

You Are the Future of the Breed

Sadly, I attended a memorial service recently for a second-generation dog person who for decades shaped a breed as a breeder, owner, handler, judge, and mentor. As I listened to family members recount funny and heartwarming stories about this mother, sister, and friend, I thought about how she touched me as the breeder of one of my dogs.

During the ceremony, my thoughts strayed about the comfort she unknowingly gave to me the moment we met. Her straightforward, no-holds-barred frankness, typical of many longtime breeders, was familiar to me and welcomed. She was the breeder of my second breed, so I recognized the temperament of a longtime breeder. Knowing that she held a great breadth of experience was reassuring; I felt she would take care of me in this new breed. She would help me learn and understand what makes the breed special, and she would be thrilled to receive the phone call about my bitch winning her second major.

Looking around the room at the dog people who had come to pay their respects, I wondered if their thoughts were similar to mine. I'm sure they were remembering some of her particular antics at dog shows or in club meetings. We all have private moments in these situations. While holding back tears, I was thinking about how she had grown up in a dog family with an established top-winning kennel name and how she decided to continue the hard work of her mother. How she spent a large portion of her life dedicated to breeding healthy, quality pups to preserve and improve a breed. How, sadly, so much knowledge and experience was now gone. Sitting there, I understood that I was witnessing history. It's important to know where you are.

On the way home I thought about the bigger picture, how this type of dog person, the second-generation breeder, judge, and mentor, is fading away and will quickly become a distant memory. What or who will take their place? How will the future evolve? What will it look like? My fear is that there won't be the depth of knowledge and experience for newcomers to rely on. How will breed preservation continue without those dedicated people of an era gone by?

Once home from the memorial service, I hugged and kissed my beautiful bitch. The dogs from these breeders are the true legacy of a bygone era of breeders whose dedication, love, and years of hard work produced smart, healthy purebred companions whom we choose to compete with.

Society shifts, things change. We have been living in what is quickly becoming history, a time of the past that no longer exists. The era of grand kennels and second-generation breeders, judges, and mentors is passing on. What can be done at this point of change in history?

Support each other. Share ideas, welcome newcomers, teach what you know, learn what you don't know, and set an example. Do this for the future of the breed. Do it for the breeders of the past. —Gail Miller Bisher, New York, N.Y.; gailmiller1@mac.com