

Puppy mills profit from pain

A former pet store patron tells her story of heartbreak

The day her young puppy Harley died, following two weeks of intensive veterinary care, Susan made a solemn promise never to buy a puppy from a pet store again.

“I basically did everything you’re not supposed to do: I bought on impulse after seeing puppies in a pet store window, I didn’t ask any questions about the breeder and I didn’t demand any information on the health or history of the puppies.”

Susan purchased Harley, a cocker spaniel/poodle mix, and his littermate, Spike, from a mall pet store in Vancouver. But within days of bringing the puppies home, Harley became ill.

“He was lethargic and disinterested – exactly the opposite of how a puppy should behave.” Harley was rushed to a vet, who informed Susan that the little dog was very sick, and had been for some time. Just a day or two later, Spike began to exhibit the same symptoms, and he, too, was admitted to the animal hospital. Her two pets quarantined at the vet, Susan returned to the pet store to speak with the owner about their condition.

“He said that I could return them and he would refund my money, but it was very clear he would not provide treatment for them and had no interest in their welfare. If I brought them back, he would have euthanized them.”

By then, of course, Susan and her family had fallen in love with Harley and Spike and had no intention of relinquishing them, particularly to someone who showed such callous regard for their care. Spike eventually recovered, but sadly Harley passed away at the animal hospital a few days later. Susan’s vet bill totaled more than \$4,000.



Susan’s story is far too common, says Marcie Moriarty, general manager of cruelty investigations for the BC SPCA. “Pet stores have been known to acquire their stock from puppy mills or through brokers who act as agents between puppy mills and the pet store owners,” says Moriarty. A typical puppy-mill dog is kept in inhumane conditions without proper food, water, medical care or socialization. Siblings are often bred together to maximize the number of litters being born and the sick and inbred puppies are sold to unsuspecting members of the public for \$1,000 to \$2,500 apiece.

Unfortunately, says Moriarty, pet stores aren’t the only places that deal in animal cruelty: Plenty of puppy mill dogs can also be found on the Internet and in the classified sections of newspapers, where it’s

easy to sanitize the breeding facility through polished language and fake photos. Reputable breeders, says Moriarty, care where their animals go, and will not sell to pet stores or allow a transaction to take place without meeting the prospective guardian.

Susan admits she should have done more research into where her puppies came from before purchasing them. “I have no doubt now that the puppies came from a puppy mill,” says Susan. “It is horrible to think that through this impulse purchase I inadvertently contributed to the inhumane pet trade. I hope people will learn from my mistake and do their homework before choosing a pet.”