

The Campus CHRONICLE



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BY **BARBARA FISHER**

An argument for ethical dog breeders



Sidd Fisher and his dog, Taran.

“I rescued him.” How many times has a dog owner said these words to you? These days people feel very confident that the only way they should obtain a dog is to rescue one. A person who is concerned with maintaining the moral high ground would never buy a pup from a breeder, because the word “breeder” is synonymous with puppy mill, right? We know to adopt and never to shop.

And how many times have you heard a person explain away their dog’s behavior issues with the phrase “He was abused by a previous owner.” They often have a story at the ready about how the dog hates men because their abuser was male, or how he is

afraid of, say, flip flops because his abuser wore flip flops. How often do you think that is completely speculative? Is it very likely that a person brought the dog into the shelter and said “I am surrendering this dog after abusing him while wearing flip flops”?

These are just assumptions made by people, because they fit a preferable narrative. It feels downright heroic to think you rescued a dog from abuse, whereas it’s panic inducing to think that the dog is simply untrained and it’s your responsibility to change that. But really, which of

the two scenarios is more likely to be true?

While rescuing is certainly admirable and valid, I chose not to do so for the reasons listed above, and also because I have young children. I wanted to have the very best chance at predicting the dog's health and behavior. I wanted to have a first-hand view of the dog's early experiences and be able to address any behavior issues as they arose.

The breed I chose was English Setter, and I knew I wanted one from an ethical breeder. Before you ball up this newspaper and toss it in the garbage in fury, here is a list of criteria for members of the English Setter Association of America, an association for lovers and breeders of the English Setter. Each person has to follow a code of ethics to be a member. This is not the entire code, but a few notable points:

"I am the caretaker not only of the individual dog but of the reputation and welfare of the breed as a whole."

"It is incumbent upon me to set the example of each dog being individually cherished but only the physically and temperamentally sound being bred."

"I accept the premise that if I breed a litter those dogs are my responsibility throughout their lifetime."

Once we selected the breeder we wanted, it took us months to actually get our pup, a spotty little boy we named Taran. He wasn't even conceived when we traveled to meet his prospective parents. During the wait, we read books about puppies and his breed, built a fence, and got all the things we would need. We were fully prepared when the day came to go pick him up. Having a puppy is a lot of hard work, comparable to adopting a particularly active and nippy child.

Thankfully the long wait left us fully prepared for the difficulties. Also, if we ever were to decide to give him up, the breeders would take him back. They would never allow one of their dogs to go to a shelter, because no ethical breeder ever would.

Dogs are the product of human intervention. They were once wolves, but people selected the ones that worked best as friends of humans. When dogs select their own breeding partners over a long period of time, the result are feral dogs like the dingoes of Australia.

What will happen if ethical breeders disappear? That would mean the only breeding taking place would be accidental dog encounters, organized by people who don't really know what they're doing, or by actual puppy mills where no one cares about health or temperament or the future of the breeds they create, and where the main goal is to make money off of cute pups purchased on impulse. The ultimate result could be the loss of the partnership between dogs and humans. They would no longer be "Man's Best Friend."

Taran is two years old now, and he is beloved by everyone he meets. He's not only beautiful, he's healthy and temperamentally sound. Even though he shares a little house with three

rowdy young boys, he’s never been anything but gentle.

My husband takes him everywhere he goes, and he is our pride and joy. Shelter dogs can be great too, but if we ever get another dog, it will most likely be from an ethical breeder.

And that’s okay.

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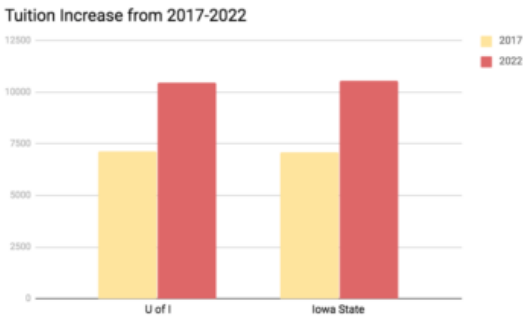
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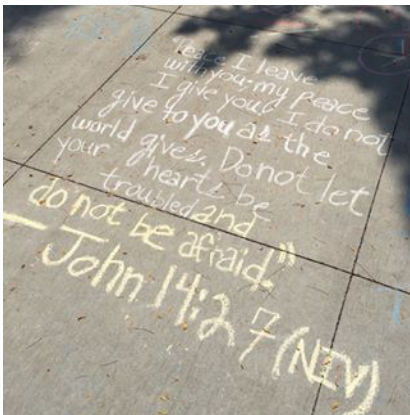
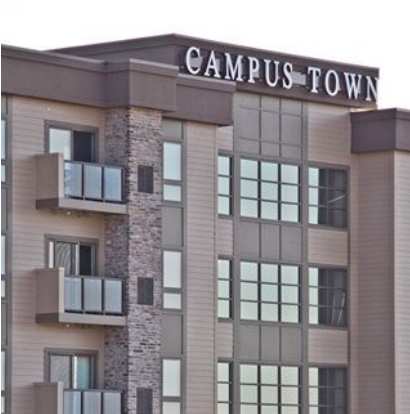
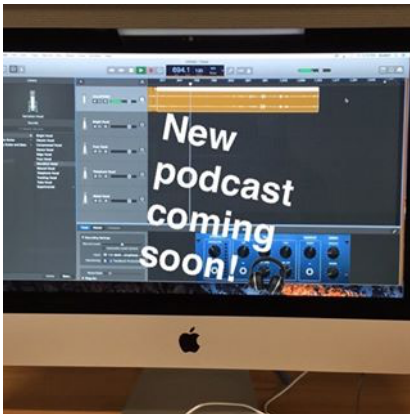
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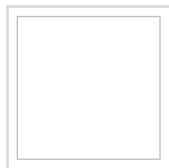
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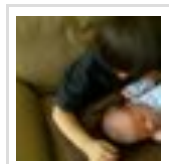
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