

Feeling Guilty About Your Purebred?

The New York Times
by **Ted Kerasote**

February 17, 2010

Dividing the world into those who should feel guilty for owning a pedigreed pooch and those who can feel self-righteous for rescuing a mutt does little to solve the two major challenges domestic dogs face today: careless breeding and an antiquated shelter system.

The first is epitomized by Westminster and the purebred dog world, where breeding for a certain look has caused damage to the health of dogs, the golden retriever being the prime example of choosing from a small gene pool. The result has been that about 60 percent of golden retrievers now die of cancer in the United States.

The second challenge is a shelter system that's mired in a century-old tradition of using euthanasia to address so-called unwanted dogs. In fact, the number of dogs who pass away each year, and whose people would like a new companion, is about the number of dogs we put to death each year in shelters. Why, then, aren't more adopted?

In short, many shelters aren't proactive. They're not open at night, making it difficult for working people to adopt a dog; they don't run foster-care programs with local communities; and they don't partner with purebred rescue organizations. So should we

blame breeders for killing the chances of a shelter dog or old-guard shelter personnel whose default is a needle?

Assigning blame to one or the other won't do much to bring more genetic diversity into the world of purebred dogs or help shelters operate in more diverse and life-saving ways. Nor does instigating guilt give the slightest nod toward the magic that happens when a person and a dog, purebred or not, fall in love.