

Please Don't Breed Annie

This classic letter was written many years ago by a shelter worker to a friend who was planning to breed her dog. It remains one of the most compelling arguments available for spaying and neutering.

Dear Mary,

This letter is about the dog and cat overpopulation problem in general, and the question of your breeding "Annie" in particular. If you don't want to read it, for heaven's sake, throw it out.

I've been taught to despise people who use shock tactics and hysteria to make points—that if you have *good* reasons for what you say and present your thoughts clearly, people will listen. I don't know. I'm a different person than I was six months ago, before I began working at the humane society, and this change *wasn't* brought about by log-

nie"? Baby animals are fun. Birth itself is so amazing, and being part of it is exciting. Since I was a little kid, I wanted to breed dogs for just that reason: to bring beautiful pups into the world and to raise them with love. Why not?

Dogs never become independent. They are dependent on people *all* of their lives—perpetual two-year-olds. So, if you cause a puppy to be born, you are responsible for him for the rest of his life—yes, *even* after you find the puppy the "perfect" home. In a year, those people may move into an apartment where they can't have pets. Will you take the pup back until a new, permanent home is found? Are you willing to check up and make *sure* your pups are getting regular vet care?

What about the people you have in mind for the pups? You think they'd be good dog owners. Well, you'd be surprised! You probably won't believe me. I've met some nice people in the past few months, people I was sure would give good homes to favorite animals. A few of these animals came back to the shelter. "He got too big." "He won't bark." "He sheds." "We're moving." "He chews." (Of course! He's left alone 12 hours a day.) "We can't houstrain him." (He's only ten weeks old.) "We want to travel." "It's too expensive."

Or the animals *don't* come back, and we hear they've been hit by cars, caught in traps, poisoned, or shot. What are you letting those pups in for?

Thousands of dogs and cats are born *every hour* in this country. Do you think they all find nice homes? Many millions are euthanized in shelters each year. *Where do they all come from?* The shelters don't breed them, either by carelessness or intent. And we have to euthanize the

majority of them. Many people, when they have a litter to dispose of, take them off somewhere and dump them. Do you think six-week-old pups crawl off to good homes?

What I am saying to you is this: If you bring puppies into the world, you are probably—not possibly, but *PROBABLY*—letting at least half of them in for lives of suffering, or lives which end painfully. Dogs aren't like people; bad times don't give them more character. The suffering caused by carelessness, ignorance, and abandonment is meaningless and eventually destroys the animal.

Are you still with me? I'm zonked. My anger's gone. I hope you know that I was only angry *because of the animals* I've loved and seen mistreated, or loved and had to kill. I don't *want* to tell you horror stories, but I'm full of them and in *every* case a PERSON was the cause of the pain; people beyond my reach, people who leave trails of pain—dead, mutilated, abandoned animals. I see around one thousand animals each month. Each is an individual. Each one that we can't place is a failure, a separate failure. Some are neurotic or sick and it is best to euthanize them. But the affectionate, playful black kitten who purred and looked into my eyes as he died; the pups who lick my face as I feel their bodies sag; the patient, loving dogs, the gracious cats—I wish *they* were the ones who could write this letter to you. But they can't.

So, we store up their pain and their love and speak for them—angrily, I'm afraid, which *they* never would. They would speak with love and trust and puzzlement at being at the shelter, and ask *why* they have no person to love and be loved by, which is all they want.

It doesn't seem like much to ask. Please don't breed Annie.

Love, Daphne



Illustration by James Bellora

ical arguments. It was brought about by experiences, a lot of them painful and some shocking. I don't want to hurt you, but if I'm to communicate my feelings, I'm going to *have* to tell you about some painful things.

Why shouldn't you breed "An-

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