

## The Good People

May 1, 1989 by AKC Gazette Breed Columnist • Categories: Breed Columns

I am please to once again have Linda Bell as my guest columnist this month.

Though I had calmed down quite a bit by the time I sat down to write this article, I was still very angry and very upset. Organizing and rearranging my thoughts brought tears to my eyes again. But in the back of my mind, I kept thinking, "Thank God for the good people."

The morning mail had brought one of those fat, handwritten letters that is obviously a personal letter—a special treat for me. I hurried back to the house and ripped open the envelope. Eagerness turned to confusion and then disbelief as I began reading the first of six surprising pages. A puppy we had sold from our latest litter, just over three years ago, was in a new home!

Mandi had gone as a housedog (the only Norwich), to an excellent show home which had several larger, kenneled dogs. She lived a pampered life, confirmed through occasional phone calls and letters, as the adored companion of both the lady of the house and her teenage daughter. Word had come one day that the lady had been killed in an accident, but subsequent phone calls and letters assured me that Mandi was still very much wanted: she would remain as the daughter's companion. I was pleased one of "my" puppies would help fill the void in this teenager's life. Contact dwindled to my normal, once-a-year letter or phone call with puppy families; the latest letter from Mandi's family, though brief, implied that nothing had changed.

But here was this letter, stating that the teenager, for whatever the reason, had simply banished Mandi (and Mandi's adopted mixed breed friend) to a kennel out back, where life was drastically different. The letter-writer disclosed the details, including that she had been "given" Mandi on the condition that she take the mixed breed too, and keep them together.

My reactions whirled from disbelief to anger, to denial, to heartache for "my" puppy, and back to anger. "But we had a contract!" I wanted to scream. I was supposed to be informed before ownership changed hands. "Oh, my, what will we do with two more dogs?" Mentally I began making plans. "Poor Mandi," I wept. "I'm going to get you back. Who knows what this new home is like?" I wondered, but I figured I could probably guess.

But Mandi's sale contract was nowhere to be found. We had moved right after selling her and lost a few other things, too. Hunting for it provided only a good vent for my anger. By now I had read the letter for a third time, and I had to admit it sounded like Mandi had, indeed, found a pretty good home. Too good to be true, actually. Faint images of Black Beauty kept coming to mind. So I made a few phone calls, gathering information, and verified some facts. A new acquaintance with the same breed as Mandi's new owner checked with fellow breeders. Yes, one said, she knew the lady in question. "That puppy is a very lucky one. She's in excellent hands," was a portion of the message relayed back to me.

An hour-long phone call to Mandi's new owner was icing on the cake. We laughed about the delightful antics of this ambassador to the breed, and discussed the many differences between Mandi and the new owner's larger, working dogs. I cried, too, many tears: tears of sorrow for what Mandi

had gone through, and tears of joy for the excellent new home she had, by the grace of God, wriggled into.

So what's the moral of this story? Perhaps It is that nothing is ever certain, not even a puppy sold to the best show home, especially when there is a major upheaval in the family. Perhaps the moral is that one must be extra careful with contracts, both in their organization and filing, and in their design. A lawyer advised me that, without public notice of "right of first refusal" and other legal technicalities, the contract may not have held much weight in court. Further, once Mandi's original owner died, our contract would have been useless—even if I had been able to find it.

But maybe the best moral is this: the dog show game is still made up of some very good people—impartial and third party people who spend time and money to verify living conditions and the character of a new owner; and people like Mandi's new owner, who care enough to get involved. She could have said "No." She could have turned her back on two little dogs in need. But she took a chance, and gave of herself. Mandi's "rescue" thrilled me, delighted Mandi, and, I'm told, enriched and invigorated the world of Mandi's new owner. We were lucky. This time we all won. Thank God for the good people.

— L.B.

My thanks to Linda.

— Margareta Wood, AKC Gazette Breed Columnist

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