

# **AKITA LORE**

## **A Primer**

by Sandi Soto, Sajo Akitas

## INTRODUCTION

This booklet is a funny serious attempt to get you through the new-owner jitters with your Akita. I enjoy writing, and I hope you will enjoy what I have written. But, please don't forget - this is mine! The growth of the Internet has made it possible for people to find all kinds of information, if only those who own it will make it available. I have had so many requests for information, as well as copies of my original booklet, that I recently decided to add this to my website. I don't mind who reads, prints, or shares the information. I only ask for proper attribution—that I be given credit for what I have created.

Much of what I have written is specific to my dogs, my contracts, and my beliefs, formed as a lifelong animal lover, a Veterinary Medical Technician, a Laboratory Animal Technician, a breeder, and an exhibitor. I spend countless hours sitting in the whelping box with each litter of puppies, and countless more hours planning, dreaming, and spending money! At one point, I hoped I could revise the booklet to make it more general, and turn it into coin to help pay for the dog food, stud fees, entry fees, and veterinary bills. Times change, and incomes along with them. While I can always find ways to spend more money, I no longer cringe when the bills come in. So, for anyone who is interested in my perspective, the particular and personal view from where I'm sitting at the big table of Akita people, here it is. Just remember, if you quote it or pass it on, don't forget to say where it came from.

Thanks for your understanding and cooperation!

Sincerely,  
Sandi Soto

## Chapter 1

### **TO DO, OR NOT TO DO**

(unless you've already done it!)

You are considering becoming, or have just become, owners of an Akita, and I want to be the first to welcome you to a strange and wonderful new world! Recognizing that anyone embarking on an adventure needs guidance, I'll attempt, through this booklet, to acquaint you with some of the experiences you're likely to encounter over the lifetime of your Akita. This adventure will be neither all good nor all bad, but preparation can make a world of difference in how you and your dog react to each day's happenings. So, welcome to the growing family of Akita people! Now, let's look at what that means.

First, the decision to purchase a dog of **any** breed should not be made lightly, or by a single member of the family. Animals are not human, and their needs, wants and instinctual behaviors can wreck havoc on a previously placid home. It is very important for each member of the family to realize that, upon moving into a new group, the *canis familiaris* looks on that group not as his family or owners, but as his pack, with all that that implies. If he is a puppy, he will attempt to appease those bigger and more powerful than he, while playing with and trying to dominate those closer to his size. It is critically important that you understand this behavior, as it will form the basis of your family's relationship with your dog, either successful, or unsuccessful.

#### **Welcome to the Wild Kingdom**

Let's look at what it means to be a canid. The domestic dog is, scientifically, *Canis familiaris*, as distinguished from *Canis lupus*, the wolf. Feral dogs, born from domestic strains but living free and not owned, do successfully mate with wolves, and produce fertile offspring. This is proof that, scientific theory aside, Mother Nature sees no difference between Fido and Fang! When you look down into your dog's liquid brown eyes, remember that he and nature both think he's a wolf, and raise him accordingly.

So what does all that mean? It means that you are his pack. It means that someone will be the leader of the pack, and if you don't want the job, then he'll be happy to fill out an application. It means that if you don't establish your unquestionable dominance very early, he will do all the natural, instinctual things he would do in the wild to find out where he falls in the pecking order of the pack.

Make absolutely no mistake about this - it is imperative for him to know his position in the pack, since that insures that he makes no fatal mistakes. If you don't show him that he is at the very bottom of the pecking order, that all human pack members regardless of size, age, or sex are positionally superior to him, then he will move right up the line, challenging each family member, until he finally wins the top spot, or loses to the truly dominant leader.

Unfortunately, his challenges are most likely to take the form of growling, threatening, or even biting. Allowing him to win means that you and your family follow his rules. This could take the form of no displays of affection between a man and his wife in front of the dog; it could mean that the parents are threatened for disciplining the children; it could mean something as simple as getting snarled at if a family member attempts to make him move from "his" place on the sofa. Losing late, on the other hand, means that he fits in somewhere between the top human and the others, and only those below him in rank are in danger. His winning may mean euthanasia, because people who wanted a pet should be able to enjoy it, not fear it. Losing early, at the very beginning of the relationship, is the best thing that could possibly happen to a dog. He's at the bottom, he knows he's at the bottom, and all he has to learn is what his jobs are in the pack structure! How much easier could life be?

## The Importance of Being the Boss

I realize I've probably made you wonder what in the world you want one of these wild animals for, but don't jump to conclusions. What I have described is along the lines of a "worst case scenario", and things are seldom that bad. More important, a few simple acts on your part can prevent the problems from ever starting! For instance, don't ever let your puppy or dog win in a test of wills. If you are trying to brush him, and he objects, tie him up, muzzle him if necessary, enlist the help of additional family members to keep him still, and brush! The same goes for nail trimming, bathing, etc. (In fact, the only time you should stop doing something because the dog objects is when you are actually hurting him, and you should be able to tell the difference.) This lesson is critical from the very beginning, and I have started it for you. Your puppy or dog has never won in his dealings with me; the first time he wins, he becomes aware of the fact that it is possible to win.

Let's digress for a while to the difference between humans and dogs. If you are in an unpleasant situation, you may feel it is possible to win, but you will hopefully look at the cost of victory. Will it mean the loss of a friend? Could it cost you your job? In a physical altercation, could you wind up injured? A dog, on the other hand, on finding himself in an unpleasant situation, doesn't weigh costs. If his experience tells him winning is possible, he will fight regardless of the dangers or the odds. If he never experiences that first win, he'll put progressively less effort into each fight, and before too long, he'll accept your leadership unquestioningly.

Will all this losing make your new dog into a wimp? Of course not! No one's ever heard of a wolf being a wimp, and yet the lower wolves in the pack order have lost repeatedly. Instead, he will channel his energy into whatever appears to be his "job" in the pack, and not waste it on hopeless bickering.

Again, before we switch gears, I want to make sure you understand what your dog is not. He is not human. He is not rational within the framework of human rationality. Even his most amazing acts are explainable within the realm of instinctive and learned behavior. While you have the sensibility to call him a "companion animal" if you so choose, he does not have the sensibility to reciprocate - you are a pack member of established rank, and he will interact with you based on your rank, his learning, his temperament, and his breed. He doesn't know what you do when you leave him alone to go to work. If you choose, you can sit down with him and explain where you go, and what it is you do daily. He still won't know. He doesn't know or care about the starving hoardes in Ethiopia. He doesn't know or care about the starving hoardes across town. Explaining it to him won't change that. His pack is the center of his world; his job is to protect his pack and its territory. He has no interest in books, magazines, television, or the stock market. Do all of you a favor, and accept him for what he is!

## Chapter 2

### The Big Decision

If you're still reading, I guess I haven't scared you off, so let's get on to the subject of decisions. The first one is whether to get a dog or not, and as I said earlier, the whole pack needs to be involved. It's best if everyone agrees, but it's not absolutely necessary in every situation. Parents may want a dog, while children who have never lived with one may be apprehensive. A husband or wife may be ambivalent, or even slightly against the idea, and wind up delighted with the animal. If any adult member of the household has strong opposition to the acquisition, it is probably doomed to fail. Assuming that first decision has been made in the positive, let's go on to what follows when the dog of choice is an Akita.

#### The Search Is On!

Akitas are bred and sold in every state, and in most countries. In some countries, there are now two breeds—the Japanese Akita and the Great Japanese Dog (formerly American Akita). To me, they are one breed, and the greatest difference is in color. There are other differences, but as the American Kennel Club approved Akita Club of America breed standard is currently written, both “versions” fit the written word.

You can find Akitas in the local paper, in dog publications, in pet shops, and at animal shelters. So where will you find the one dog that's right for you? Nowhere, if you actually believe there's a perfect dog out there waiting for you to take him home! Puppies are puppies, and Akita puppies are all adorable. The only clue you have to how a pup will turn out is found in its parents and other ancestors, and this includes temperament as well as physical appearance. Let's take a look at some of the sources I've mentioned.

#### How Much is That Doggy in the Window?

Pet shop pups are seldom accompanied by their parents. The majority are weaned early, sold, and shipped out in litter lots. The breeders don't put a lot of money into their litters, because they don't get a lot out of them. Many breeders of pet shop puppies breed dogs as a sideline to their major business, which is often farming or dairy cattle. The litters bring in extra money, and they are gone before they really mean much extra work. They are generally not socialized, are not fed high quality feed, and don't have a chance to learn much from their littermates. Pups which leave the mom and the litter too early don't learn that biting a littermate may cause retaliation. They don't learn to back off when the top dog (Mom, of course!) growls. They miss out on pack education!

Another major consideration, at least in my opinion, is price. While pet shop puppies bring in little money to the breeders, they mean big bucks to the pet shop proprietor. These pups, almost universally, carry grossly inflated price tags, yet they are (generally) of lower overall quality than the poorest quality pets in the litters of reputable breeders. The price tags can only be explained by the overhead of the seller. If you want to pay upwards of a thousand dollars for a cute ball of fluff, do yourself a favor and try to at least get a representative example of the breed from someone who is passionately concerned about that breed. For that kind of money, I'd at least like to be able to say that Fido's dad was International, Canadian, American Champion Multiple Best in Show Winning "Hi Steppin' Strutter", rather than "Jim's Big Bear" from somewhere in Kansas. For the kind of money most pet shops charge, that's the choice you have. Pet shops will try to convince you their guarantee is worth the extra money you'll pay for the reduction in quality. It's not.

## Throw-Away Dogs

Akitas in animal shelters are another tale entirely. They may be wonderful pups or dogs which wound up in bad circumstances. They may also be real bears. Their health status is generally totally unknown, as is their parentage. Akita Rescue Societies (ARS) rescue Akitas from animal shelters (as well as other situations). They evaluate rescue dogs, and attempt to place them in compatible homes. When necessary, they euthanize those they feel cannot be successfully placed. Unfortunately, our world has spawned a generation of people who throw-away what they don't want or need, rather than taking the responsibility of proper placement or euthanasia. Regardless of where you get a dog, it is your responsibility to make proper decisions on the fate of that dog. And incidentally, I HIGHLY recommend ARSA-FL, the Akita Rescue run by Dorie Sparkman in Jacksonville, Florida. At any rate, adult Akitas from animal shelters are sometimes best left to the experts; if there is any question about the dog's temperament, run, don't walk, out the nearest door.

## The Big Time!

Dog publications cater to the dog show trade. Dogs found here are generally thoughtfully bred, well cared for, and of good quality. Please keep the "generally" in mind. Reputations vary, as does quality, but those who exhibit their dogs, as a rule, are apt to breed to the standard (or at least their interpretation of it), and pay attention to temperament and health as well as appearance. If you want an Akita to show and breed, you will probably do extensive homework on pedigrees, type, and performance records, and may very well choose to buy from a breeder whose ad you saw in a dog publication. This can be an excellent choice, but you should insist on the same things you should insist on from a local breeder, i.e. a health guarantee, a reasonable return policy during the first week, and freedom from disqualifying faults under the breed standard.

## . . . and, the Home Front

Local newspaper advertisements can be a mixed bag. You can find the same breeder who has an ad in a dog publication, as well as the dreaded "backyard breeder". I've always done my breeding in the backyard, at least until we built a garage, so that's probably not what the term implies. Show enthusiasts may try to sell their pet puppies locally, and certainly wouldn't refuse to part with a show or breeding quality pup to a local buyer who was interested in showing/breeding. They offer you the opportunity to see a litter, and meet the dam (mother), and maybe the sire (father) too. It is a chance to watch the interactions between littermates, and to evaluate the temperament of the adult dogs on the premises. Even if you don't purchase a dog locally, it will make you more aware of questions to ask if purchasing long distance.

The other kind of breeder you may meet through local ads is the one who never planned the litter, and who doesn't know much, if anything, about Akitas, breed standards, showing, proper temperament, or how to raise a healthy, well socialized litter. He simply owns two Akitas, or has a neighbor or friend who owns one, and they "did what comes naturally". He may have splendid pets, and if the price is low enough, and he will guarantee the health for at least 5 days (long enough to get the pup checked out by a veterinarian), you may find a diamond in the rough; just don't bank on it happening.

## More Decisions

It must seem like I never stop! But, to "him" or to "her" can be crucial. Do you want a pet, and have no interest in showing or breeding? If so, then either sex should be equally acceptable, since pet puppies should be sold on spay/neuter contracts. Unfortunately, and for reasons I can't fathom, many human males have a great deal of difficulty neutering their male dogs. It is important

to realize that an intact male can father more puppies in one week than a female can produce in her entire lifetime! Sexual neutering simply produces a better pet, with less likelihood of wandering and less likelihood of health problems. It reduces fighting and aggressive behavior, but has little if any effect on protectiveness. If your dog is going to be a pet, just a pet, and nothing but a pet, decide before hand to have it neutered!

## Chapter 3

### Definitely NOT All About Akitas

I've gone to a lot of trouble to make sure you know what can go wrong with the human-animal bond you may have gotten yourself into. I'd like to go into that a little deeper, but temper it with the reasons my family and I surround ourselves with Akitas. Relax folks, it ain't all potholes an' poop!

Yes. Dogs dig holes. Dogs shred paper. Dogs steal laundry. Dogs water and fertilize. They bark. They collect fleas. On the other hand, they lick your face when you cry. They do funny things to make you laugh. They seem to know when you need an unjudgemental friend. In spite of the many things they do that irritate, on balance, they are one of the most pleasurable experiences known to mankind. Our Akitas are, simply put, fun. We know they laugh at themselves, and we're pretty sure they laugh at us too! Dogs supply unconditional love, one of the greatest needs we have. And if you accept your dog for what he is, make demands on him that convince him of his place in the pack, and teach him the rules he needs to follow to live in your family, then he will provide a great deal of pleasure for a great many years.

#### How Not to Have a Problem

Prevention is one of the greatest tools we have to work with in this life. When dealing with dogs, the old saw about an ounce of prevention should be always on your mind. A new dog or puppy can destroy carpeting, furniture, and peace. He can make your home smell like a zoo. The only creature that can do more damage is a small homo sapiens, and that's mainly because kids don't learn as fast. But there are solutions - at least for the dog. You'll have to deal with the kids without my help!

#### Logic and the Cave Dog

The simplest means of preventing your new dog from wrecking havoc on your home is the crate. I've heard every imaginable excuse for not using one, but the only reason I really buy is that the uninitiated think it's cruel to crate a dog, and that the dog must hate it. But really, there's nothing wrong with being uninformed, particularly when you have me to inform you! Dogs love dens. They are the civilized equivalent of the cave in nature. A den is for unwinding, snoozing, taking that special chewy bone, or escaping from the turmoil. Dens are not for punishment, and a dog put in his crate as punishment will never consider it his den.

Young pups and dogs should be put in the crate when they are tired, and given a treat when they are put in, so the whole thing seems like a reward. They should sleep in the crate at night. When young, a pup should be taken, in arms, directly from the crate to the potty, without passing play time. After all potty duties are completed, the pup should be played with, paid attention to, and loved. And when there's no one who can watch him, he should be put back in the crate with a treat, or his next meal. Soon, he will go there on his own, just to sack out. If, by chance, he has done something sinful, and you are chasing him down to administer justice, the dog who makes it safely to his crate is home free, and must not be dragged out except in capital cases.

Yes, he will object to the crate in the beginning. My theory is that if he calls me (by barking, howling, etc.), he'd better have a darned good reason. If he doesn't, then I bang food bowls together and scream about how he woke me, or whatever, till he wishes I'd leave. After a few repeats of this act, or four days (whichever comes first), he'll make the connection that his screaming causes yours, and it might be wise to quit! Congratulations! You have a crate-trained dog!

## Holey Socks and Other Glitches

Laundry causes problems. If you are one of the sunshine set, you need to know that dogs think flaggy things flapping in the wind were invented for them to play with. The best method I know of to convince them otherwise is voice lessons, followed by knot-tying lessons. For the first, practice saying "NO" in capital letters, in a menacing, Marlon Brando godfather voice. Then, with the dog accompanying you, hang out clothes, and each time he takes a swipe at a flapper, bark "NO" in your most commanding tone. Now go practice your knot tying, and when he pulls the clothes off the line anyway, tie vast quantities of them around his head, torso, tail, and any other accessible parts, while ranting at him continuously. Leave him embarrassingly dressed for as long as you can stand it, not to exceed one hour. Take pictures - they're great for parties, then undress him, while admonishing him sternly not to repeat his foolishness. Chances are, he'll never touch the laundry again.

Dogs do water and fertilize, but the normal Akita will do his business as far away from the house as the fence will let him. Akitas are catlike in their toilet habits, and really can't stand to walk through poo. In fact, Akitas are among the easiest dogs to housebreak. A word about sex. Take your female puppy outside, and she will piddle 16 times in three minutes. Just when you feel it's safe, and take her back in the house, she'll fool you, and piddle three more times on your carpet! That's nature, and that's par for the course with the little girls. Boys are easier in the beginning, but once old enough to overcome nature, the girls won't mark territory the way the boys do, inside or out. If you give your Akita enough chances to perform outside, he or she won't **have** to have accidents in the house; and being an Akita, I can already tell you that he'd prefer not to dirty the place he lives in.

You're way ahead on the barking problem just by having chosen an Akita. Ninety percent of them are not barkers in the normal sense, so when they bark, it's best to take notice. They won't waste their time barking at everyone who walks by - they bark at the ones who stop at your fence, who park at your gate, or who act suspiciously. Passing dogs seldom rate more than a grumble. Your neighbors will begin ignoring their own dogs, and listening for yours!

Fleas? Well, about all I can say on this subject is "Adam had'm." The flea problem in some parts of the country is so bad that even those who have no pets have flea-festation. That being true, you might as well have a pet and give the fleas something to chew on other than your legs! Seriously, talk to your vet, make up your mind whether you want chemical or natural pesticides, and follow professional and label directions on any product you use.

## For the Good Times . . .

Now, about those other things Akitas do. They are, in my vast experience, the smartest dogs going. They learn quickly, and are eager to please. To a point. If you bore them, they'll try to find a way to liven up the situation, and you'll either get mad or end up laughing at their antics and sense of humor! Training your Akita for obedience work is definitely **not** made easier by this fact. But don't you love a challenge?!

Akitas are about as subtle as a Mack Truck, and if he wants to be close, he'll lean on you - literally! He'll use his paws like a cat or a bear; many owners say their dogs box with their paws. They also hold their food, slap your leg, and paw at you for attention. If Akitas could have anything they wanted, I believe they'd ask for hands!

While many Akitas don't warm up to strangers quickly, your leadership can affect this with **most** of them. My own dogs generally sucker any and every visitor into scratching and petting them, as long as my husband and I seem to feel at ease with the stranger. Since they accept us as

leaders, they follow our lead, and cash in on the situation. A female who truly accepts and trusts her human leaders will even allow strangers to visit her very young puppies, since she knows that the pack leaders wouldn't allow any harm to come to the youngest members of the pack - i.e., if you say they're alright, they're alright until they prove otherwise!

Akitas establish strong bonds with those they like or love. My dogs recognize friends they haven't seen in two or three years. They adapt easily to friends who act as housesitters. I find that adult Akitas which have been properly socialized, and have accepted the lower positions in the pack (all dogs below all humans), will adapt readily to being placed in new homes. They are among the most adaptable of dogs, a fact which I found very surprising. Conversely, if you place them temporarily due to major changes in your life (a sabbatical to Europe, for instance), they will fit right in within a week or two; and when you come back six months later, they'll be just delighted to go back home and pick up life where you left off. They're also not likely to forget the hospitality of their temporary pack! The key to all of this, of course, is your early insistence that they follow your lead on all important matters.

Akitas are dignified, standoffish, intelligent, beautiful, cute, stupid, hilarious, clowns. They take great pleasure in amusing their people. They can curb their natural instinct to hunt, and guard the family cat with a passion. Most Akitas adore children. Some only adore their **own** pack's children, but proper socialization, coupled with your obvious stern disapproval, can insure that they are at worst tolerant of other children as well. My own belief is that Akitas are fully able to recognize, by body odor, the young of any species, and are able to learn that all young are to be treated one of two ways -acceptance or avoidance. An Akita that is a bully, picking on the weaker members of society (i.e., children), is, in my opinion, temperamentally unsound. Our dogs love to be around most children, but if they show me in some way that a particular child annoys them, I give them permission to leave, and I make it impossible for that child to annoy them further. No dog should have to put up with torment and abuse from children; and no dog should turn to violence when there is a way out of the situation. **Always give your Akita a way out! Your failure to do so could lead to a tragedy.** This is a big dog, and a tiny warning nip to him could be serious business to a child.

In summary, the normal, temperamentally sound Akita is gentle, kind, loving, and at the same time arrogant and discriminating. He is a pleasure to behold, and a comfort to have around!

## Chapter 4

### **Oh, Promise Me!**

A contract is a breeder's way of using small print against you, right? I sure hope not! Whether pet, show or breeding quality, any puppy or dog you buy from me comes equipped with a rather lengthy contract, and I'd like to explain why.

As a breeder/exhibitor, I am proud of my dogs. I have chosen certain dogs, bloodlines, and types for a reason, and I have a written plan of what I want to achieve with my breeding program. Each litter has a place in that plan, and each puppy is an important piece of the puzzle. To protect you, me, and that puzzle piece, we make promises...

#### **You Promise Me . . .**

You agree to provide veterinary care, proper housing, adequate feed for the various stages of growth and development, and adequate exercise. You further understand that your Akita should be kept under adequate control at all times, so that it does not become a nuisance or a menace to the general public. Akitas can and do become nuisances. A fence climbing, 100 lb. dog can terrorize the local populace, do a real job on trash cans, and use up many of the lives of neighborhood cats. When you take possession of your Akita, I can no longer control its ability to be a nuisance, so you agree that I will henceforth be held harmless and legally non-liable for any damages to persons or property which may be caused by the puppy's/dog's actions. Sounds fair to me, how about you? Additionally, you agree that if you fail to fulfill the terms of this contract, and I sue you, you are responsible for resulting legal fees. This is how I protect myself from irresponsible owners.

If you have purchased a show quality Akita, you agree that it will be trained for the show ring and a reasonable attempt will be made to achieve an AKC Championship. If you are unable to accomplish this, you agree to arrange for a qualified conformation trainer/handler to fulfill this obligation at your expense, **or** you contact your trusty breeder for assistance. If we can make the arrangements, I will train and show your Akita. You will pay all entry fees, and a negotiated portion of the expenses of showing the Akita, and we'll both be happy. In some instances where this looks like a real likelihood, I will retain co-ownership of the dog so that I can show in the Bred-by-Exhibitor Class. In other instances, I may retain co-ownership for other reasons, but those would be spelled out as terms of the contract. Mainly, I want you to understand that I have a vested interest in the future of this Akita. I am proud to have my kennel name on it, and I am concerned that it be trained, handled, and shown properly and humanely.

In all likelihood, your Akita will already be individually registered at the time of this purchase. I make it a practice to name all of my pups, so that I can keep track of them, and what litters they came from. If the dog is not individually named I will request that my kennel name, Sajo's, be placed at the front of the AKC registered name, and that the name you choose begin with a particular letter. All the pups in a litter have names beginning with the same letter. The good news is, you can call him anything you want, and he won't pay any more attention to you than he does to me!! (Just kidding, guys!)

You agree to have the Akita examined by a licensed veterinarian within 5 days of purchase, and to notify me of the results of the examination. Before you pick the puppy up, he will have been examined by my veterinarian, and if he finds a problem, you won't be picking the puppy up! This double check helps insure that you get what you pay for, i.e., a healthy, sound puppy.

## And I Promise You . . .

Your new Akita is guaranteed to be in good health and have all the necessary vaccinations for its age. Most breeders give their own vaccinations, and most use high quality vaccines from reputable sources. I will provide you with a separate record of all vaccinations, worming, etc. If your veterinarian declares the Akita unhealthy within 5 days of the date you took possession, and will provide a written statement of his findings, you may return the dog, and I will return the money you gave me. I will not return the money you paid to your veterinarian, or money paid for dog food, or anything else. If we both agree, I will instead replace the Akita with another of at least equal value, if one is available at that time; if you want a replacement, and I still want you to have one, but I have nothing available, we can agree that I will provide you with a replacement at a later date, but in any case within two years (unless you've been frantically searching for my particular bloodline of Akita for twelve years, this is probably not the way to go!) If I have bad vibes about the situation, I have the right to choose to give a refund rather than a replacement. After all, we're dealing with living things here, and if I truly don't think you'll work as Akita people, then I shouldn't have to let you take another one of my "kidlets". In every case, my liability will be limited to the original purchase price - dog food, veterinary care, training, etc. are entirely at the your expense.

## Hip Dysplasia & Other Monsters

As the breeder, I guarantee your show or breeding Akita against canine hip dysplasia (CHD) to the age of 5 years, provided that you submit radiographs to the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) on or before the Akita's third birthday. If your Akita fails OFA certification between the ages of two and three years, the AKC registration papers will be returned to me, and **either** the puppy will be replaced with one of equal value, **or, at my option**, a refund of the purchase price will be given. **Also at my option**, your dog [a] will be surgically neutered and be retained by you as a pet, or [b] will be euthanized, or [c] will be returned to me. Why do I insist on making these decisions, and in what circumstances would I make each? Let's get specific.

Suppose your dog is dysplastic, but he is certainly functional, has little or no pain, and you want to keep him as a pet. As long as convert his registration to "Limited" and have him neutered, we have a deal! And you don't want a replacement pup or dog for a couple of years? That's okay, too. But what if you want a replacement now, I have one available, but old Fido just won't tolerate an additional dog; do you have a friend who is wild about Fido, and who would provide the same excellent care you do? Return the papers to me, have Fido neutered, place Fido with the friend, and come pick up your new puppy, who incidentally comes with the same guarantee! Just make sure I'm in on all the decision making, or you have voided the contract. Woe is the person who places Fido with a friend, gives the papers along with the dog, doesn't have him surgically neutered, and Fido sires or produces a litter down the road. That was not our agreement, and can lead to real legal trouble.

In the next scenario, suppose Fido is in a lot of pain, and cannot be made comfortable. If he is returned to me, I replace him, and you don't have to make the hard decisions. In the event I (in consultation with one or more veterinarians who have examined Fido) feel that you are prolonging his suffering because of your inability to make a decision, I can apply the pressure of refusing to replace him unless you do relinquish him to me. In this circumstance, you would do well to remember that an invalid dog, unlike an invalid human, can't occupy his time reading, watching television, or listening to music. All he can do is suffer, and it's sometimes up to us to say "Uncle". Alternately, Fido could be in little or no pain, a perfect pet for someone I know, but unplaceable with anyone you know. If you can't or don't want to have him as well as the replacement, then I have the chance to place him. So, in a rather large nutshell, that's why I want a major hand in making these decisions. I do want you to know, though, that if you are making all the right moves, and keeping me informed, I'll obligingly keep my nose out of it.

## The Eyes Have It

I also guarantee your show or breeding quality Akita against Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA), a hereditary disease which causes blindness. Since a blind dog can function very well in familiar surroundings, it is seldom necessary to euthanize a dog with this problem. It is, however, absolutely essential that they not be bred, due to the hereditary nature of the problem. So, the same basic agreements apply as for CHD.

My liability in the case of CHD or PRA will be limited to the original purchase price. In the case of CHD, if radiographs have not been submitted for OFA certification on or before the Akita's third (3rd) birthday, the portions of the contract relating to hip dysplasia, and all terms in Item 3 of the contract, go out the window. To be frank, my CHD guarantee is one of the best you'll find, but I can't keep myself on the ropes forever. After a certain age, wear and arthritic changes in the bones and joints can be diagnosed as CHD. So have radiographs before the age of 3 years, and, if you have any idea that there may be a problem, have them again before the age of 5 years. Changes after that are likely to be arthritis, and will hit all of us if we live long enough. PRA is a slightly different problem. A dog can have clear exams for years, then test positive for PRA. The strategy I believe in is not to breed dogs that have not been tested, and not to breed to a dog with any PRA positive relatives (sire, dam, littermates, etc.). My PRA guarantee, therefore, is forever. However, it is only on the dog, and not on pups it produces. I will do all I can to prevent this monster from cropping up in my lines, but it can happen anyway.

If you bought your Akita as a pet, the CHD guarantee is different. I guarantee the dog to be functional as a pet, and define crippling HD as used in the contract. I don't guarantee against PRA, since it would not generally be a major problem in a pet, but I also don't expect any of my dogs to have it (famous last words!).

## Beauty, Being More Than Skin Deep . . .

An Akita sold as show and/or breeding quality is guaranteed to have no: [a] disqualifying faults under the breed standard, [b] major deviations from the breed standard or [c] physical defects which would exclude it from consideration in the breed ring". For those of you embarking on this for the first time, the five disqualifying faults in an Akita include: 1) size - dogs under 25 inches, bitches under 23 inches (measured at the highest point of the shoulder -don't discuss this until your Akita is 12-15 months old); 2) sickle or uncurled tail (the tail should, at the very worst, touch the top of the back when the dog is moving); 3) noticeably undershot or overshot (the front teeth should meet in a level or scissor bite); 4) drop or broken ears (ears must be erect); 5) butterfly nose (the nose on a white Akita may be a livery flesh color; all others must be solid black, with no pink spots; the nose on a dog with a lot of white on the face can take as long as 12-18 months to fill in, but obviously some never do). All-breed disqualifications include: missing testicles in male dogs, so of course I guarantee a male to have all standard equipment; viciousness toward a judge or handler - I breed for temperament, and will replace a dog with bad temperament, but this **sometimes** is a reflection of environment, illness, etc. Show quality does not guarantee that the dog will complete an AKC Championship, because I can't force you to feed, groom, train, and handle your dog appropriately.

An Akita I sell as Breeding Quality Only may have a disqualifying fault, which will be specifically noted under "Additional Terms and Conditions". In special circumstances, a dog may be so obviously superior, but have a broken ear (possibly from fighting), or a butterfly nose due to a lot of white on the face, that I would sell it as breeding quality after lengthy discussion with the buyer on how the dog should be bred, etc. These individual cases are few and far between, so I won't go into it here. In other cases, I might sell a dog as breeding quality simply because I find its color or markings objectionable. This type of dog could certainly be shown, but it would be guaranteed under the terms on which it was sold, even if it went on to win 43 Best in Show awards!

For my purposes, "Breeding Quality Only" indicates that the Akita is, for reasons listed in 'Additional Terms and Conditions' considered by me not to be 'Show Quality', as defined above or due to the my personal interpretation of the breed standard as accepted by the American Kennel Club" (it's okay to read that last part as "breeder prejudice").

### The Question of Parenthood

Since most people who want to show their dog also want to breed it, if I sell you a dog as "breeding" or show/breeding quality, it is guaranteed against any congenital or hereditary condition which would prevent it from producing or siring a litter by the age of four years. **It is not guaranteed against any condition which can be traced to improper nutrition, poor conditioning, excessive show campaigning, or inhumane treatment by you!** If, with adequate care and nutrition, your show Akita proves to be of less than show quality between the ages of 2-4 years, or fails to produce a litter by the age of four years with at least two attempts, or is certified by a licensed veterinarian to be unable or unwilling to breed, I will, **at my option**, replace with an Akita of equal or greater value, or refund the original purchase price.

There are some other fancy do-dads in the contract relating to the importance of breeding at the right time, and what steps have to be taken before I will replace under this clause. None of the steps are very expensive, but they keep the unethical few among us from saying that an Akita is sterile when they were really too busy to pay attention to the dogs body language. **If it is the opinion of a qualified, objective veterinarian that infertility is due to excessive show campaigning, a medically supervised program including adequate rest and a severely restricted show schedule, must be followed for a period of one additional year before this portion of the guarantee will be honored.** Believe it or not, a dog that is on the road going to shows 35 weekends out of the year may be so physically and mentally out of shape that it cannot reproduce! I picked 35 weekends out of the air, but you get the general idea.

### Reach Out and Touch . . .

Now comes the personal part. I promise to provide you with advice and assistance pertinent to care, feeding, grooming, training, etc. of your Akita upon request. I don't have all the answers. I don't know all the tricks. I do care a great deal. I do want continued contact, but please don't call or write only when there is a problem! Let me know how wonderful your dog is! Let me see some of those cute pictures, even if I have to return them. Help me remember that despite the fleas, piles of doggy doo, and dirt all over my floor, I have provided someone, somewhere, with a little happiness! If I don't keep in touch as much as you'd like, remember that while there is only one of me, there may be 15 or 20 people out there who have fallen in love with one of my "kidlets".

I recently added an additional clause in all my contracts, which allows you to correct a mistake, with no charge, within one week of taking possession of your Akita. For seven days, your may return a **healthy** puppy/dog (if it is unhealthy, we already covered that. However, if you starved and beat it for a week, don't expect to get a full refund - expect an animal abuse lawsuit!), and I will return whatever you have paid me for the dog. If you bought a box of dog food, and fed it to the dog, you don't get that back. But if you paid the purchase price in full, or made a deposit and had a payment schedule, you'll get your money back. Because it's the wrong color. Because it chases the cat. Because it digs holes. Because a dog was the wrong thing to get right now.

What about partial refunds if the dog isn't exactly what you expected it to be? Not likely. You didn't buy a dress, or a pair of shoes. This is a living creature, and while you and I may both expect it to grow and develop a certain way, we may both be fooled. When your dog is paid for, I don't pocket a whole lot of money. In fact, my passion for showing and producing what I consider to be the very best, costs far more than puppy sales and stud services can hope to cover. After that

week grace period, your money is spent, and I can't get it back. So I guarantee with a replacement. It may take time in some cases to provide that replacement, but that's what the contract says, and that's what we both agree to. If you have doubts, I can refer you to people who have experience of how well I stand by my contracts, and of the fact that I will go above and beyond the written word, because I believe you should get what you came to me for, i.e., a healthy, temperamentally sound, beautiful Akita.

If a puppy has a problem, and I agree to replace it, don't assume that I will trade you for the littermate I kept. If I kept one, that one has a particular place in my planned breeding program. If you are willing to let Fido go, we'll work together to find him a home, and I will replace him with an Akita that hopefully will meet your needs, out of the next available litter, or maybe with a young adult that we can both see has no problem. I won't offer you a partial refund unless my rich uncle died the week before, so don't start counting money. Also, don't insist that I take back the first one. If I can, I'll be the first to make that suggestion. If I don't suggest it, I don't have room (Remember? This is not a skirt, or a pair of shoes, and I can't just hang it in a closet).

If you have questions about the contract that I haven't answered, just ask me. I'm willing to discuss, explain, and, if you convince me I'm wrong, change or delete something. Our contract protects both of us, as well as the dog it represents, so it's important that there be no missed understandings!

## Chapter 5

## Beauty, and The Beast

(Or, How to Keep Your Akita Lovable and Livable)

### Inner Beauty

This isn't going to be a treatise on how beauty is only skin deep, and even ugly dogs are beautiful. Let's face it - ugly dogs are ugly. Akitas, however, are not built to be ugly, and beauty isn't skin deep - it's bone deep, muscle deep, and organ deep. It comes from good health, and good health comes from choosing healthy parents, proper exercise, and proper nutrition. So... what this is digressing into is a treatise on building beauty from the inside out!

We all know that you are a reflection of what you eat (along with how many sit-up you do!), and this is also true for your dog. I'll assume that you don't keep yourself in good health by eating fifty-cent hamburgers and french fries three times a day. Consider the cost of eating a healthy diet; now consider the cost of feeding your dog a healthy diet. Although Mother Nature has decreed that he is a carnivore, and that most of his nutrition should/must come from meat, this doesn't mean you need to make a rancher rich by feeding him steak. What it does mean is that if a forty pound bag of dog food "A" costs \$12.00, that's thirty cents a pound. The grocer has to make a profit, the wholesaler has to make a profit, and the manufacturer has to make a profit, which means that the stuff in that food probably cost the manufacturer fifteen cents a pound.

What can you get for fifteen cents a pound that will keep a living creature healthy, with shiny hair, smooth skin, and good bone, muscle, and organ development? I haven't found anything yet, and doubtless neither will you. Keep in mind that the larger the company, the less profit they have to make on each sale, so generally the big names can sell for less than the small, specialty manufacturers. It has been proven that shoe leather and chicken feathers will give an analysis that looks like a good dog food (after all, they are mostly protein), but your dog can't be expected to maintain any semblance of good health on such materials. Look for foods listing meat (chicken, fish, beef) as the first ingredient, and avoid foods containing soy flour where possible, since soy has a reputation for causing skin problems in Akitas. Unless you can cut out the middleman, expect to pay **at least** fifty cents per pound for a good quality food. Dogs require less food when fed high quality, highly digestible, calorie dense foods, so a better feed will last longer, and may, in the final accounting, cost less than a cheaper food. When considering the actual costs, don't forget that illnesses and the accompanying veterinary costs, can often be directly attributed to inadequate nutrition.

Look for a statement on your dog food to the effect that it is adequate for all stages of life; I used to recommend that you feed puppies high quality puppy foods, feed adults high quality maintenance diet, and take advantage of stress/competition and elderly diets as needed. In the past ten years, I have learned that what are called "premium" puppy foods can cause problems with skeletal development in a number of large breeds, including the Akita. As a result, I now feed and recommend "premium" maintenance diet for all stages of life—the only exception would be special need cases, such as dogs requiring lower caloric intake so they can once again see their toes, or elderly dogs with EVIDENCE of a MEDICAL NEED for a senior diet. I do supplement (with canned food, cottage cheese, and yoghurt) during late pregnancy and nursing. In the long run, feeding a high quality diet will save you money, and you'll have a companion that radiates good health!

Akitas really are beautiful dogs. Unlike poodles, collies, etc., they don't require a great deal of effort to keep them in moderately beautiful condition! Just think - no mats, no tangles, and no long hours of brushing - or did you buy a fuzzy? If you did, I take back at least part of that, since

they need a little more of everything as far as grooming. But in general, bathing as needed, brushing on a regular basis, and nailcare-nailcare-nailcare will provide just about all the beauty we mortals can stand!

### **The Wonderful World of Water**

Many Akitas like to swim. Few Akitas like to be bathed. Such anomalies! My preferred method of forcing Fido to stay in one place while I make him smell good is the novel idea of bathing him on a table. I use a large grooming table, covered with a "plastic lace" tablecloth (gives the dog good footing in the soap and water, while protecting the wooden grooming table from the effects of frequent soakings). Since grooming tables big enough to hold an Akita are generally too high for average sized bathers to reach the top of the dogs head with any degree of ease, my wonderfully obliging husband cut several inches off the legs of my table. It is easier for the dog to jump onto (they do, believe it or not!), easier for me to reach all portions of the dog, and the right height to perch on when I grind their nails with the cordless Dremel® I use for nail care. If possible, make an investment in one or both of these wonderful inventions (short table and Dremel® - buy the Dremel MultiPro®, it will outlast several of the cheaper model). If not, improvise the table, and clip the nails carefully and often.

Oh yeah, about that water. All my Fidors past the age of 4 months get their baths in the open via the garden hose. In winter we have been known to move the beauty salon into the bathtub, and during Florida's long fall and spring seasons, we hook the hose up to the utility sink and use slightly warm (tepid or room temperature) water. Use a good quality dog shampoo, and rinse it out thoroughly. One of my best friends when bathing is a 2'x3' chamois. I use before toweling, and it sucks most of the water out of the coat. Start with a dry chamois, and press it onto the wet coat like a horse blanket. Don't rub, just press, then wring it out and press it on again, until it has sucked out as much water as it can. Then let Fido shake, and towel him down some. Those who intend to show their dogs will now get out the Metro Air Force® dryer, and blow and brush until dry. The rest of you will put Fido in a crate or other confined space out of drafts until he is dry.

### **Hair Care**

That lovely, stand-off Akita coat isn't achieved by hard work, you guys. As a matter of fact, it's generally part of the package. Improper brushing from puppyhood can, however, make Fido look like a slightly fuzzy Doberman Pinscher. To prevent this type of catastrophe, backbrush! Always, always, always brush the coat against the grain! The purpose of this is to fluff up the undercoat. Remember the undercoat? That's the stuff that covers your floor, clothing, and furniture twice a year, and that prevents you from getting Fido's skin wet when you're trying to bathe him! Its purpose is to insulate and protect, and it does both best when it stands off from the body. Since it is possible to train the undercoat to lie flat, its important for you to get in the habit of fluffing it up when brushing. Your tool here will be a "pinbrush." It has straight metal pins set into a rubber base. The base should be soft enough that the pins "give" easily when you push against them, or squeeze them together in you hand. A brush that's too stiff will damage the coat, and worse, hurt the skin. Then your Akita won't want you to brush him, and what could be a pleasure for at least one of you (the dog!) will become an ordeal for BOTH of you!

Speaking of hair rugs, twice a year your Akita will go through a normal period of "blowing coat". This is when the undercoat sheds out, your dog looks so ugly you want to hide him (or yourself!) in the closet, and you consider taking up spinning wool. Daily combing with a Greyhound® (brand name) comb will go a long way toward keeping sanity and peace in the home during this period. Lay in a large supply of paper bags to fill with hair at each session, or leave it on the lawn for the birds to use in nest lining - they will, since it's beautifully soft and warm. Almost forgot—if you have ANY intention of showing, use a spray bottle to LIGHTLY MIST the coat before brushing. I stress LIGHTLY. This helps prevent coat breakage.

## **The Manicure**

Chances are, when you pick up your Akita, his nails will be short. For several reasons, I recommend that you keep them that way. When nails grow too long, they force the foot off the ground, and change the lovely, functional round shape of the foot. Since the feet support the entire weight of that massive body, it is extremely important that they stay in good condition. If the shape of the foot changes, it can affect the bones above the foot, and real problems can result. Second, if nail care is a regular, expected part of grooming, Fido will accept it more readily, provided you're not a Lizzie Borden with the nail clippers. I still recommend a nail grinder, but if you decide to follow my advice, buy a Dremel® (commonly known as a moto-tool) instead of one of the dedicated nail grinders. It's cheaper, more powerful, and the pricier of the two cordless models is a groomers dream! And, if you get bored and need a hobby, you can use it to make neat little wooden things!

## **Other Beauty Tips**

There are none. That's it. Or if I think of something later, I'll send you more pages!

## **Puddles On The Carpet**

Let's face it. This is one place where the little boys have an edge on the little girls! Due to vagaries of anatomical structure (where did I think that up?), female pups don't develop complete control of the urinary bladder sphincter muscle quite as early as male pups. This tends to result in frequent "piddling" accidents during early housebreaking. Personally, I have somewhat of a Jekyll/Hyde reaction to this situation, i.e., if the pup wets in response to me walking in the door, we have a possible case of submissive wetting, and we ignore it. If however, we've been hanging around the house, have offered many opportunities to water the grass, and the pup searches out a spot and piddles, we get mildly violent!

Intentional puddling causes me to snarl and scream, pick the pup up unceremoniously in mid-piddle, and plop it out the nearest door. It's all an act, mind you, but the pup doesn't realize that this ranting maniac can turn off and on at will. With a young pup, all the snarling can usually be prevented with the proper use of a proper crate. Your puppy will, in most cases, try very hard to please you, and will not intentionally try to make you angry, although I have seen a few wily, older pups and dogs try this. Remember that he is a baby, that if he were human he would be in diapers and plastic pants to prevent accidents, and that unless something goes terribly wrong, he'll be housebroken years before his human counterpart!

## Chapter 6

### Some Closing Thoughts

This booklet is a compilation of some of my more coherent musings on the nature of the beast, other than my husband, that is closest to my heart. At home, we are literally surrounded by Akitas. Much of our vacation time revolves around Akitas, since we spend most mini-vacations at dog shows, or whelping litters, or visiting doggy friends. These beautiful, noble, funny dogs have been my passion for twenty-plus years; this was written in the hope that some small portion of the joy they have brought into my life will spill over into yours. I sincerely want this adventure of yours to be a successful one, and even more importantly, a happy one!

In that vein, I began at the beginning, and I'm going to end at the end. With proper care, your Akita will be with you for many years - ten to thirteen is not uncommon for a healthy Akita. However, getting back to my original premise that the domestic dog is only a breath away from being a wild animal, I want you to consider some things in those final years.

When your much loved companion begins to show his age, remember that, in the wild, he would be considered a short-timer. He would be unable to hunt for his food, and unable to protect what he did find from others of his kind. He would, very simply, be unable to withstand the rigors that Mother Nature demands from her children, and he would die a quiet death, or be killed according to the ways of Nature. You, however, have usurped the dominance of Nature, and will undoubtedly break all the rules intended to insure that only the strong survive. You will provide him with food, you will walk with him if his sight is failing, you will adjust your activities if his hearing is failing; I can only hope you will give him a dignified end when his life is failing, since you have prevented the natural course of events from doing so.

Since the first version of this slight tome, I have had three Akitas with various forms of cancer. All were operable, and all survived. I seldom had pathology run on the tumors, since if they were removed, that was the end of the experience. I will not put a dog through chemotherapy. Why? I have known, and currently know, human beings who have freely chosen chemo. They know the choice they are making, and they are aware their life is dependent on that choice. Some of these people, after suffering the side effects, have chosen instead to take advantage of pain medications, quit the chemo, and die. I would not put a dog, incapable as it is of making an informed choice, through the discomfort of chemotherapy. That is my belief, and your snapshot of a corner of my mind. I do not intend to impose my belief system on you, but I think it is important that you consider all sides of the question, should you be faced with making this choice.

Akitas have great dignity. Even the oldest of them, who suffer with every attempt to stand or walk, will nearly always suffer in silence. His loyalty and devotion may convince you that he is enjoying life, as he continues, albeit very slowly, to accompany you at most every opportunity. Be sure that you are probably his only enjoyment in life - he neither reads the great books, nor watches the mini-silver screen - and if it weren't for you, he would be happy to simply lie down and die. If you know your friend well, the pain, discomfort, and humiliation will be there for you to see. Please do not allow him to die without assistance, simply because it's easier for you that way. He has always known that his life was safest in your hands, and that you could, and would, make decisions he couldn't make, for his welfare. Be willing, at the end, to allow him to go peacefully, painlessly, and with dignity. As his replacement for Mother Nature, you, we, owe our companions that much.

[Back to Sajo Index](#)