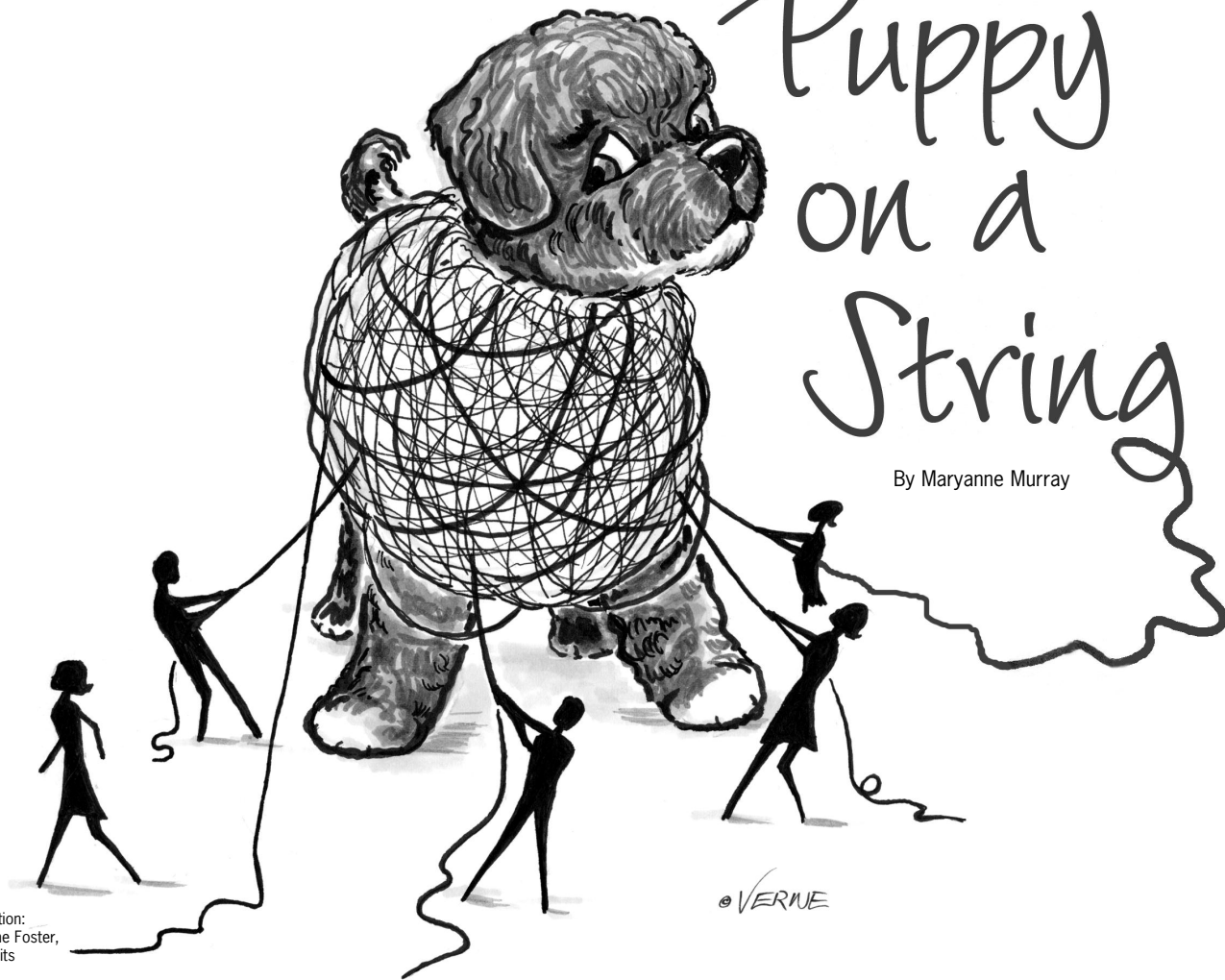


Puppy on a String

By Maryanne Murray

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Expect Strong Moral Tethers From A Good Breeder

Buying a Portuguese Water Dog puppy is so much more than just adding an adorable, cuddly new member to your family. While it's exciting and fun and lots of happy times, it's also a major responsibility. Owning a PWD puppy comes with strings! No, not the contractual kind or the kind you negotiated with your deposit but rather, as a more descriptive term, **heart strings**. Your heart strings! You have pledged yourself to providing a loving home for the lifetime of this living, sentient creature.

Your commitment to this new puppy, the ties that bind, should be sincere, long-lasting, solid and strong and straight from your heart.

Just as significant as your pledge of loving care for this new life is the basic moral obligation, the ties, yes, the **strings**, a good breeder will maintain with you as a part of their duty to see that the puppy is living a good life.

You may already have substantial contractual STRINGS with the breeder but the strings I refer to here are more like “tethers” – they keep you connected but not controlled.

Good breeders stay in contact with you and insist you keep in contact with them. A new puppy owner once told me about his breeder that “*I should have married her – she’s always on me!*” Well, that’s a breeder who is taking her moral obligation seriously. Being “tethered” to your breeder doesn’t need to be oppressive – lightly tethered with a hint of caring keeps everybody, especially the puppy, on the best path. If your breeder isn’t in touch with you but took and cashed your check, go figure!

“Puppy on a String” is a series of articles addressing things to consider when buying a puppy.

When your puppy's breeder decided to put the sire and dam together to produce this litter, he/she made a conscious determination to create living creatures who had needs for food, shelter and in this case, loving care, training, vaccinations, and everything else that goes with responsible dog ownership. Hopefully, their decision was the result of serious consideration and proper motivation. **Breeders are responsible for what they produce.**

Puppy buyers should expect caring and friendly contact from a breeder after they take their puppy home. Dedicated breeders always maintain a follow-up program and stay in touch with their puppy buyers. They ensure that the puppy, as a youngster and as it matures, has optimum emotional as well as physical care. These dedicated, responsible breeders are also prepared to take back or help to relocate at any age a dog of their breeding should the owners be incapable of keeping the animal. In fact, breeders should be available for consultation at any time and take an interest in each dog's welfare for its entire life. You're in it together! You're both tied to the dog! If your breeder only shows up when it's time to enforce a contractual obligation, be assured that you and your puppy are a means to an end..... an end with questionable gain.

Breeders are responsible for what they produce and breeders only produce what they want. If what they want involves your "down the road" contractual participation by producing puppies for them, then you have just become as morally obligated to the puppies produced as they are. Your dog produced the puppies – you agreed to it – you are responsible for those little lives. Get your "tether" out and keep track of the pups produced by your dog. Reflect on the connection you had with your breeder and figure that the puppies produced by your dog will probably get the same treatment and most assuredly, the same contract! What will it be? Tethered or **STRUNG OUT?**

Moral obligation derives from our recognition of a shared existence, a shared being with the rest of humanity. The

most grounded kind of human being there is, the one with the moral consciousness to lose any roots in ignorance, greed, selfishness, fear or intimidation, is the person you want as your breeder. The breeder who treats their puppy buyers as human beings and not just as a means to an end is the breeder you need to find.

BREEDERS – the way you interact with your puppy buyers tells the world who you are, what you stand for and what to expect when conducting business with you. Will you maintain a continuing "tethered" relationship or will you employ the heavy duty **STRINGS?**

Knowing what is right and what is wrong in specific dog breeding circumstances and having the integrity to do the right thing defines a breeder's moral consciousness.

***Keeping tabs on the puppies produced and being available to help puppy buyers is a big part of responsible breeding.
Your "tether" determines your dedication and commitment.***

Understanding and empathizing with your puppy buyers and their concerns reflects your sense of fairness. A moral and ethical obligation to be responsible for your puppies and to respect your puppy buyers depends on your basic view of life. If your life view is individualistic and egocentric, you are less likely to feel a moral obligation than someone who believes in the golden rule. Understand that your actions affect people in ways which can produce good or ill will and that the consequences will go "full circle"... we reap what we sow.

Maryanne B. Murray became a part of the world of Portuguese Water Dogs in 1979 when she got her first PWD, CH Tiezena Konstelada. "Brilha" was the 274th PWD born in the USA and became the 6th AKC CH in the breed in 1984, all major points, all owner handled. Maryanne breeds under the kennel name Brinmar, has been a PWDCA member since 1979 and has served the club in many capacities over the past 31 years, including a four-year term as President from 1990 - 1993, during which time the water trial program began and the first PWDCA National Specialty was held. She is currently Chairman of the Breed Standard Committee, Courier advisor and co-chair of the Heart Committee.

Top Ten questions to ask before you buy a Portuguese Water Dog Puppy:

1. **IS THIS THE RIGHT BREED FOR YOU?**
2. **HOW WELL WILL A PUPPY FIT INTO YOUR LIFESTYLE?**
3. **IS THIS A LONG TERM COMMITMENT YOU CAN AFFORD?**
4. **HAVE YOU SPOKEN WITH AT LEAST THREE BREEDERS?**
5. **IS YOUR DEPOSIT REFUNDABLE IF YOU DECIDE NOT TO GET THE PUPPY?**
6. **DO YOU WANT A FAMILY PET OR DO YOU WANT A DOG TO SHOW AND BREED?**
7. **HAVE YOU AND THE BREEDER DISCUSSED ALL OF THE HEALTH TESTING RECOMMENDED BY THE PWDCA?**
8. **DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE TEMPERAMENTS OF THE SIRE AND DAM ARE LIKE?**
9. **DO YOU HAVE A POSITIVE IMPRESSION OF THE BREEDER?**
10. **HOW HAVE THE PUPPIES BEEN RAISED AND HOW WELL DO THEY INTERACT WITH YOU?**

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TOP TEN QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU BUY A PORTUGUESE WATER DOG PUPPY

1. IS THIS THE RIGHT BREED FOR YOU?

Do you know about their health issues, temperament, activity level, grooming, mouthiness, training, intelligence and often stubborn nature? Do you know what a good specimen of the breed looks like?

2. HOW WELL WILL A PUPPY FIT INTO YOUR LIFESTYLE?

What will you do with the puppy if you work all day? Do you have a fenced yard or are you prepared to take the puppy outside on a leash in all kinds of weather? How will your children handle the puppy? Are you prepared to go through at least two years of wild and crazy puppy behavior and provide consistent training? Major lifestyle changes could be ahead for you to meet the demands of an active puppy.

3. IS THIS A LONG TERM COMMITMENT YOU CAN AFFORD?

Grooming, training, life long veterinary care, boarding when necessary, quality food and your time all have associated costs.

4. HAVE YOU SPOKEN WITH AT LEAST THREE BREEDERS?

Comparison shopping is the only way to go when making a major life purchase such as a house or car or, in this case, a family member. Different breeders have different prices, contracts, requirements, dogs, ways of raising puppies, and reasons for being a breeder. Find a breeder who meets your requirements.

5. IS YOUR DEPOSIT REFUNDABLE IF YOU DECIDE NOT TO GET THE PUPPY?

Sometimes, life happens and plans change. Know up front how your deposit will be handled should you not be able to get the puppy. Shop around – not all breeders have the same rules.

6. DO YOU WANT A FAMILY PET OR DO YOU WANT A DOG TO SHOW AND BREED?

Read and understand any contract you must sign in order to purchase the puppy. Some breeders may expect long term contractual promises, “STRINGS”, which could cost you and your dog down the road. Showing and breeding is not for everyone. Decide what you want before you start shopping and be assured you can get a good quality family pet as well as a good show/breed quality puppy.

7. HAVE YOU AND THE BREEDER DISCUSSED ALL OF THE HEALTH TESTING RECOMMENDED BY THE PWDCA?

Before you buy, make sure you know exactly what health tests the litter’s father (sire) and mother (dam) have had and how they will impact your puppy. The PWDCA has a recommended health testing policy for breeding animals. See:

<http://pwdca.org/resources/programs/breederreferral/BreederReferralAgreementForm.pdf>.

8. DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE TEMPERAMENTS OF THE SIRE AND DAM ARE LIKE?

You should be able to meet the parents to assess their temperaments. It’s not always possible to meet the sire as he may live a considerable distance away but you should ask for references and speak with others who have his offspring. Meet the dam, the mother, definitely.

9. DO YOU HAVE A POSITIVE IMPRESSION OF THE BREEDER?

The breeder needs to be a person you feel you can trust, go back to at anytime with questions and who has the best interests of your puppy and the breed at heart. The rapport you establish with him/her should last for the life of the puppy. If your gut tells you differently, reassess the purchase and rethink beginning a relationship with this person.

10. HOW HAVE THE PUPPIES BEEN RAISED AND HOW WELL DO THEY INTERACT WITH YOU?

A good breeder will make every effort to properly socialize a litter with people and children and the puppies will usually be the center of attention in the house. Kennel raised puppies may not get as much human interaction as they should. Good beginnings are important.