



# The Breeder's Responsibility<sup>1</sup>

By Vandra L. Huber, Ph.D ©

A reputable breeder has a responsibility to her litter long before the litter is ever conceived. First, she educates herself regarding the breed. She studies all the literature, considers line versus type breeding, whelping, genetics, and anatomy. She consults with old-timer breeders. She attends specialty shows and personally goes over and evaluates as many dogs as possible. She is always open to learning and never assumes she knows it all. She starts with the best brood bitch possible. She is willing to wait for her -- building up her credibility in the breed and her knowledge of Scotties -- until someone will mentor her and entrust her with a promising bitch.

She also is patient. She finishes her bitch's championship first before breeding. She waits at least until the bitch has had its third season and/or is 18 months old before she breeds her. She seldom breeds back to back -- never if the bitch has had a c-section. Even though it is often difficult to do, she ruthlessly critiques her beloved bitch, owning up to her conformation, genetic and health faults. She picks the best -- not the most convenient or inexpensive -- stud dog possible. She collects as much information as possible on the sire, and dogs in his pedigree. She personally goes over and evaluates each potential sire. The record of the dog or a handler's sales pitch does not sway her. She deals with ethical breeders but does she let her own emotions (positive or negative) towards an owner cloud her thinking. Instead she focuses in on the stud dog, what he possesses, what he is producing, and what her bitch needs.

Even then, she breeds only after studying pedigrees, after conducting breed-appropriate genetic testing, and after updating vaccinations and worming. She is realistic, aiming for at least as good if not better than she has. But, she knows that breeding still involves some degree of genetic roulette. She conducts a prebreeding health check including vaginal smears and brucellosis tests. She requires the owners of the stud dog to do the same. To insure the mating will occur, she may employ ovulation timing tests or may have a sperm count/ mobility test conducted on the potential sire. She may seek out the assistance of her reproduction specialized to assist with the breeding.

## Watches Over Her Brood Bitch

After breeding, she carefully watches over the dam, insuring that she receives proper nutrition and care. She gets an ultrasound conducted on her bitch at exactly 28 days or an x-ray after 50 days to determine the number, size, and position of puppies. If the litter is small (3 puppies or

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<sup>1</sup> In preparing this article, I referenced a variety of sources and conferred with breeders I respect. Particularly insightful were several articles in the The Border Terrier written by Judy Donaldson, Education Coordinator of the BTCA, and Anita Moran, the editor. I also relied on input from some of my e-mail colleagues including Julie Lockett, Shirley Bell, Melissa Rowland, Jennifer Parkin Lilley, and Kay Durr. I also am indebted to Gail Gaines, Lois Bolding, and Laurel Tofflemire who gave me feedback and shared their years of wisdom. And then there is Peggy Sue, one of my Scotties. I wrote this as I sat watching over her litter, marveling over the miracle.

less) or the puppies are positioned incorrectly, she will not think twice about a c-section. Rather than having the c-section when it is convenient or least costly, she will usually wait until the bitch's contractions start. As whelping approaches, she will not leave the brood bitch alone. She may take her to work, work at home, or cash in her vacation days. Three or four days prior to whelping, she will sleep near her Scottie mom-to-be, insuring that the bitch does not whelp alone. She will alert her veterinarian and her back-up veterinarian that whelping time is near. She will construct or purchase a proper whelping box with railings to minimize the likelihood of a puppy being squashed. She will amass whelping materials such as heat lamps, scissors, floss to tie off umbilical cords, scales to weigh puppies, tube feeding equipment, and electrolyte enhanced water. Then she will wait. She will check for a drop in her temperature, changes in bowel movements, and vaginal discharges. Each of these is used as signals of imminent whelping and/or possible problems. The health of the brood bitch and the puppies is central. If there are whelping problems, she will go to the emergency clinic first and think about the \$600 to \$1200 emergency fee later.

Once the puppies are born, she will watch over them, usually 24 hours a day for a week -- longer if there are problems. She will weigh the puppies daily to insure they are thriving. If necessary, she will feed them by hand, tube feed them, or supplement them. She'll grind up liver, separate egg whites from yolks to make a special supplement. She will watch bowel movements, examining them rather than squeamishly discarding them. She'll make the puppies urinate to insure that they are not dehydrated. She will supplement her precious brood bitch. That may include electrolytes in the water, cottage cheese, nutri cal, liver, and chicken noodle soup. She will check for heavy panting to prevent eclampsia and other post whelping problems. She will not let people visit the puppies until the puppies have been vaccinated. She will be fanatically about people cleaning their shoes with bleach and disinfecting their hands.

### Puppy Watching

As the puppies mature, she will spoil them, socialize them around adults, children and other dogs. She will groom them, cleaning messy rears and clip nails. She'll examine their teeth, their skin, their bellies and their stools to insure they are disease free. She will worm and vaccinate them on schedule and keep a careful record of those vaccinations. To a degree, she will train them. She will hang on to her Scottie puppies until they are 10-12 weeks old and until they have had a couple of sets of vaccinations. If it is summertime, when parvovirus is more prevalent, she may hang on to the puppies for a longer, sheltering them at home.



In placing her puppies, she will exercise caution. If the potential buyers have not done their homework well, she will spend as much time as it takes to educate them and to help them, as well as she can, to make an informed decision. She will screen her customers carefully and make sure her Scottie puppy is going to the right home rather than any home. She will instill upon the buyer that this cute little Scottie will be dependent on him for its entire life span -- not just while it is cuddly and tiny. She will emphasize that teaching a child about responsibility is the wrong reason to get a puppy. Responsibility always falls on the shoulders of the mommy and daddy of the children that have promised to do it!

### Realistic Preview of Life with a Scottie

She will give the buyer a realistic preview of the care and maintenance of the Scottie. The responsible breeder explains carefully and in great detail that the puppy is not going to behave like the adult dogs that are seen at the breeder's house. The breeder makes certain the buyer understands how important it is to attend puppy kindergarten and to leash train the puppy while it is young. She will provide instruction on housebreaking the puppy. She will point out that a puppy that is put in the fenced in yard ALL DAY never trains itself out there or has to learn to hold in its urine! (aka "housebreaking"). She will stress that a puppy should not be left alone all day. A lonely and bored puppy is a mischievous puppy that will chew and rip up household items -- most likely a cherished item belonging to the owner. She will talk about regular grooming -- even give the buyer a copy of the breed's grooming manual -- or she'll groom it for free for a couple of times. She will mention vaccinations, nail trimming, annual teeth cleaning, and flea control. She will talk about exercise and nutrition, suggesting foods and a feeding schedule. She also will make sure that the puppy leaves for his new home with a written set of instructions and telephone numbers. Since Scotties easily can become obese, she will share weight charts with the owners.

Recognizing that the welfare of her puppy is more important than the desires of a purchaser, she may turn some families away. After all, a Scottie is not for everyone. A conscientious breeder will suspend the sale of the Scottie puppy at any time during the negotiation if she is not comfortable with the potential placement, home environment or attitudes of the family or a family member. Consideration will be given to the housing of the animal, the makeup of the family (children, amount of time at home, other animals, swimming pools and boats) and the animal. A conscientious breeder will assess the buyer's ability to invest the time, patience and tenderness necessary to train a Scottie puppy. If the buyer's life is too busy, she will steer the buyer to an older companion Scottie or steer them completely away from owning any dog at this time.

She will emphasize that Scottish Terriers do not regard themselves as dogs but as family members. When you yell and scream at them or at other family members they sense it. In response, these sensitive souls may run and hide or set their ears back. She'll talk about a Scottie's feelings and how easily they get hurt. She'll stress positive rather than negative training techniques. A Scottie will do what you want because he loves you, not because you've disciplined him. A responsible breeder will point out that a Scottie thrives in a safe, predictable, and loving environment. When this environment is disrupted, a Scottie becomes confused, uncertain and threatened. If someone who understands a Scottie's personality does not handle him correctly,, then he could become aggressive or overly timid. Neither of these conditions must happen because it can lead a dog to fear bite. So, the very life of a Scottie depends on his proper care in a nurturing environment.

### **Placement Contract**

In placing a puppy, she will require a written contract that specifies return policies and health assurances. Her contract will require the neutering/spaying of a companion Scottie. If the Scottie is to be bred, the responsible breeder will want some control over the process and choice of mates. These things protect the breed and her breeding program. Experience with Scotties, study of pedigrees, knowledge of reproduction and dedication are all factors that go into breeding sound and "typey" Scottish Terriers. These things take years to acquire -- a lot of people are not ready and do not have the knowledge or desire to make that kind of a commitment. Her contract will include a clause that if the buyer can't keep the puppy, he will return it to her. The puppy will not be given away or sold without approval of the breeder.

And, the responsible breeder will provide an all- encompassing safety net. One of her Scotties

can always come home. If, for any reason, the buyers can no longer provide a home for her cherished puppy, she will come and get the Scottie or make arrangements to have him returned. She will not lecture or pass judgment on the owner. As a steward of the breed, she wants to insure that puppy will not fall into the wrong hands or be sold to the first or highest bidder. This also increases the likelihood that her puppy will never end up in an animal shelter, roam the streets, or need rescue!

She will instill upon the buyer that purchasing, providing for, training and loving a pup is an equal responsibility to the owners. How the Scotties is raised, what the puppy is fed, how much attention and exercise the puppy is allowed, what kind of disease protection (distemper, hepatitis, leptospirosis, parvovirus, corona, kennel cough and rabies), and maintenance (teeth cleaning, nails trimmed, coat washed and groomed) is provided is the owner's future responsibility. She will make sure the buyers are well prepped with information on raising and training their puppy. Doing the right thing for a Scottie is, in reality, a protection of the buyer's investment and a long and happy life for a devoted companion.

### Life Long Follow-up

She will follow the life and career of the puppy she has placed. She will check-up on her puppy, speaking with the owners at regular intervals (e.g. two days, two weeks and two months etc.) throughout the life of her puppy. When she hears of a medical break through (e.g. a genetic test for VWD) or when there is a training or grooming seminar, she will alert the owners. And she makes the owners promise to take the puppy to a training class. She is committed to follow-up. Without follow-up, a breeder can not know what she's really breeding or what problems lurk within her line. Her puppy is her puppy -- no matter where it lives or with whom or how long it has been gone.

A responsible breeder also keeps up with her own education. There is always more to learn -- from other breeders, rescue folks and even dog haters. So she listens to the comments and ideas of others -- whether they are show breeder, pet owners, just Scottie lovers or animal activists -- without criticizing or attaching. Each dialogue contains at least one tidbit of knowledge. From the animal rights activist, it is the glaring reminder that she has a life-long commitment to her puppies. If she doesn't insure their future through responsible breed, education and life long nurturing, her precious puppies may not have a future. From the person who purchased her puppy in a pet store, she learns that she didn't know where to get a puppy and that information needs to be more readily available. She learns that her terse answers to naive questions are often interpreted as rudeness and snobbishness. Despite unfinished chores, feces that need picking up, barking dogs, she reminds herself that the person on the other end of the telephone did call her first. If neglected or treated poorly, they may turn to the backyard breeder or the pet store clerk who treats them with respect rather than disdain.

And she gives something back to her community. She may help with rescue, fostering unwanted pets. She may sit in a booth all day answering questions at the State Fair, the local mall or the Highland Games. Whenever and where ever the opportunity presents itself, she takes the time to talk with people, to educate and to be educated -- even when there's no sale to be made. While she doesn't wish to pass judgment on others, she also will try -- given the opportunity -- to gently educate new breeders or less responsible breeders. In her heart, she believes that with education the scales of responsibility will eventually balance. In sum, she keeps the welfare of the breed, the individual pups, and the people in mind at all time. And in the process she takes time to ponder the instinctive manner in which a Scottie mom nests, to enjoy her puppies, to watch their mother teaches them to be tough little die-hards, to see the wee Scots mimic their mother's movements, to march forward like waddling ducklings when you cry out Ba-a-a-bies.

And then she says thank you to the Scottie gods above . It is worth it.