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Elizabeth

The Power of Language

What's in a word? A lot of power for good or bad. When did being a breeder become a "bad" thing? When I first got into Shelties, my mentors proudly had a sign out front proclaiming _____ Kennels. They knew they sold (yes I said SOLD - not placed or adopted) quality show dogs and healthy pets. They were proud of their dogs and their hobby. I was so looking forward to the day when I could have a couple of acres out in the country and do the same. Now I feel cheated. I have a sign out front - in very small letters it says my kennel name but ONLY the name not the word "kennel". There's another sign nearby. It says "Posted - No trespassing" . Guess that's a sign of the times.

Friends tell me they don't have a "kennel". Their dogs are kept in "dog rooms" not kennel rooms. Others say "ALL my dogs are house dogs". When did keeping dogs in a kennel become a bad thing? When did keeping multiple dogs become bad? Several of our founders made a substantial part of their income from the sale of pet puppies. Now people hide their numbers and won't even tell other breeders exactly how many dogs they have. Others say "I only breed for myself". When did it become a hateful thing to breed a pet or two? Or even (horrors - gasp) make a profit from puppy sales? I know I am always proud when I sell a puppy to someone who will show it but that's not because I am ashamed that I may have produced a "pet quality" puppy but because I am proud that my pups are going to a home where they will be active mentally and physically in breed and performance rings. I am proud that someone who shows would want a puppy I produced. I am equally pleased and proud when I place a healthy pet with someone who will cherish and spoil it for a lifetime.

In the last twenty years, there has been a gradual mind change in our country. Part of it is simply that we are becoming a more urban/suburban country and far less rural. People don't grow up on farms working with animals on a daily basis. Pets have become the replacement for children for many upwardly mobile people who spoil them and treat them as "furbabies" and "furbabies". I cringe every time I hear those words - especially from a breeder. The pet industry is a multimillion dollar money machine with clothes, and soft crates and designer treats for pampered pooches. Celebrities use them as accessories. And the fact that they are ANIMALS is forgotten. No wonder people raise such a fuss when a dog "bites" someone. An animal did what animals do and most likely some where a human made a mistake with that animal either the owner in training it or the person who approached it. When I was a child it was drilled into us - NEVER approach a strange animal. Wonder how many kids get any training in that today? If you want to know the true facts on the "dog bite" epidemic in our country read "Dogs Bite But Balloons and Slippers Are More Dangerous" by Janis Bradley. You are more likely to get hit by lightning or slip and fall in a bathtub than you are to be killed by a dog attack. But people have forgotten they are animals. They think of their dogs as their "fur child" and they feel a sense of betrayal and rejection when they get bitten by their dog or it bites someone else.

The other part of this equation is far more insidious. The animal rights cult has grown and spread and is fast becoming part of our mainstream thinking. With them comes the use of words such as "puppymill". Every time I hear some breeder pointing at another breeder and calling them a puppymill I want to smack heads and take numbers. I don't feel a need to go into depth on this issue since Charlotte Clem McGowan has done a fabulous job covering the subject in her recent

article. I will simply say that in thirty four years in this breed, I have NEVER gone to visit a so-called "puppy mill" breeder in Shelties that actually turned out to be a "puppy mill". Sometimes they had more dogs than some people approved of and sometimes they didn't "keep" their dogs the way others think they should, but never have they turned out to be "puppy mills" such as the AR groups love to show on TV with the filthy wire cages and sad-eyed dogs wallowing in their own filth. In fact two breeders that someone called a "puppy mill" have ended up being among my best friends. Jealousy was the reason for those accusations. I have visited horrible breeding situations with rescue but never was it someone who was actually a Sheltie show breeder. Maybe I have just been lucky - or maybe it's not as common a situation as the AR groups would have us believe.

The Humane Society of the United States has just announced to the media that there are 900 puppy mills in the state of Virginia, many of them "unlicensed commercial kennels" and selling puppies through the Internet. You couldn't hide 900 unlicensed puppy mills in the entire state of Virginia. Most likely some of those "unlicensed and selling through Internet" breeders they are referring to are US - show breeders who keep our numbers down so we don't have to be licensed as commercial and have fancy websites to show off our dogs. The animal rights fanatics consider ANYONE who breeds even ONE litter to be a puppy mill. Their motto is "don't breed while others die" meaning the dogs put down in shelters. You can read Nathan Winograd's excellent new book "Redemption, The Myth of Pet Overpopulation" for a commonsense approach to this "problem" that the shelters and AR groups are using as a weapon to attack breeders.

Other word changes brought into common usage by the AR groups is that of "rescue" and "adoption" and "placement" and homevisits. It has become harder to take in a stray than to adopt a human child. I wonder how many people have gotten turned off by some of the attitudes found in the more radical "rescue" groups and gone away when they would have been an excellent home for an animal but didn't feel like being subjected to an inspection process that requires a life history before they can have a pet. I was refused an "adoption" on a cat a few years ago. The reason - I had intact dogs! What did they think - the dogs are going to breed the cat? Or I am a bad person because I have intact dogs that I show? This goes hand in hand with the move among the AR groups to change the language of the law from animal "owners" to animal "guardians". I am sure a lawyer could address this in far better detail than I but I do know that the word "guardian" has well established limits and definitions under current law. Do you really want some AR slanted animal control officer able to come into your home at anytime without a warrant and tell you that you can't remove dewclaws or write you a ticket because your dogs don't have water bowls in their crates 24/7? That could be our future if we become the "guardians" of our dogs instead of proud owners.

There comes a point where we have to start drawing lines in the sand and refusing to give in to the politically correct language that has infiltrated society from the far out AR groups who really don't seem to like animals all that much. Mostly they just seem to hate people. To Ingrid Newkirk of PeTA "A rat is a pig is a boy." To me "a dog is a dog is an animal". I am proud to say that I am a breeder of purebred Shetland Sheepdogs. Shakespeare said "that which we call a rose, by any other word would smell as sweet." And dog poop is still just as stinky.

I own dogs who live in a kennel and I am a breeder. And that's my final word.

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