

The Importance of Getting to Know Your Dog's Breeder

MARCH 26, 2013 BY [XAVIER A. SANTIAGO](#) — [READ 2 COMMENTS](#)

We all wanted to date the head cheerleader, or quarterback, and admirably thought we were a perfect match. But as it quite often turns out, our personalities were better tuned to the band or theater geek — myself included.

As a breeder and a handler, I've noticed over the years that just as in high school, sometimes we just like the *appearance* of a breed of dog. But more often than not, understanding what's behind those seductive eyes is entirely different.



Xavier with his Alaskan malamute, Dinah. By: [Xavier Santiago](#)

When I've had the pleasure to chat with people at dog shows and rescue events, most don't even know that there are more than 175 breeds of dogs (and those are just the ones [recognized by the AKC](#)).

Let's face it. We've spent 30,000 years with man's best friend. We've worked with them and they with us. So when it comes down to it, spend a little time investing in your future four-legged partner.

What to Consider When Buying a Puppy

A few quick tips:

1. **Where do you live?** Urban, suburban, countryside?
2. **What's your lifestyle?** Let me rephrase: Are you single? Married? Do you have a family? Are you an active person? Like fitness or prefer to veg out?
3. **What's your personality like?** Outgoing, introverted, sociopath? (Please stop reading if you are the latter.)

Once you've compiled those answers, you can start investigating the voluminous world of dogs. Don't just look online and trust every website — truly educate yourself. Research the parent club associated with the American Kennel Club.

What's a parent club? I'm so glad you asked! The parent club is the organization in charge of managing the breed. These clubs help govern breed standards, health issues, etc. and work with breeders in the regions of the country to ensure we are on track. Almost of all of them work their butts off for the better of the breed — often at a personal loss — which is what makes us *stewards*.

At almost every parent club is the breeder referrer. These are appointed or elected to be aware of all the breeders in the region (who are in good standing with the parent club) and can forward you

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to a reputable breeder near to you.

So to begin, do an online search for "[Breed Name] Club of America." Quick as a doggy lick, you're there and can find the breeder referrer.

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Know Your Dog's Breeder

Now, any breeder worth his weight is going to be quite direct about whether you are the right fit for his breed of dog. Don't be put off. Many of us have spent countless amounts of time investing blood, sweat and tears (that is no joke) with our animals, so we expect the same of our puppy buyers — we aren't selling our children, but it sure feels like it.

The breeder may — I know I do — recommend the associated rescue organization. In my case, [Alaskan Malamute Assistance League](#) is the go-to place. Why? They take rescues, abandoned dogs, hopeless cases and even puppy mill rescues. Their members spend oodles of time to rehabilitate, transport and rehome, just like many of the shelters — bearing in mind, not all of them are purebred Mals.

However, if the breeder believes you are fit, he may offer an older dog for rehoming. This is always a viable option for people who are retired or don't desire the joy of training, and that includes the poops and pees in the house. Trust me, [housetraining isn't easy](#).

But here comes the real challenge: the bridge building relationship with the breeder.

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Just "Property"? I Don't Think So

Many people buy animals as if they are commodities, and most state laws view animals as chattel. However, most breeders see their animals as extensions of themselves beyond their breeding program.

Think about it for a moment. The breeders have invested themselves, and not just finances. So once you've convinced them that you truly want to possess an animal from their line, don't be afraid to ask questions. Health issues only scratch the surface. Questions like temperament and personalities of the animals, as well as their environment, contribute to your overall experience.

I love questions (references from past buyers, fellow breeders, vets, what's in the contract...) — these questions give me a sense of who the puppy buyer is. More examples of that in future articles...

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Develop a Relationship

The relationship you develop with a reputable breeder, in my humble opinion, is for the life of the animal. I know countless breeders who have sold dogs to the same family *for generations*. That's trust and respect that you don't build overnight.

The breeders know the health of the dog and are there for questions should they arise. Why? Well, beyond improving their breeding program, they know their animal is in a loving home and that you both care for its health on all levels.

Christmas cards with Santa hats are only the beginning. Breeders love to know how the animal that they helped raise from whelp, at its most fragile time, to almost 12 weeks, is actually doing. My puppy buyers are on Facebook, and I adore seeing the photos as the dogs have grown. We also communicate regularly to discuss training and how the dogs are adapting to all sorts of life situations.

I encourage them to participate with regional malamute groups and to be involved. After all, that's why we're called dog fanciers. Now, I'm wondering if my time in Britain is rubbing off on me?

So, is the bar set too high for breeders and puppy buyers? **NO!**

After all, having a creature that is relying on us is a great responsibility, and I want to make sure you can handle that for the lifetime of one of my dogs... I think most breeders do, too.

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About Xavier A. Santiago

In addition to working as a producer and on-air talent — including as a judge and host on Animal Planet's "Groomer Has It" — Xavier Santiago is a second-generation breeder, owner and handler of Alaskan malamutes, and a professional handler and trainer of other breeds. Growing up around animals, Xavier always had a special connection and love for dogs. Trained by some of the best, known for his love of the sport and, most important, placing the care of dogs above all else, Xavier constantly strives toward embodying the spirit of dog fancying. Working with rescue groups, community organizations and politicians, he has led a battle to improve animal welfare. He lives in London and New York City with his wife and dogs. You can visit [Xavier's website](#), follow him on [Twitter](#) or check out his [Facebook page](#).