

Dear Backyard Breeder --

I am writing this in a state of anger, frustration, and sadness. I think you will understand why as you read this letter.

About two years ago, you decided to breed a litter of Shelties. Your female wasn't really breeding quality, and you certainly didn't know enough about the breed, so perhaps it was greed, ignorance, or the desire to show the kids the highly overrated miracle of birth. You managed to find a male of equally undistinguished parentage, and the deal was consummated. Your female, who had previously been confined to the backyard because she was not housebroken and had absolutely no manners, must have felt like royalty when you allowed her to stay in the garage while she tended her puppies. The puppies received very little handling and only absolutely minimal vet care. After all, you had to make money on the litter. You started to panic when the pups were 6 weeks old, and prospective buyers were not exactly beating a path to your door. The price dropped to \$75, and the interview for prospective buyers consisted pretty much of "Did you bring cash?"

One lively, playful male was sold to a young couple with a toddler and another child on the way. Any responsible breeder would have known this was a bad placement and would have counseled the couple to wait until the kids were 4 or 5. Maybe you didn't know any better, or maybe you just didn't care, so you sold them the puppy. Things were okay for a very short time, but then the puppy, in his youthful exuberance, was knocking the toddler down, and the kid was becoming afraid of him. The parents, novice dog owners without a clue about training, banished the pup to the backyard. Unfortunately he was lonely and started barking and digging. They called you and offered to return him, but you said you didn't want him back and that you were getting out of dogs. (Thank goodness!) They ran an ad in the paper...free to good home, but they were pretty lenient on the interpretation of good home.

A young man took the puppy. He saw this free, AKC registered dog as a way to make extra money standing the dog at stud. I guess the income wasn't that great, or the guy spent it too quickly. The dog was hit by a car. The owner neglected to get veterinary care until 5 days later and only did so because the leg was all swollen, and the dog was in severe pain. When the vet told him how much the treatment would cost, the owner said to euthanize the dog. The vet thought the dog was too sweet to kill, so she called someone in rescue. This person paid for the treatment and took the dog home to heal. When the dog was healed and no adopters were forthcoming, she called me and I took the dog to foster.

He really liked living here. I taught him some basic manners, and he got to watch TV in the evenings. He liked playing with my dogs. When a good possibility of a home came along, I adopted him out. Things were fine for the first 2 days, but then he started to show unpredictable aggression, not to the adopters, but to guests or people they encountered when walking him. They reluctantly returned him to me. I did more socialization and then got another rescue person to take him for a week and see what kind of results he got. Same story. The dog was fine for a very short time and then began displaying unpredictable aggression. I took him back knowing that the only alternative now was to put him down. A dog with unpredictable aggression is just not a candidate for placement. We have so many more dogs looking for homes than there are homes available that resources cannot be spent on a dog with unsatisfactory temperament.

So, Back Yard Breeder, you produced this dog and then abandoned all responsibility for him. I took him to the vet yesterday. He knew something was wrong...probably because I was crying and my hands were shaking. I knew I had to do this, but I really liked this dog and hated that this was the way it would end. I held him in my arms as he drifted off. There is no more confusion and instability in his young life, and now he has playmates at the Rainbow Bridge. I know that for at least the time he lived here he was happy and well-cared for. I can't help thinking that if you had been more selective of buyers and if his owners had been more responsible and provided him with care and training, he wouldn't have had to die. Maybe it was genetic. Perhaps his parents had aggression problems, and you never considered that when you bred the litter. I don't know. I just know that I wish you could feel as bad as I do over this.

I suppose the irresponsible people who owned him along the way have to share the blame too. The young couple bought on impulse without doing any research into the breed. They didn't train him and then just gave him away when he became inconvenient. The young man who let him suffer before seeking vet care should never own another pet. But by and large, Back Yard Breeder, I blame you because you made a conscious decision to create life and then refused to take responsibility for what you had created.

Angrily yours,

A Rescue Worker