

CHIPS and DIPS

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Tekoah Terriers

Well, now that I have your attention, this is not about snack food! It's about microchips and the dips or low points in the prevailing system. It's about one breeder's perspective on taking responsibility for the little lives I bring into this world.

I have been involved in showing and breeding for about 15 years now and have always tried to do the right thing both for the dogs I produce, as well as those that are adopted from me. I have always sold my dogs with a contract, requiring spay/neuter for pet homes. I used to have all my own dogs tattooed w/ their AKC number, would show this to all prospective puppy buyers, and advise them to do the same with their dog.

Then a few years ago, I had my thinking altered by a dog named Levi. I have always participated in rescue, fostering when I am able, transporting dogs and referring good homes on a regular basis to our area's over worked, but well loved, Lou Swafford. One day I got a call from Lori Valentine in N.C. She said, "There is a dog coming into rescue and I think it might be one of yours."

Lori and Kathy have known me for years and know enough about me to know I would take back my own breeding without question. With further investigation, I found out whom I had sold the dog to and made arrangements to pick him up. I met the man I had sold Levi to in Va.Beach. The well educated, well paid man that went the extra mile to find a good dog from a good breeder. Nothing could have prepared me for what came out of that van.



Levi, barely recognizable as an Airedale, came slowly creeping from the van with head held low. Eyes revealed the agony of a lifetime, borne in his three short years. Levi was a three-year-old male Airedale and only weighed 40 pounds. He was **TOTALLY** emaciated. He had bald spots, open sores, fleas, mange, ticks, roundworms, tapeworms,

whipworms, coccidian, giardia, and ear infections. His toenails were little, tiny puppy toenails: Levi didn't have enough nutrition coming in to even grow a TOENAIL!! Most of his body was totally devoid of hair, having been ravaged from the outside by fleas, ticks and mange, from the inside by what my vet declared to be "every conceivable parasite that a living creature can have." What hair he had was fully matted to the skin.



People that know me and my own terrier temperament always ask what I said or did to the man that did this. I surprise them and myself, as I write this, by saying, I simply shook his hand, thanked him for giving me a chance to help Levi and walked away. I knew if I allowed even a portion of the storm to surface, I would have pummeled him into the asphalt and had to call Margo Dupre or Diana Fielder for that bail money we always joke about.

Instead, I gently helped Levi into my van and sobbed the whole way to my vet. I called the clinic on my way and they were ready for me. Both with medical care specialists and a box of Kleenex. After determining just how bad his condition was, my vet advised euthanasia. His hemoglobin was so low as to be life threatening, he was in end stage of malnutrition. The mange was demodectic, most likely due to his health being so deteriorated that his immune system was shot. She doubted he could handle being treated for all the parasites.

It's almost funny now, but I was sobbing so hysterically when I got there that one of the vet techs who has become my friend, immediately ushered me out the back door of the building. Somewhere in the midst of my tears, I had laid out a fleece before the Lord. I prayed for guidance and the wisdom to do the right thing. I had decided if he was heartworm positive, that would be my sign to put him down. Surely, he could never survive the treatment for that.

When I went back in and Meryl, my vet, told me he had every conceivable parasite that a living creature can have, she then laughed and added, except for heartworms. She said, 'I honestly think he's too anemic to support them!' As if to confirm my answer to prayer, I

began to notice something. In spite of the way he had been treated, in spite of his horrible condition, being so sick, in pain, every time the door would open and someone would come back into the treatment room, his head would lift, ever so slightly, his eyes brighten just a little and his tail would wag a slow, gentle greeting. Almost a question, really. Terri, the vet tech saw it too and decided the question was 'Are you the one that is going to help me?'

I sobbed some more, gave him a big hug (bugs be damned!) and told Meryl to treat him for internal parasites, frontline him for fleas and ticks but NOT to dip him. I was torn between overloading him with toxic treatments and knowing he was thoroughly depleted and still LOADED with parasites.

I picked him up three days later and began the 'restoration'. Levi became a full time job for me. He was so malnourished that he had to be fed six tiny meals a day. He also had to be bathed every single day with medicated shampoo, which needed to be rubbed into his sores until they bled. Even as I hurt him, he smiled into my eyes, wagged and kissed my hands. Feeding him tiny meals was the hardest part. He was SO hungry and SO happy to be getting food. I cried until I thought I couldn't cry any more. Then came the day that he finally only ate half of what was in the bowl. He walked away, thought about it, came back and repeated the process several times. Then I realized the problem and sobbed anew. He was too full to eat anymore, but couldn't bring himself to walk away from a dish with food in it, being unsure that he could count on another meal. Then I went upstairs, only to be pestered by my own dogs. In spite of full dishes, they were overdue their morning 'cookie' and let me know it. I cried with happiness this time and said 'Oh, you big brats! You have no idea.'

I could write a whole book about Levi. God's Hand was definitely in this one and an angel named Walter came just to see what Airedales were all about. His visit had been scheduled before Levi arrived and he came only days after I had Levi. When he saw him, he thought he was a Weimeraner, because he had been totally shaved down and was completely blue/gray in color due to the severity of his anemia and the deteriorated condition of his skin. Walter looked into Levi's eyes and it was all over. I actually tried to talk him out of it, assured him it would be months before I could even think about placing him. Walter visited with all my dogs, came back to Levi, looked into those eyes again, got tears of his own and said "I'll wait."

He visited Levi several times during the rehabilitation process. I have attached before and after pictures. Levi is now the shining star of his neighborhood and the light of Walter's life. Walter says walking him is difficult because he can't get 50 yds without a neighbor running out to give Levi a cookie. To this day, the reminders are still there. He stunned us by growing a gorgeous, rich-in-color coat, however his legs are crooked from malnutrition during puppyhood and his tail is just a stump, we assume chewed off in frustration from being chained to a tree, starvation or both. He gets very worried if Walter is out of his sight. He hates cats, which made me laugh and say "Hey! There IS an Airedale in there!" Walter describes him as his best friend. They are both so lucky.

Chapter TWO

I am the type of person that looks at a bad situation and tries to decide what changes can be made to keep this thing from happening again. I don't know how I can prevent selling a puppy to seemingly wonderful, well educated people that turn out to be monsters. What I did think about was how close Levi came to being turned into rescue and probably euthanized and had it not been for Lori and I knowing each other, I would never have known.

The plan I came up with was Home Again Microchips. From the time Levi arrived, I started microchipping every puppy that I bring into the world and registering them with Home Again, listing ME as the contact. I keep file cards on them all, so I can notify the owners if a dog has simply escaped or been lost. I have found this plan to be beneficial in ways I hadn't even counted on. First of all, it's a new screening tool. If people balk at having me listed as the contact 'on a dog they have paid good money for', I send them packing. Most respond positively and say I am the type of breeder they were told to look for. Secondly, since the puppy buyers know I'm listed as the contact, they keep me updated with address and phone number changes. The biggie is that I will be contacted if one of my dogs comes into rescue or is turned into a shelter.

This is where my plan actually fell through with one of the rescue clubs in Texas. Yes, this is going to be an admonishment of sorts, since I don't think it should ever have happened, but let me preface this by saying that the individuals involved are wonderful people with the best interests of the dogs at heart and both those involved, as well as fellow club members in their area have all followed up with me and vowed to make sure this type of thing never happens again. That's the thing about mistakes. As long as you learn from them and make positive changes, they were worth it.

I sold a puppy bitch to some people in Md. They were obligated by contract to have her spayed and provide me with written proof. When they didn't and I tried to contact them, they had moved, left no forwarding address, their phone was disconnected, even their email no longer worked.

Then I got a letter from CAR (Companion Animal Recovery) saying that the person that owned dog with chip # xxxxx wished to have my name removed as the primary contact. I quickly contacted them and wanted to know who had my dog, but CAR's stand was that it was confidential!!!! Not only that, but the regular mail letter I had received said if they didn't hear from me within thirty days, they would honor the request!!!!

WHAT????????? I paid for the chip, I put the chip in, I paid for the registration!! I was furious. After several phone calls and emails, I finally got someone at CAR to at least give the person making the request my phone number and ask them to call me to discuss the request.

When the call came in, it was a woman from Texas who had adopted the bitch from rescue there. Fortunately, it was a wonderful home and we immediately established a

good rapport. She said she so loved the bitch that the first thing she did was take her to the vet for a thorough exam, whereupon the vet scanned her and found the chip. On investigation with the rescue group involved, I found out she had the tag ON, indicating her chip when they got her!! I was furious! Their explanation was that it was chewed, rendering the actual number unreadable. They called CAR with what they thought the number said, but when that wasn't it, they dropped the matter. I couldn't believe it. I try so hard to be a responsible breeder, work so hard to support rescue and here I was thwarted in my efforts by rescue itself!!! They said they didn't have a scanner and didn't know what else to do.

As I said, the follow up both from the rescuers involved, like Sandi Folta and Ellana Livermore, as well as members from the local Airedale club, like Joyce Miller and Rebecca Preston, turned the whole thing into a positive experience.

So here is my plea. I still strongly advocate microchipping every puppy that comes into the world. For this to work, however, we need as many scanners out there as possible. In Virginia, all the shelters I am aware of either have one or have access to one through a vet. I don't know of a vet who would not be happy to scan a dog for free that is being rescued. The scanners themselves cost about \$200 but I think Schering-Plough will sometimes give them to rescue organizations, especially if they are going to buy chips and chip anything that comes in that isn't already done. As a breeder, I think it is my responsibility to both chip and have a scanner on hand. As a side note, it really impresses the puppy buyers when you scan their puppy and show them how it works. If you can't afford a scanner and the chips, I think you need to question the ethics of taking that puppy sale money.

This is hardly a perfect world, as recent world events have so painfully reminded us. The trick, I think, is to strive for the best we possibly can. I can't totally prevent myself from selling to someone that seems like something other than what they really are. I can't be certain I won't have another dog fall through the crack somewhere. I can, however, sleep peacefully at night knowing I am doing the best that I can to do the right thing.

Postscript

Levi was Walter's best friend, and he recently passed away from a brain tumor. God is so good. I had a litter in July and, for the life of me, I could NOT find the right home for that last male puppy. When Walter called me, he was sobbing, and he said "now that I have lived w/ Levi, I know I not only need another Airedale as soon as possible, but I need one of yours. Is there ANY chance you have puppies coming any time soon??" I just cried with him and told him of the male puppy in my yard even as we spoke. I asked if he could meet me at 3pm. He laughed through his tears and said he'd meet me at 3 AM, if that's what was required.

Walter was Levi's special savior. It will forever warm my heart that he got three such wonderful years after the first three from hell.

