

Dear Mary,

This letter is about the dog and cats in general, and the question of Breeding your dog “Annie” in particular.

Not too long ago, I didn’t much like people who use shock tactics and hysteria to make points. I believed that if you have *good* reasons for what you say and present your thoughts clearly, people will listen. I’m not so sure anymore. I’m a different person than I was six months ago, before I began working at the animal shelter.

Baby animals are adorable and fun. Birth itself is amazing, and being part of it is so exciting. Since I was a little kid, I wanted to breed dogs for just that reason: to bring beautiful pups into the world and to raise them with love. Why not?

I’ll explain. Dogs and cats never become independent. They are perpetual two-year-olds. So, if you cause a puppy to be born, you are responsible for him for the rest of his life—even after you find the puppy the “perfect” home. What about the people you have in mind for the pups? You think they’d be good dog owners? I’ve met some very nice people in the past few months, people I was sure would give good homes to some of our favorite animals. But some came back. “He got too big.” “He won’t bark.” “He sheds.” “We’re moving.” “He chews.” “We can’t houstrain him.” “We want to travel.” “It’s too expensive.” Or the animals *don’t* come back, and we hear they’ve been hit by cars, caught in traps, poisoned, or shot.

Each year, between 2,000 and 4,000 dogs and cats are humanely killed at our city animal shelter, for the simple reason that there are thousands more dogs and cats than available homes in this area. If you do the math, what this means is that for every 10 puppies and kittens that are born, 4-5 of them will ultimately lose their life at the animal shelter. Just about half. *Where do they all come from?* If not spayed and neutered, 5 male and 5 female cats will on average turn into 160 cats in just 2 years. Dogs and cats aren’t like people; tough times don’t give them more character. The suffering caused by carelessness, ignorance, and abandonment is meaningless.

Are you still with me? I don’t *want* to tell you horror stories, but I’m full of them. Thousands of them. Each one that we can’t place is a unique failure. Some have serious problems and it is best to euthanize them. The affectionate, playful black kitten who purred and looked into my eyes as he died; the pups who licked my face as I felt their bodies sag; the patient, loving dogs, the gracious cats—I wish *they* were the ones who could write this letter to you. But they can’t. So, we store up their pain and their love and speak for them, with deep sadness and sometimes anger, as they never would. They would speak with love and trust and puzzlement at being led from a cage or run to a quiet room with a metal table, where someone lovingly holds their paw while they take their last breath, simply because they have nowhere else to go.

It doesn’t seem like much to ask. Please don’t breed Annie.

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