

## Anatolian Shepherd Dogs April 2019

### Kindness Matters

Do you remember your first dog show ever? I do. Autumn of 1972. I was 5 years old and the Austin Kennel Club had put on a fun match that allowed very young kids to handle dogs in junior showmanship. I was showing my mother's first show dog, a Lhasa Apso bitch named Mandy. I was so short the judge had to help me put the dog on the table and Mandy promptly flopped onto her side to be groomed. I managed to achieve something resembling a stack, and then the judge helped me get Mandy to the floor, and pointed to the diagonal and asked me if I could walk my dog to the end of the tar paper mat and back to her. I assured her I could and set off. Mandy took a huge dump in the middle of the ring. I was determined though, and I kept on walking, down and back and around to the end of the line. Mandy kept up with me somehow.

I don't recall how we placed in our class, although I'm fairly certain it was last, but I was awarded my first sportsmanship award that day. It wasn't the prize I was after, but I persevered, and added more sportsmanship awards to my credit. I was convinced they were for the little girl whose dog pooped in the ring or bit her and she didn't cry.

The few pictures I recall from those days show me glowering at the camera, 70s fashions of polyester double knit sewn by my grandmother, my hair flopping in my face much like my dog's, and the girl who had beat me for best junior beaming at the photographer. The first time I won best junior handler I was over the moon! I was also hooked. Dog showing had become my drug of choice.

The point of this reminiscence is that I could never have made it past that first class had people at shows not encouraged me, had they not been kind. I recall handling lessons given to me by children of dog club members. I recall handlers and breeders who would sandwich me between them in the ring and tell me, 'just do what the person in front of you does', and then the two of them coaching me as they set up their own dogs. People were incredibly kind to a serious, shy child who wanted to show dogs.

This past weekend I was at another show with a little kid in the ring. One of the Anatolian people sent her daughter into the ring with their dog, a placid, low key male with good shut down when away from home. And 40 years later it happened all over again. The handlers on either side of the little girl coached her on what to do and how to show her dog. The judge was patient. People were kind.

I have seen incredible acts of kindness from one exhibitor to another, but it seems for every kind act there is one that is not so kind. You hear stories of people yelling at other exhibitors ringside, or read of people cutting coat off of dogs while the owner is out of the setup. Social media is part of the problem – what used to take weeks to travel around the country now travels the world in seconds, and on social media we are bold to say cruel things that we would not say in person.

Twice in the past year I have had judges tell me that they didn't need my entry. That they had already judged a class of Anatolians somewhere else in the country and my entry was of no use to them. Wow. A low entry breed, and you don't need to put your hands on another dog? A dog of different pedigree and type than the ones you saw on whichever coast?

Where has the civility gone? Does it take the presence of a child in the ring to bring out the kindness in each of us? I stuck it out for 40 years, but others might not be so pig-headed, and you often hear tell of

people who go to a show and have a judge or exhibitor be so rude to them that they don't go back. I know of one instance where a new Anatolian exhibitor was handed the wrong ribbons. When she went up to the judge for a win photo he snatched the ribbons away from her and upbraided her for even having them, as if she had stolen them from their rightful owner. Mistakes happen. Be kind. Just this past weekend a judge handed out the wrong ribbon to an exhibitor and I had to go ask the handler of the dog if they had the ribbon. They did, we switched, and life continued.

I know that dog shows can make us all nervous, and nervous, insecure people say and do things they don't really intend. I am ever so guilty of that sin. Maybe we all need to take a deep breath, close our eyes, and try to remember that moment when we realized showing dogs was our drug of choice. Maybe we all need to remember that a little kindness goes a long way, and it is a one size fits – and flatters – all sort of thing. Newbie, old timer, judge, professional or owner handler – we are all there for the same thing. The common thread is our love of our breed, and of our dogs in particular. Maybe we can spread a little bit of that love to each other. Love your dogs. Be kind.