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How Much Is That Doggy Online : Social Media and Dog People

Social media is so cool!

Except when it's not.

How often have you seen this happen? Someone posts to a Facebook breed group asking for information about a breed. They talk about their dog, maybe post a picture, and it's clear that the dog isn't purebred. Or someone posts that they've just gotten a pup and they want to breed and show dogs. Everyone piles on. The person is told their dog is a mutt. And it may well be true, but it's still \*their\* dog. The new pup owner is frostily told of the testing required for CHIC status and is presumed to be the next backyard breeder in the making – and maybe they are, but there is still time to try and educate them.

The newbie reacts to the negative posts in a defensive manner. People already in the group attack them for being defensive. Things spiral ever downward, and the person leaves the group in disgust. The group makes comments about how thin skinned newbies with their ugly mixed breeds are, and their plans to breed dogs that the world doesn't need, and group members (figuratively) lift their legs on a lamp post to mark their cyberspace as they go back to their corners to wait for the next unsuspecting outsider to stumble along.

Then there's this one – a woman, active in my local handling class, who has been showing her dog in conformation and performance events for the past seven years, attempted to get her first show dog from a reputable breeder. She contacted many. She did all the right things, but no one would talk to her, because they didn't know her and she didn't know anyone they knew. In the end, she got a dog from what most of us would consider a backyard breeder, in a midwestern state, who texted her as she was boarding a plane and said something along the lines of, 'buyer backed out, send money and the dog is yours'. No one in the breed reached out to her, they just ignored her. And she did go away, right to the very sort of breeder we all disparage. Whose fault is that?

Or this one – a performance person with a new show puppy approaches a long-established show breeder of Medium Flooferfluffers at a very large summer show cluster and excitedly introduces herself to the breeder. The breeder looks down her nose at the newcomer and asks 'What breed do you have?' The newcomer says, 'Well, I have Floofs, just like you!' And the breeder haughtily announces, 'Medium Flooferfluffers – we don't call them Floofs, that's common.' The breeder walks away and the newbie stares after her with tears in her eyes. Sounds a bit melodramatic? True story. Names have been changed to protect the innocent and the well-established, both.

There are plenty of scenarios, but they all play out the same, and in almost every one the new person leaves in disgust, with hurt feelings. They want nothing to do with the purebred dog fancy because it did not welcome them – it snapped in their faces, rolled them in the dirt, and sent them packing.

We in the fancy say that we are doing this to protect our breeds. We want what is best for our dogs, because we have poured our lives, and our livelihoods' returns, into our dogs, and they and their offspring are our collective passion. The dogs are what bind us together, but the dogs are what the newbies we're running off have in common with us as well.

Sometimes, after we've been in a breed for awhile, we seem to forget that we all started somewhere. We forget that our first dog in our favored breed may not have been the best example of that breed. My first Anatolian was dysplastic. He was a beautiful dog, and he was an amazing LGD, but his hips were awful. Fortunately his breeder stood behind his breeding program and replaced him with another dog. Not everyone is as lucky.

I bring this up because I recently posted to an online group asking for information about a new-to-me breed that I wanted to learn more about. I listed my experience in dogs and (at least I thought I did) clearly stated what my expectations were, and that I was attempting to decide if I were the right person for this breed. I got the same sort of welcome as the average newcomer posting to a group. One or two people said it sounded like \*maybe\* I was the right person for the breed. Two people (one pet person and one breeder) contacted me privately to tell me about the breed. Most of the responses? Negative. Dismissive. Then a general post to the group from an admin (that received many likes and hearts) along the lines of how they were tired of people posting and asking for information and then disappearing without thanking the group. Well hell, given that sort of welcome, I was tempted to disappear without a word too, and was sticking around simply out of sheer, bloody-minded meanness.

We need to ask ourselves where these people go after they disappear from these groups. Where do they go to get information and dogs if we are not willing to virtually extend a hand in welcome to them and try to provide them with breed specific information, and a place to look for breeders? Here's a hint – probably not to people associated with the show world. Most likely not to the caliber of breeders that we like to think of ourselves as being.

We, as a fancy, need to do a better job of policing ourselves online. I get that we have lives, and we're tired, and we've answered the same questions a hundred times before, and we don't like people, which is why we prefer dogs. But we are cutting off our noses to spite our faces when we meet the newbies to our social media groups with the virtual equivalent of a pack beating. We need to try harder to be inclusive or we will simply drive potentially good homes directly into the arms of those who only ask that the payment hits their account before the dog walks out the door. If this treatment rankles someone who has been in dogs for nearly 50 years, what must it feel like to the starry-eyed newbie who is attempting to do the right thing and look for a reputable breeder? We must be better than that because our breeds are depending upon us.

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