

KENDALL
by Jeanne A. Cook

Years ago I bought my first Mastiff, "Kendall", over the phone from an ad I had seen in a national magazine. She was 4 1/2 months old, from "big name" champion stock. The friendly (supposedly experienced) breeder represented her as a wonderful pup, saying her only shortcomings were that she was "light-boned" and "didn't have great brindling". He said she could earn a championship, but it would take some time, so he was selling her as "pet quality".

From the day she was shipped in, my vets said "send her back". She was extremely shy. But I had fallen in love with her, didn't have the heart to ship her back and I was hoping I could help her. When anyone came to my house, she would run under the kitchen table, growl and quiver. I had obedience trained my other dogs and began socializing her the next week. I kept in touch often with the breeder. The breeder advised "Mastiffs are just like that. Put her in the bedroom when somebody comes over and she will grow out of it". When I told him what my vets, trainers, and experienced dog people had said about her, he said "They don't know anything about Mastiffs. They aren't like any other dogs."

Kendall was not just extremely shy, she was also mentally unstable. She became more confident with obedience, and became pretty well trained. She was fine as long as there were no strangers, and would settle down in unfamiliar surroundings. But she also became very unpredictable with maturity. While walking in the yard with my brother (whom she had grown up with and adored), one minute she was fine, then suddenly, without provocation, she was sullen and stalking, then suddenly friendly again, all within 5 minutes' time. She continued to go back and forth at times. In the beginning she was fine with my husband and loved my children but she became unpredictable with everyone but me. Around 13 months of age, without provocation, she went for my son who was just walking past her. That afternoon, also without provocation, she began slinking behind the furniture stalking my husband who was sitting in a chair, just reading a newspaper. The breeder told me I "just didn't know Mastiffs" and that I should have just kept her in the bedroom until she grew out of it. He would not take her back and was obviously tired of my calls. As much as I still loved her, I put her to sleep that evening.

There is a lot you can do with just "shyness" coming from a lack of socialization, but there is absolutely nothing you can do with a dog who is also basically unstable. Where does an unstable dog of that size fit in? What do the championships, type, size, head, etc. mean if the dog is unable to live with people? If Mastiffs were truly as the breeder had said, I didn't want another Mastiff. I watched the breed for years before taking another chance on a second Mastiff. There have been some real improvements in Mastiff personality in the last 10 years, but we still have a long way to go to improve the breed as a whole.