

WITNESS TO CRUELTY

The Amish – Puppy Mill Connection

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LANCASTER COUNTY: A BOOMING TOURIST TRADE

Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, a 946-square-mile area, is described as an agricultural oasis. With its gently rolling green hills and lush pastures as far as the eye can see, the pastoral county is home to over 4,000 farms. It is also home to almost 22,000 Amish, whose ancestors arrived in Pennsylvania in the mid 1700's. Setting them apart from modern society are their distinctive plain, dark-colored clothes, wide-brimmed straw hats (men & boys), organdy caps (women & girls) and horse-drawn buggies. Outsiders are captivated by these unobtrusive people who seem virtually suspended in the 18th century. Along with shunning modern conveniences like cars and electricity and using old-fashioned mule power to plow their fields, the Amish draw attention unlike any other religious group. They are one of the most popular tourist attractions in Pennsylvania, due partly to the critically acclaimed 1985 movie "Witness" which was filmed on location in Lancaster County. Starring Harrison Ford as the handsome Philadelphia detective

and Kelly McGillis as the beautiful ethereal Amish widow, it is the story of forbidden love and colliding cultures, and the use of guns and violence to settle disputes, something that is anathema to the Amish. The movie, with its stunning cinematography and gorgeous musical score, enticed millions of viewers to look further into this mysterious sect known as the Amish.

Each year about four million tourists flock to Lancaster County, pumping over 1.2 billion dollars into the economy, and looking for a chance to gawk at the Amish, eat at Amish-themed restaurants, and buy Amish-made crafts (furniture and quilts in particular) and homemade preserves and pies. Many tourists vie for the opportunity to take pictures of unsuspecting Amish, even though photographs are strictly forbidden by the group. In fact, in Amish-owned businesses, signs warn "NO photographs allowed!"

TRUTH AND FICTION: THE PUPPY MILL CAPITAL OF THE EAST

Lancaster County is also a place where you'll find the lines between truth and fiction closely guarded. The Amish are not quite as anachronistic as they may appear at first glance: contemporary Amish have cell phones, caller ID, answering machines, generator-operated heaters and propane-driven appliances. While car ownership is banned, they see nothing wrong in riding in them and often hire others to shuttle them around town. Telephones are not allowed in Amish homes, but many are found in barns or booths, called shanties. Many Amish own freezers but keep them in non-Amish neighbors' homes, sometimes paying rent for the space. (Mennonites, the older, less-strict religious order from whom the

Amish split in the 1600's, drive cars and have electricity. Old Order Mennonites, also known as "horse & buggy" Mennonites, are but a mirror image of the Amish.)

Besides raising cows and chickens, hundreds of Amish (and Mennonites), are engaged in another "agricultural" venture, that of large-scale dog breeding known as puppy mills. When it comes to the subject of dog breeding and the Amish, nowhere are the sounds of silence by tight-lipped local officials and the Tourism Board more apparent. Given that the Amish are well known for their agricultural skills, it's no wonder that most people are stunned when told that many Amish, with their large-scale commercial kennels, are responsible for Pennsylvania's reputation among the animal welfare community as the "puppy mill capital of the east."

So how and why are the Amish engaged in such a controversial, exploitative industry as puppy mills?

BIRTH OF AN INDUSTRY DEFINED BY CRUELTY AND GREED



The Midwest gave birth to puppy mills during the Depression as means for families to earn extra income during hard economic times. Today, even after decades of controversy, these mills continue to operate, unabated, contributing to the burgeoning animal

overpopulation crisis and the collapse of sound breeding practices.



No one knows for sure when the first puppy mills surfaced in Pennsylvania but many were established by the mid 70's, when it was learned that a dog broker from the Midwest arrived on the scene to promote dog breeding as a cash crop. At a meeting in November 1981, several hundred Amish and Mennonite farmers were told they could raise and sell puppies to the public and pet stores alike, and with little or no overhead, they could make a fortune. Centrally located, Lancaster County was easy pickings for customers in Maryland, Delaware, New York, New Jersey and New England.

Unfortunately, the Amish began breeding and raising many different breeds of dogs with little or no knowledge of veterinary care and nutritional needs, and scant attention to hereditary problems, especially those caused by inbreeding. How was it possible that these amateur Amish breeders - who only attend school up to eighth grade and whose crudely made signs advertising puppies for sale often contained misspelled words - could read veterinary medical labels? Hidden away from the unsuspecting public, dogs are crammed in wire-bottom pens in and often behind barns or trailers. Thus, dog breeding

gave rise to another cottage industry: the construction of Amish-made cages on legs, similar to rabbit hutches, used to confine the animals and to make cleaning up animal waste easier. The dogs live for years in these cages with no chance of release or relief until they are no longer able to produce puppies and are destroyed.

A HISTORY OF VIOLATIONS AND CONSUMER COMPLAINTS

On March 17, 1991, *The Pittsburgh Press* ran a four-part series on the problems faced by puppy purchasers. The headline "Puppy Protection - Buyers Beg State for Dog Lemon Law" jumped off the front page. The editors followed suit a few days later by taking an anti-puppy mill position in a superbly-written editorial. Later that year, a Pennsylvania state task force was organized to study state kennel regulations and ways of offering protection for consumers who purchased sick puppies from breeders. Yet by mid-1992, little had been accomplished. After one year, nothing more was heard from the task force.

In 1992-93, more articles in Pennsylvania newspapers warned of rising consumer complaints of sick puppies purchased from Amish kennels, and of deplorable conditions witnessed by customers and investigators alike. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) called for a boycott of Pennsylvania and Lancaster County until the breeders cleaned up their act. According to many Amish breeders who supplied puppies to pet stores up and down the East Coast, the boycott had no effect on wholesale purchases and Lancaster County tourism continued to boom.

Pennsylvania dog wardens and humane agents discovered that many Amish breeders were violating animal health, shelter and sanitation regulations. The issue intensified in 1993 when *The New York Times* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer* ran articles with the headlines "Amish at Heart of Puppy Mill Debate" and "Amish Dog Breeders Targeted over Cruelty." Some Amish kennel owners granted interviews but would not allow reporters or photographers near the dogs' breeding areas, usually in and behind barns or sheds. Many breeders, who owned chicken and dairy farms, claimed they raised dogs just like any other livestock, keeping them in small cages and killing them when they are no longer "productive." In September 1993 a state Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement official reported that "the Amish are a significant part of the problem...a dog is the same as a chicken to them."



Then, in December 1995, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* ran a three-part investigative piece on Pennsylvania's puppy mills. The headline and byline captured the heart of the matter: "Breeding Dogs and Disease: Pennsylvania's prolific kennels have spawned viruses and genetic defects. Some buyers get puppies that die within days. Puppy mills ruin the family pet."

Lancaster County dog breeders Melvin Nolt and Daniel Kauffmann, who reluctantly agreed to be interviewed for the *Inquirer* article, had difficulty understanding the way dogs were perceived by "city people."



Kauffmann, who was convicted of animal cruelty in 1990, said "We country people do not look at dogs that much different from other animals. When you have livestock, you have deadstock. Why is this such a big issue?" Melvin Nolt admitted he began breeding dogs in 1974 with the purchase of seven cocker Spaniels from a Western dealer. "It's an animal. It's just like any crop that comes along. We breed for the money," Nolt said. "That's what we're in it for."

In September 1996 *The New York Post* ran a scathing exposé titled "\$4.4M Puppy Mill Scandal" that focused on Lancaster County's puppy farmers. The NY ASPCA and *The Post* gained access to some of the worst kennels in the area and interviewed the owners. The reporter found animals crammed in cages in dark sheds; filthy, matted, feces-covered animals who were "unresponsive to a visitor's presence and voice." Owner David Zimmerman previously had his license suspended by the USDA and was fined over \$51,000, a sum which he refused to pay. Thumbing his nose at authorities, Zimmerman continued to breed and sell dogs.

ASPCA investigators visited the farm of Melvin Nolt (mentioned in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* article) and saw even more deplorable conditions. According to *The Post*, Nolt, who had been cited for repeat violations by the USDA, sold about 800 puppies at an average of \$225 each in 1995. Notorious puppy miller Daniel P. Esh was also mentioned in the same article for selling puppies without a USDA license.

THE FORCE OF ONE WOMAN: THE PA DOG PURCHASER PROTECTION ACT BECOMES LAW

Enter the Pennsylvania Federation of Dog Clubs and Dotsie Keith, Federation Legislative Chairperson. Both the Federation and Keith were instrumental in helping write legislation to protect animals and puppy-buying consumers in the state. For years, Keith documented the medical and psychological problems seen in pet shop and puppy mill animals by reviewing consumer complaints. Then, through her work with shelters and veterinarians, the concept of a puppy lemon law was launched. In July 1997, after a long nine-year battle, then-Governor Ridge signed into law the Dog Purchaser Protection Act.



In her remarkable opinion piece, "Why Pennsylvania's Dog Clubs Fought for a Puppy Lemon Law", Keith recounted the

hurdles and opposition she and others encountered along the way. One surprising challenger was Robert Yarnall, Jr., of Kimbertal Kennels in Chester County, a commercial Doberman and Rottweiler breeding facility. Yarnall and Kimbertal Kennels were cited in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* article for breeding and selling animals with hereditary problems resulting from inbreeding. Yarnall claimed the inbreeding was accidental.

According to Keith, "Yarnall started a campaign of misinformation and lies to try to destroy us and our federation - making us stronger and more determined to get the law passed. We had the support of the American Kennel Club (AKC), the state's humane societies, veterinarians, animal rights groups, national animal welfare organizations and dozens of dedicated individuals working with us."

Currently, Yarnall is busy recruiting puppy millers to join his American Canine Association (ACA), a private dog registry based in Pennsylvania. Many of the breeders/puppy millers are Amish and Mennonite who had their AKC privileges suspended and who are now using the ACA. Touted by the ACA as "America's largest veterinary health tracking purebred canine registry," this list is really nothing more than your run-of-the-mill dog registry, based on paperwork provided by consumers who purchased sick puppies in New Jersey pet shops.

Several dogs were found to have genetic conditions and other health problems. A spokeswoman for the ACA, in an e-mail message last year, stated that the "goal of the ACA is to track the genetics of canines for defects and strengths. Only those individuals or companies who have chosen to have the foresight and desire to improve the canine genetic world, by selling ACA registered canines, have the privilege of being listed on our web site.

We strongly commend those who wish to improve the canine world by breeding genetically superior canines." However, we were unable to find names of breeders on the ACA website, only pet stores were listed.



NO END IN SIGHT: UNLICENSED KENNELS AND LACK OF ENFORCEMENT

The Pennsylvania Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement issues licenses and inspects the state's dog kennels, numbering in the thousands. Lancaster County has the highest number of licensed kennels in the state, nearly 300 for the year 2004. Any kennel that has 26 or more dogs must be licensed by the state. It is unknown how many unlicensed kennels exist but clearly they are numerous. The state issues kennel licenses but it is up to local municipalities to enforce zoning laws that limit the number of animals in a kennel. Some kennels far exceed - literally by hundreds - the maximum number of dogs allowed, with as many as 900-1,000 dogs in one kennel alone! Local governments often blame the state for the problem, while the state claims it's a local issue. With all the bickering going on back and forth, is it any wonder the laws aren't being enforced?

Several kennels are notorious, because of the inhumane conditions in which the animals are kept and the number of

consumer complaints. Among them are Daniel P. Esh of Clearview Kennel, Joyce Stoltzfus of CC Pets, formerly known as Puppy Love Kennel, and Angela Holloway of Heavenview Goldens and Shelties. (The latter two happen to be non-Amish.) All have been cited numerous times by the state for violations in areas of housing, sanitation and general care of the animals, and all have been suspended by the American Kennel Club. Esh surrendered his USDA license last summer after years of serious violations, claiming he no longer "wholesales." All three have been sued by the Pennsylvania Attorney General, yet their licenses were renewed in 2004 and they continue to sell dogs.



In April 2004, Esh sold a number of Poodles and Pugs at a dog auction in Missouri. Sadly, there was no reprieve for his dogs as they were sold for use as breeding stock in yet another puppy mill. (It was noted on the auction list that some dogs were "missing teeth" but were "good breeders.") Amazingly, Esh is now selling puppies over the Internet with the help of a longtime friend, one who is regularly seen driving Esh around town, including to the courthouse to answer charges of animal cruelty and neglect.

Repeat violations and unscrupulous business practices notwithstanding, rarely is a kennel closed down permanently. Since 2000, a few have been raided by the state and breed-rescue groups who

were able to liberate a number of animals, rehabilitate them and find caring, permanent homes for them. One state and humane society raid that resulted in a kennel closing a few years ago, that of Aaron Zimmerman, caused quite a controversy. After selling some 59 dogs for \$6,000 to a rescue group in PA and giving the remaining dogs to other rescues, Zimmerman held onto his USDA license and hightailed it to New York's Finger Lakes region where he again set up shop running another puppy mill. Zimmerman, who was also sued by the Attorney General for selling sick puppies to his favorite buyer, Joyce Stoltzfus, hasn't looked back. The Finger Lakes region is fast becoming a haven for Mennonite and Amish puppy millers, with about 60 millers having relocated to the area so far - less than a dozen of these are USDA-licensed. Left unchecked, the area is ripe to become another Lancaster County!

THE "AMISH PROBLEM": NEW JERSEY'S BANE

Many puppies sold in New Jersey pet stores originate from Amish and Mennonite puppy mills in Pennsylvania, with the highest concentration coming from Lancaster County. It's a love-hate relationship, with some pet stores refusing to buy puppies from Pennsylvania because of the "Amish problem" while others sell only puppies from Pennsylvania because of the bad reputation of the puppy mills in the Midwestern states. Some pet stores sell animals from both regions. The majority of NJ pet stores have their puppies trucked in by Midwestern brokers like the Hunte Corporation, Tracy's, and Pine Spring Pets, even though there is a licensed broker based here in Cumberland County, NJ.

Debby Ford, owner of Pampered Pup Kennels, travels weekly to Pennsylvania to buy puppies and then delivers them to shops around New Jersey. She is licensed by the USDA and also holds an "out-of state dealer's license" from Pennsylvania, which requires that anyone entering the state to buy puppies wholesale must have a license. Two other NJ pet dealers operate legally by holding a license to buy from Pennsylvania. But here's where the trouble begins.

For anyone who wants to make quick and easy money, Lancaster County's puppies are there for the taking. Buyers living in bordering states can be in and out in a day! There is no oversight and no supervision of puppy sales, which opens up the avenues to illegal puppy brokering. People descend in droves on the area's farms to buy litters of puppies for resale, either in pet shops or through classified ads. Unscrupulous buyers pay as little as \$10 per puppy and get even better bargains when they purchase "litter lots." Never mind that, by law, interstate animal transport regulations require an individual health certificate for each animal. These can be easily forged and often are. Never mind that people are selling these puppies as their own. They often lie.

Unsuspecting buyers then fork over cash for puppies that are too young to be taken from their mothers, are often unhealthy, or are not the "purebreds" buyers think they are. Oftentimes the "papers" include false names and/or addresses of the breeders. Everyone is participant in this network of fraud and deceit but the only likely winners are the puppy millers and their brokers.

THE FALLACY OF "FARM-RAISED" ANIMALS

Earlier this year, several illegal brokers were identified and their names turned in to Pennsylvania and New Jersey officials. A few have been ordered to stop selling animals, while others are being watched. Still others continue to beat the system and dupe customers, just as the Amish continue to do by having more dogs than legally allowed; by keeping them hidden from sight, crammed in cages in barns and trailers where they swelter in the summer heat and freeze in the winter; and by peddling their dogs in the classifieds as "Amish raised," as if that were an attractive selling point.



And remember those puppy mill operators who were the subject of the above-mentioned newspaper articles? Recently we found Melvin Nolt's name on cage cards in a local NJ pet shop. Nolt in 2000 had over 750 dogs in his kennel, which he keeps in long rows of cages along side his barn. Esh is consistently over his township's legal limit of 250 dogs by having more than 600 dogs in his barn and in cages on his farm. Still, no one comes close to Amos M. Zimmerman, who keeps almost 900 dogs in his kennel! Nolt also has serious, repeat USDA violations but that doesn't stop him from selling or the

pet shops from buying! And Daniel Esh is listed as one of the breeders for puppies sold by an unlicensed broker through the classifieds in *The Asbury Park Press*.

Many consumers have the impression that "farm-raised" puppies are better bred and cared for than their Midwestern counterparts. Not so! A puppy mill puppy is a puppy mill puppy. Any ad that says "no Sunday calls" is no doubt Amish or Mennonite, as neither sells on Sundays. Ads or signs that say "farm-raised" means only that the animals are kept somewhere on a farm, out of sight in barns or outbuildings. When we visited Daniel Esh at Clearview Kennel, he brought his puppies to us and would not let us see the parents or go near the barn. Even smaller-scale backyard breeders would not let us see the parents and instead brought the puppies to us - a serious red flag!



DON'T BUY FROM PET STORES: MAKE ADOPTION YOUR ONLY OPTION

If you're interested in acquiring a companion animal, visit your local shelter, local breed-rescue groups, and Petfinder.com. There you'll find many wonderful dogs and puppies (and cats, kittens, rabbits, as well as others) waiting to find permanent, caring homes. Shelters and rescue groups routinely evaluate for

temperament and behavior, and try to carefully match the animal with a prospective new adopter. Never, ever purchase an animal from a pet shop. Instead, give the gift of life - adopt your next companion from a shelter or rescue group.



Sources: The archives of
The Lancaster Intelligencer and New Era
The New York Times
The New York Post
The Philadelphia Inquirer
The Pittsburgh Press

Libby Williams is the founder and president of New Jersey Consumers Against Pet Shop Abuse, an all-volunteer, non-profit 501(c)3 organization dedicated to ending puppy mills and pet shop consumer fraud.

For more information on Pennsylvania's puppy mills, the perils of buying any animal from pet shops and general puppy mill info, please contact New Jersey Consumers Against Pet Shop Abuse at: info@njcapsa.org

Or visit the website:
WWW.NJCAPSA.ORG

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