'unknown' and heretofore 'non-existent plague,' has never before in the history of their breeding program been seen or



experienced.

Quickly now, circle the wagons. All of this excruciating damning information must be buried so deep that no one can misinterpret this 'quirk of nature' as a genetic defect produced by perfect Mr Wonderful or out of the bloodlines, of the 'Perfect Princess.'

So the humans involved have wiped their mind's slate clean of their remembrance of any serious defective diseases or conditions or problems in their own bloodlines, especially, those chronic conditions that are treated daily with medications and potions and special diets, and the surgically corrected and perfected ones.

They choose not to admit or consider, or dwell upon the problems, so 'ally-kazzam' the problems do not exist, and they shall flatly deny any existence of genetic health or conformation problems that have been surgically corrected, after all, they all have/throw faults.

By repeating that mantra over and over they have brain-

washed themselves into a very pleasant place and now their very wonderful stud dog can strut his hour upon the stage and bring glory to them as his breeder and/or owner; Miss Perfect Princess can be bred back into her seriously disease-compromised line, because, here comes that mantra again, 'After all, they all throw faults,' and in this line we get winners in every litter! So whatever it takes! That's what we'll do. Look at Mr. Wonderful!

They are so proud of him!

After all, look how beautiful he is!

Look how he moves, that is what counts!

By God they all throw faults!

Never mind that the faults this adored one throws result in death for some of his tragically affected progeny, sometimes the death being an agonizing one, or a long lingering painful one, robbing them of any kind of quality of a life filled with robust health and action, or perhaps an early euthanasia.

How many heartbroken Masters and mistresses of these highly touted adored progeny will never again give their hearts or pocketbooks to keep these beloved ones alive?

How many will be sacrificed at Mr. Wonderful Stud Dog's altar to get the champions from him? How many more will be whelped by Mrs. Perfect Princess, whose sire, dam and/or siblings were affected with severe diseases, resulting in death or euthanasia?

Their answer? All that it takes! How does this help the Breed exorcise these genetic disasters of ever-growing proportions and consequence? Simply stated: it doesn't.

Too many are all involved in the charade of paying lip service and professing undying love to their chosen breed. They exist inside the circled wagons and share lots of laughter and fun and socializing and after all, that is the purpose of this 'sport,' to provide pleasure and social interaction and fun with their peers.

Any one who dares question their methods and purpose is 'drummed out of the Corp' and banished to an isolated position.

When disaster strikes in one of their litters, all their accomplices bemoan the 'Fickle Finger of Fate' which has pointed in their direction.. Offering condolences as they plan another disastrous matingisastrous for the tragically affected whelps which will pay the painful and sometimes ghastly painful price.

After all, we are gamblers and we must take a gamble to produce these winners. If that's the price we must pay, with some affected littermates, so be it. We are not breeding pets, even though we quickly seek out pet homes for those who do not measure up to the show scene.

Or all the rejects are taken to the vet's with so many problems they must be euthanized. The breeder leaves these unfortunate victims with the vet and goes back to the ones who survive because of their beauty and promise of conformation and gait...the stars!

Then the ballyhoo really starts. The dead and dying ones are forgotten and blamed on fate as sad, but are quickly and conveniently put to rest. Unavoidable, because the breeder bred, knowing full well the risks, but gambled and took them anyway. 'After all, they all throw faults!'

Later on, with the surviving stars and winners being paraded in the show ring to the ooohs and ahhs of the ador-

ing crowd and swelling head and chests and egos of the breeders, all seems worth it to them.

Now these beautiful stars and winners will be bred, often very close breedings, setting in concrete the genetic dynamics and terrible diseases they carry.

Some of these stars will die young, as their genetic dragons overtake them. Some will survive and produce more genetic dragons.

So you may ask...

"Who will pay the piper?"

The answer, tragically, is the Breed pays the piper.

The Breed pays in its popularity, in its capacity to perform as beloved, healthy, robust, happy companions or as healthy, strong and willing working companions. It pays with the tears and sadness of those who have suffered as they lost the ones they had such high hopes for, and as they gravitate to other breeds or sports. The Breed struggles on, dragging behind a terrible weight of the load of genetic dragons it bears. And who is responsible? The breeders are responsible!

Next time you plan a breeding, look long and hard into the health and longevity and reproductivity of those you plan to mate. Give a serious thought to the first generation sires and dams and siblings and aunts and uncles of these partners. Stress the HEALTH and longevity, as seriously as you stress the conformation and movement of the pair.

Become a deadly gene dragon slayer. Work for your Breed, not against it! You know in your heart who will pay the piper. ■



REGIONAL CLUB CHALLENGE

The GSDCA Regional Club Challenge Program will run from August 1, 2005 through July 31, 2006. Deadline for all clubs to submit their forms and supporting documentation for points earned will be August 15, 2006. Any questions, email Kelly Knight at Hadderway@comcast.net.

Complete GSDCA Regional Club Challenge Guidelines and forms are available at www.gsdca.org, click on Regional Clubs from the Home Page