



A PUPPY FOR CHRISTMAS?



The following article is a copyright of the San Francisco Bay West Highland White Terrier Club. It was written about Westies, but it certainly applies to Berner puppies or any other pet you are considering adding to your family during the holiday season!

The fantasy of surprising your loved ones with an adorable puppy under the tree on Christmas Morning may seem like the perfect gift...but is it really? Humane Societies, shelter workers, the AKC, reputable breeders and rescue groups across the country resoundingly say NO!

Animals should never be given as gifts at any time of the year and the holidays are, in fact, the worst time to bring a dog of any age into your home and your life.

New puppies require extra attention and a stable environment that Christmas usually does not permit. Caring for the puppy's round-the-clock feeding and housetraining needs as well as finding time to comfort and reassure an insecure pup amidst the holiday chaos can be a difficult task.

Just think about a few of the potentially hazardous and no-win scenarios to which you will be subjecting a young Christmas puppy:

- Doors left open with people coming and going giving a new dog the opportunity to run away -- a catastrophic situation for your pup and your family not to mention your loss of money.
- Pup will be underfoot and could be stepped on causing an injury resulting in a broken paw or leg.
- Household will not be in any routine which means the pup will not establish a routine for housetraining -- a situation that will add extra time to the overall housetraining process and unnecessary stress for you and your dog. Also, remember that winter weather generally does not provide the optimum conditions for housetraining.
- Numerous additional household safety hazards for your puppy due to holiday decorations, gifts and festivities.
- The all-important introduction and transition period to forge the bond between you and your pup will be seriously compromised. Pets need to have the right start in a family or bad habits can develop.
- Holiday activities will impair your ability to adequately supervise the interaction of the new puppy and your children -- the risk of a sick, frightened, injured or confused pup biting your child is very high.

Puppies given as gifts are usually impulse purchases from pet stores because reputable breeders do not sell puppies during the holiday season. A dog is not a toy that can be returned or discarded. And the result of making the wrong choice when selecting a living being as a gift is tragic. Ask any shelter worker or rescue volunteer about the influx of ill, untrained and unwanted dogs in the holiday aftermath.

No matter how much you think your loved one would enjoy this "surprise", you should never presume to make this decision for another person. Owning a dog can bring years of happiness but it takes the right match of pet and owner to create that bond. A dog is another family member and requires a lifelong commitment, therefore, lifestyle, time and financial resources are important considerations in selecting the right breed. Given that many breeds, including Westies, can live well into their teen years, this is a major decision requiring emotional stability and financial responsibility -- it is a decision that can not be taken lightly.

This is an important decision that needs to involve the entire family and can not be made in a hurry. It takes time to research the appropriate breed, choose a reputable breeder and select the perfect pup. The wait will be well worth it! No one should ever be denied the joy of selecting his or her own dog.

We highly recommend you place a "Puppy Gift Package" instead of a live pup under the Christmas tree. This is a fun gift to create and a fun gift to receive. This gift package can consist of a wide variety of items such as a stuffed dog complete with a big red bow, a gift certificate entitling the recipient to the "dog of your choice", a crate, gift certificates for the first veterinary check-up and puppy socialization classes, dog toys, bowls, leash, collar, brush, comb, books about dog care and dog breeds, video on dog training, donation to a rescue group or shelter -- be creative and have fun!

You may discover by your loved one's reaction on Christmas morning that the idea of a new puppy and the accompanying responsibility is less than thrilling and definitely not wanted. However by giving the "Puppy Gift Package" nothing is really lost. All the items can be returned to the mall or donated to your local shelter or rescue group. Then together you and your loved one can pick out something really wanted.

On the other hand if a puppy is really desired, your "Puppy Gift Package" will be greatly appreciated. Then after the holidays, when life has returned to a normal pace, together you and your family can thoughtfully begin the process of going to dog shows, talking with breeders, selecting the right dog and giving your dog the right start. Your time and effort will be greatly rewarded with a faithful companion who will give you a lifetime of love and devotion.

