

## Wisconsin Puppy Mill Project Fact Sheet: "FREE TO GOOD HOME?"

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are told, "you should just give them away."

This attitude makes us shudder. In the first place, small adoption fees in no way begin to cover the cost incurred for medical treatment and upkeep of rescued pets. Yes, rescues and shelters are anxious to find homes for their animals – **GOOD** homes. **And many people who take free pets do provide wonderful homes.** However, frequently – much too frequently! – animal welfare workers are called in to rescue former "free to good home" animals.

### Did you know:

#### 1) People value what they pay for.

Pets obtained for free are less likely to be spayed or neutered by their new owners (why bother with vet bills?), and more likely to be abused and/or discarded, because "there are plenty more where that one came from!" A recent study at one animal shelter yielded the startling statistic that 51% of all owner-surrendered dogs had been purchased for less than \$100; 41% of all owner-surrendered dogs had been obtained "Free to good home."

The handsome, well-fed-looking fellow above is Brutus, and he was "spokesdog" for several years for an all-breed dog and cat rescue. Brutus started out life as the pampered friend of "Mark." Brutus and Mark played ball together and walked on the beach together, and, in general, enjoyed each other's companionship. Then, Mark's company transferred him to a different state. Mark didn't know how to take Brutus with him, or considered it unfair to submit his friend to the trauma of moving, or just plain didn't know that most states DO allow big, good-natured dogs to move in with their masters.

Whatever the reason, Mark placed an ad in his local newspaper: "Free to good home, friendly, lovable

Sometimes, shelters and rescues are criticized for charging an adoption fee. "If you're so anxious to find homes for these pets," they

black lab." Someone saw the ad, called Mark, and said, "That's just the dog I've been looking for. Can I come over and see him?" The new person was very nice to Brutus, talked to him, rubbed his ears just the way Brutus liked to have his ears rubbed, and convinced Mark that he and Brutus were just made for each other.

**Brutus's new owner's idea of a good home** was a two-foot chain tied to a rope collar, in a garbage-filled backyard, no water dish or food bowl anywhere in sight. This sweet, loving dog was now 20 pounds underweight, suffering from dehydration, malnutrition, fleas, intestinal worms, mange, fly-chewed ears, heartworm, and, worst of all, neglect.

Luckily for him, neighbors reported the situation. Police and animal welfare rescuers arrived and Brutus was confiscated. The new owner was arrested, charged, and convicted with cruelty to animals. He paid a fine that probably totaled less than Brutus's medical bills.

Brutus went to the vet for all kinds of medicine, then home with the volunteer for lunch. Several years



later, he still lived with the volunteer, who eventually adopted him! He was well and happy and a bit overweight; greeted everyone with a tail wag and a wet kiss.

Brutus, the "Free To Good Home?" poster dog, went to the Rainbow Bridge on 27 February 2002 at the estimated age of 13 years. He lived the last six of those in the lap of luxury with his rescuers. Brutus was a favorite visitor at area schools, and touched the hearts of everyone who met him. This article is his legacy: please remember Brutus and this photo every time you see an ad that says, "Free to good home."

**2) So-called "Bunchers" gather free pets until they have enough for a trip to a Class B Dealer who is licensed by the USDA to sell to animals from "random sources" for research.**

The Buncher may only get \$25 a head for former pets, while a dealer can get \$100 or even more per pet. The Class B dealer probably already has a contract with certain facilities, and will transport them to other areas within a state, even out of state. While, unfortunately, there are legitimate medical reasons to use some animals in experimentation, the majority of reputable medical labs use animals bred for the specific purpose.

However, there are many, many different types of animal "research," and many types of facilities that use dogs. Almost every cosmetic, household, and chemical product is tested on animals, including former pets obtained from shelters and Class B Dealers. Veterinary schools and medical schools, and even some engineering schools use dogs and cats in classrooms and "research." Textile manufacturers who make products for medical use test and demonstrate on dogs, frequently retired racing greyhounds.

Research facilities that use live animals in testing are supposed to be registered with the USDA (though not all are). Please check the USDA / Animal Welfare Act License and Registration lists online to see how many facilities use animals for "research" or product testing in your state – the URL is listed in the "Further Resources" section below. *(Please note that not all of these use dogs or cats!)*

**3) Free animals are taken to "blood" pit-bulls and other fighting dogs – to train them how to kill, and to enjoy it.**

Often, a larger dog's muzzle will be duct-taped shut so that he can't bite back, and the fighting dog will gain confidence in killing a dog larger than he is.

**4) One "adopter" was blacklisted by rescues and shelters, because he took free kittens to his "good home"– as dinner for a pet snake.**

**5) Unspayed or unneutered pure-bred dogs may end up as "breeding stock" in a puppy mill.**

There is nothing sadder for rescuers than to come across a mill breeder who has been a former pet. Imagine being loved, pampered, well-fed, and cherished, then ending up in a tiny cage with wire mesh under your feet, getting little food and no loving

attention. Forced to "service" female after female if you are a male dog, and forced to produce litter after litter of puppies if you are a female. Nothing is worse than betrayal of trust – these animals loved and trusted their former owners to look out for their well-being, and instead, those former owners unknowingly condemned them to a life of torture in the mills.

One woman told us she believed that if she didn't give away her Dalmatians' AKC registration papers along with the dogs, she could keep them safe from millers.

Wrong. Unscrupulous breeders, who use puppies as cash crops like other farmers raise cattle, pigs, or chickens, aren't above forging registration papers, or using those from deceased dogs, or making up their own "breed registries" so that they can claim the puppies they sell have "papers." Rescuers have learned the hard way to make sure that all pets they place have been spayed or neutered before going to new homes. Please see our Further Resources section at the end of this article for a link to our online article, "What Breed Registration Really Means."

**6) Animal Hoarders watch newspapers for Free To Good Home animals.**

The scary thing is, these collectors truly believe they are "rescuing" the animals, and will even pose as rescuers to take animals out of shelters! The events described below took place in a small town in Michigan, but animal hoarders can be found in all geographic locations and all levels of society. See "Further Resources" for the URL for the Wisconsin Puppy Mill Project's *Drive To Save Lives*, a hoarder situation in Adams Co., WI, that WPMP was involved in in 2006. (By the way, because of WI's lax laws, that particular hoarder bought a "kennel license" and is hoarding dogs again with the blessing of his county!)

When the two animal rescue volunteers and the policeman walked up the steps of an ordinary-looking house in Galien, MI, they had no idea they were walking into a living hell.

Neighbors had complained about foul smells coming from the house; the owner, they said, kept dozens of cats in there, but they hadn't seen her in a couple of weeks.

The place smelled, all right; a strong odor assaulted their noses the minute they got out of the car. Still, nothing in their experiences could have prepared them for what stunned their senses as they opened that front door: the unimaginable sights and silence and stomach-churning stench of mass death. Light was dim, and they saw trash all around – trash,

and bodies. The owner of the house had simply locked the doors and windows and left dozens of cats behind with no food or water, to die. The only thing that kept the volunteers from collapsing in despair were faint rustles, scratches, mews, coming from just out of sight around the corner. There were still live cats in this house of horrors.

Estimates range from 40 - 60 as the number of cats this lady had abandoned; it was impossible to tell for sure. Over the next few days, volunteers trapped and removed all of the live animals they could find. There were 18, in a wide range of ages, and of these, two later died.

All of them were starving, dehydrated, and totally unsociable. They had survived the only way they could, by preying on the small, the weak, the sick, and the dead. Rescued kittens lived in fear of adult cats; adult cats lived in fear of each other – and of human contact.

Meanwhile, a warrant was issued for the arrest of the house's owner, and the entire area was outraged to learn that this was her THIRD offense! The THIRD time she had "collected" a house full of cats, and then abandoned them, the SECOND time in this very same house!

**How could this happen?** It's not as unusual as you might believe – or hope. Such people are called "animal hoarders;" they take in orphaned dogs or cats, watch the "free to good home" ads, either don't believe in spaying and neutering or run out of funds for the vet bills. These hoarders actually think they are "rescuing" the animals! More and more free pets come to them – they're very convincing; and they truly do love pets – and the ones they have keep reproducing, until the hoarders are overwhelmed. In the best circumstances, animal rescue organizations are called. In the worst – the hoarder simply walks away.

The owner of the "Galien Hell House" was located in another state, and brought back for trial. She served jail time, paid a fine, did community service, but there is no guarantee that as soon as her sentence is served, she won't simply move to another house in another community in another state, and start answering "Free to good home" ads again. Meanwhile, police and rescue workers tasked with "cleaning up" after her are still having nightmares.

## What Can You Do?

Some folks answering the "Free to Good Home" ads really are loving, responsible pet owners. Many – perhaps even most – are not. There are steps YOU

can take to help end abuse:

- **DON'T** advertise Free pets; **DO** convince others not to. Some people even take the time to phone owners of pets advertising Free to Good Home and warn them of the dangers.
- **DO** ask your local newspapers to quit accepting, or at least actively discourage, Free To Good Home ads.
- **DO** write letters to the editors of your local newspapers warning of the dangers of Free to Good Home. See the end of this article for a sample letter to get you started.
- **DO** spay/neuter to keep from creating possible Free to Good Home situations or condemning your pet to a short, miserable life in a puppy mill.
- **DO** contact breed rescue organizations (there is one for every breed of pure-bred dog!) or local animal welfare organizations for help in placing unwanted pets; if you bought the pet from a responsible breeder, he/she will help you rehome the pet.
- **DO** charge at least \$25 to discourage resale of pets to labs. (Some sources suggest charging no less than \$100 for pure-bred dogs.)
- **DO** take the time to interview every prospective owner. Ask for vet and personnel references, and check them, then visit the new home where your pet might be living!
- **DO** write a letter to your state and federal representatives in support of animal protection legislation, aimed at regulating puppy mills, cracking down on animal fighting, and doing away with Class B dealers, who sell animals obtained from "random sources" to research facilities. Random sources include strays, stolen pets, seized shelter animals, animals purchased at flea markets--and pets found through "Free to good home" ads. (See our "Further Resources" section for websites that will tell you what state and federal legislation is pending.)
- **DO** report any incidence of suspected dog-fighting to police, Animal Control, and your local Humane Society. **DON'T** try to stop these people yourselves; there is a lot of money involved here, and you could be putting yourself and your pets at risk if you try to intervene alone.

- **DO** call police, animal welfare workers, even the health department, if someone in your area seems to be "collecting" cats or dogs.
- **DO** write to district attorneys, judges, and prosecutors if you hear of the arrest of any so-called collectors in your area, and urge them not only to prosecute to the full extent of the law, but also to mandate psychological counseling for these individuals in the hopes of avoiding repeat violations.
- **DO** call police or animal welfare workers for any incidences of suspected abuse. Be willing to testify in court, if necessary. Note: what constitutes animal abuse is defined by state law. If your state has inadequate abuse laws, **TRY TO CHANGE THEM!**
- **DO** visit the "First Strike" section of the HSUS website (URL below) for printable fact sheets for Law Enforcers and Prosecutors detailing the links between cruelty to animals and violence against humans, and share them with the appropriate agencies in your area.

**Remember—the welfare of pets is in ALL of our hands!**

### Further Resources:

- **Read this article online:** <http://www.nowisconsinpupmills.com/free.html>
- **Reporting Animal Cruelty:** <http://www.nowisconsinpupmills.com/reporting-cruelty.html>
- **USDA / Animal Welfare Act License and Registration lists** (dealers and research facilities):  
<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/home/>
- **What Does Breed Registration Really Mean?** <http://www.nowisconsinpupmills.com/akc.html>
- **"First Strike": The Connection Between Animal Cruelty and Human Violence:**  
[http://www.hsus.org/hsus\\_field/first\\_strike\\_the\\_connection\\_between\\_animal\\_cruelty\\_and\\_human\\_violence/](http://www.hsus.org/hsus_field/first_strike_the_connection_between_animal_cruelty_and_human_violence/)
  - Download Fact Sheets and other materials:  
[http://www.hsus.org/hsus\\_field/first\\_strike\\_the\\_connection\\_between\\_animal\\_cruelty\\_and\\_human\\_violence/download\\_first\\_strike\\_materials.html](http://www.hsus.org/hsus_field/first_strike_the_connection_between_animal_cruelty_and_human_violence/download_first_strike_materials.html)
- **Animal Hoarding:**
  - Animal Hoarding: <http://www.nowisconsinpupmills.com/animal-hoarding-overview.html>
  - "Drive To Save Lives," Adams County, WI, the Geds case: <http://www.nowisconsinpupmills.com/savelives.html>
  - Psychiatric Times, "People Who Hoard Animals": <http://www.psychiatrictimes.com/display/article/10168/54031>
- **Laws and Legislation:**
  - Find your Elected State/Federal Officials: <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>
- **Rehoming Responsibly:**
  - Finding shelters/rescues near you: [www.petfinder.com](http://www.petfinder.com) & [www.pets911.com](http://www.pets911.com) .
  - Can We Help You Keep Your Pet? <http://www.wonderpuppy.net/canwehelp> – alternatives to giving pets away, including tips on solving common behavior problems, moving, house breaking, new baby, allergies, pet health problems, and grooming tips. If there is no other alternative, this site lists things to consider in finding your pet a new home.
  - Dog Owners' Guide: Minimizing Owner Surrenders: <http://www.canismajor.com/dog/surrend1.html>

 **Sample Letter to the Editor:**

Editorial Page Editor  
Newspaper name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip

Editor:

I was distressed at the number of "Free Pets to Good Homes" ads in the newspaper tonight, and just had to write to let people know what happens to many of the pets obtained through such ads. Much too frequently, animal shelters and rescue organizations are called in to rescue former "free to good home" pets--if the pets are lucky.

There are very good reasons that reputable animal shelters and rescues charge an adoption fee for their animals. These small fees in no way begin to cover the cost incurred for medical treatment and upkeep of the pets they adopt out. Did you know:

- People value what they pay for. Pets obtained for free are more likely to be abused and/or discarded, because "there are plenty more where that came from!"
- So-called "Bunchers" gather free pets until they have enough to make a trip to a lab worthwhile, then sell them for "research," household product and cosmetic testing, and vivisection!
- Free animals are taken to "blood" pit-bulls--to train fighting dogs how to kill, and to enjoy it!
- According to one Humane Society, free kittens are being taken to new "good homes" in some areas--as dinner for a pet snake!
- Puppy millers take free unspayed/unneutered pure-bred dogs for breeding stock.
- So-called Animal Hoarders watch the newspapers for Free to Good Home animals. These collectors truly believe they are "rescuing" the animals!

Some people answering the "Free to Good Homes" ads really are loving, responsible pet owners. Many -- perhaps even most -- are not. Please DON'T advertise Free pets; charge at least \$25 to discourage sale to research labs. Please DO take the time to interview each and every prospective owner; the Humane Society or any rescue organization can help you with what types of questions to ask. And please have Mama spayed as soon as the kittens or puppies are weaned!

Sincerely,

(your signature)

Your Name  
Your Address  
Your Telephone Number