

A Brave Voice Against Puppy Mills

BY JOHN BALZAR



Ted Paul believes his dog, adopted from Oregon Senior Dog Rescue and afflicted with a condition that makes her tongue hang out, spent her first six years as a breeder in a puppy mill.

The Portland Oregonian described Ted Paul as an upstanding citizen and a lifetime dog fancier. Indeed, his love of pets and his local prominence were the reasons he recently found himself in the news.

You see, the Oregon businessman had traveled to the state Capitol and testified in support of legislation aimed at curbing breeding facilities that confine large numbers of animals in deplorable conditions.

But with his courageous stand for the humane treatment of dogs, Paul—who's been active in the dog show world for more than three decades—found himself under attack from local dog producers. He was called a traitor. He was accused of betrayal.

An apology was demanded. Protest letters were mailed. The blogosphere grew heated.

Huh? A dog lover who speaks out for dogs is called a turncoat by those who profess to also care about dogs?

Regrettably, the reaction is all too common. The nation's large-scale breeders have managed to dupe otherwise humane, sensible people into fighting legislation designed to help the very animals they cherish. The modest bills introduced in Oregon and more than 30 other states this year are aimed specifically at puppy mills, seeking to establish basic care standards and limit the number of breeding dogs in facilities that churn out animals en masse for sale to pet

stores and on the Internet.

Yet misinformation and scare tactics have led many good breeders to believe they are the targets of the legislation—a false notion that serves only to buoy an inhumane industry and silence more reasonable voices in the breeding community.

After his bravery put him in the midst of this firestorm, we caught up with Paul to get his perspective:

I was deeply saddened and somewhat surprised at the very sharp reaction from breeders I know in Oregon. Yet, as I look back, I recall seeing this type of reaction forming among dog breeders many years ago—as various pieces of legislation began

to surface around the country to curb excess breeding and puppy traffic. [The attitude] has contributed so much to the overpopulation of dogs in the United States, not to mention to the huge amount of euthanasia needed as a result.

My concern with the people who operate puppy mills is that they are callous, ruthless animal abusers who will breed any two animals they think will sell. They are in it only for the money, and in their greed they treat animals as a cash crop deserving of no favors, just torture.

Profit-driven puppy producers and their sympathizers resent—and, yes, fear—the likes of Ted Paul because of his credentials as both a humane advocate and a knowledgeable dog breeder and judge. Too often, puppy mill operators have been able to count on support from good breeders in defense of the idea of raising dogs for sale. But Paul and others are increasingly bucking that trend and speaking out:

I addressed the legislative committee [in support of the puppy mill bill] as past president of the Collie Club of America, past president of the Purebred Dog Breeders and Fanciers Association, past president of the Cleveland Collie Club, and an AKC dog judge.

I have raised many champions, including one of the top winning collies in the country. I have been the featured speaker at symposiums and banquets, and I have authored a book, The Christmas Collie.

[My wife] Beverly and I got our first purebred collie in 1960 and raised and showed collies for 30 years. Our objective was to improve the breed, and for a small hobby kennel, we did quite well. Our philosophy in showing dogs was to do it all ourselves: breeding them, raising them, grooming them, loving them, and handling them.

Ted Paul stands as a true champion of dogs who is willing to break ranks with other breeders to help stop abusive puppy mills. The HSUS advocates adoption from shelters and breed rescue groups as the first

choice for people seeking a pet, but we also see responsible breeders as a valid source of dogs. In the end, as Paul notes, they are not the problem:

Puppy mills are huge contributors to pet overpopulation. But don't overlook the thousands of uninformed people who feel they have to breed their pet. For every responsible breeder, there are hundreds of pet owners dumping unwanted puppies into the mix.

How do we stop this? Education, education, education.

Start in the school, use word of mouth, advertise, hold registration papers on pets until spay or neuter agreements are signed, and employ any other means necessary to end this indiscriminate backyard breeding.

I sincerely believe this problem will be brought under control, but this is where we

must all reach out and bridge the gap between us. It will take a joint effort between the AKC, The HSUS, responsible breeders, and legislators to apply the necessary controls against puppy mills and the implementation of spay/neuter laws to stop this animal carnage once and for all.

Responsible breeders will not be affected. The AKC will still register purebred dogs. Dog shows will still flourish. But this cruel overpopulation of dogs with so much resulting euthanasia will fade from the scene forever.

The Oregon bill was awaiting the governor's signature at press time. Lawmakers in the state join their counterparts in Virginia, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Washington in cracking down on inhumane mass breeding facilities.

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