

THE TOP FIVE REASONS RESCUE IS CALLED

By Pat Saxon and Donna Walker, GSMDCA Rescue Chairs

1. DOG IS TOO DOMINANT
2. CANNOT HANDLE BOTH NEW BABY & DOG
3. SPOUSE 'HATES' AND IS AFRAID OF THE DOG
4. DIVORCE
5. HEALTH PROBLEMS

We could write a book about some of the more extreme cases we've handled in the past 15 months—including the dog that lived in the basement with a monkey and the lady who set her house on fire to keep animal control from taking her 16 dogs—but following are the top five reasons people contact Swissy Rescue to give up a dog.

The number one reason for surrender is dominance. Although some of the dogs we've dealt with were truly human aggressive or extremely dog aggressive, the majority of the “dominant” dogs were simply Swissies with stronger temperaments owned by families who had no clue how to properly train or socialize their dog. These dogs got the upper hand on their family at an early age and never looked back. What experienced Swissy owners consider typical Swissy behavior that needs to be addressed or controlled, many first-time Swissy owners interpret as aggressive behavior. Unfortunately, these inexperienced owners tend to wait until their sweet adorable puppy who is growling over their food bowl or grumbling at the kids weighs 120 lbs. before they contact their breeder or Rescue for help. These families simply weren't prepared for their little bundle of fur to turn into a big barking stubborn adolescent dog. Not knowing how to handle the dog, they resort to isolating the dog from the family in the garage, laundry room, or back yard, which exacerbates the problem. They wait until neighbors refuse to allow their children to come over and play anymore, or relatives threaten to shoot the dog before they reach out for help. Fortunately, most of these dogs are successfully rehabilitated in a foster home and then rehomed with a new, dog-savvy family. And, in some instances, the owners are able to learn how to properly handle and rehabilitate the dog themselves and are, happily, able to keep the dog themselves.

The second most common reason for surrender is a new baby in the household. Although many families are able to successfully introduce a new baby into the family while ensuring that their Swissy remains an integral part of the family/pack, there are those that, unfortunately, do not know how to properly train the dog and the children to respect each other. These families also tend to deal with the problem by isolating the Swissy away from the family.

A long time Swissy breeder once said that when people ask her how Swissies are with children, she asks how their children are with dogs. Not long ago, a woman called Rescue saying she just had to have a Swissy because the breed best fit her "situation". Her “situation” was that her children were aggressive and rough with their current dog, so she figured a big dog that was supposed to be “great with kids” could handle what her kids dished out. We advised this woman that a Swissy wasn't the right breed for her situation and suggested that she consider how her children's current behavior might one day result in a bite if they were aggressive with the wrong dog. Amazingly, she responded that she had never thought about that possibility. Ah, to be able to train some of the two-legged ones as well as the four.

The third reason—spouse hates and/or is afraid of the dog—was a real surprise. Many times one spouse buys the dog and the other spouse isn't on board with the addition to the family and either resents the dog, or is just plain afraid of it. By the time they call Rescue, they've usually had the dog for two or more years. It's hard to imagine what that time had been like for both the Swissy and the family member that had an issue with it. Temperament issues usually enter into this equation, but not always. The purchasing spouse thought that once the Swissy was in the home, everyone would co-exist as one big happy family, but they were wrong.

The fourth reason, divorce, is very sad. One Swissy bitch was taken to a shelter with her papers. She had lived with her family for 6-½ years. It's difficult to imagine what the children in that family must have gone through not having their best friend with them while they dealt with their parent's divorce. And it was obvious to her new owners that this Swissy girl loved children and was a good girl in general as she is sweet tempered and well behaved in her new home.

The fifth reason, health, has been the hardest for us to deal with. As many other Swissy owners, we've both personally had, and have, Swissies with health problems. Tremendous heartache often accompanies health problems and, many times, great expense associated with diagnosing and treating the health issue. But, the undying love and trust these dogs give you while you're taking care of them is priceless, to some of us.

We've had calls regarding young Swissies with joint problems or epilepsy and the issue with their owners is usually monetary — they don't have the money to treat the health problem. But then there are the owners that call us with Swissies that are 8, 9 or 10 years old. After just a conversation or two, it becomes apparent that these owners simply do not want to deal with an aging dog. Or, they don't want their incontinent female or epileptic Swissy peeing on their brand new carpet.

Unfortunately the crystal ball technique for placing dogs hasn't yet been perfected so we all, Rescue and breeders alike, are stuck with our instincts. Unfortunately even those of us with very good instincts don't always get it right. One breeder lamented that, after puppy buyers read all of the information available on the web or speak with a few breeders, they know exactly what to say and what the breeder wants to hear. And Rescue is no different; we've run across plenty of applicants that do a fine job of fooling us with their written application. Fortunately, the majority of the time we are able to weed out these people. But there are always those that slip through the cracks.

Many buyers are so obsessed with getting a puppy that they are in complete denial about whether or not they truly have the time and commitment to properly train and socialize a Swissy puppy, or deal with a health issue should it arise. Early last year a woman contacted Rescue and when told how difficult it can be to houstrain a Swissy, she said she could handle it. A year later, she wanted to give up her Swissy and claimed no one told her how hard they were to houstrain. Another woman called with an 8-month old epileptic Swissy. She claimed she had no idea epilepsy was in this breed. Obviously, this woman didn't do any research, or the breeder didn't provide enough information, or perhaps the breeder did but the woman bought the puppy anyway thinking the chance would be slim that her puppy would actually end up with a health problem. Although she was given advice on how to go about finding a veterinarian experienced with treating epilepsy so that she and her epileptic dog could have a quality life together, she kept asking whether or not she could sue the breeder, and what her legal options were. Sadly, her last concern was treating her dog. Thankfully, most owners successfully train and do a wonderful job of raising their Swissy, and most are prepared to handle potential health issues that may arise, both emotionally and financially.

We take our hats off to the breeders who place dogs on a much more regular basis than we do. It's a tough job and until you've done it yourself, you don't realize how difficult a task it can be. We've contacted many breeders and most have been very helpful and the majority have taken responsibility for their dogs. The fact that Rescue is contacted before the breeder is no reflection on the breeder. Believe it or not, although contracts are signed and breeders tell people to call them with any questions, many of these people do not think about calling the breeder. When we ask if they've contacted their breeder, many say they didn't even think about it. Some admit to being too embarrassed to contact their breeder and so are grateful when Rescue offers to make the first phone call.

By the time this article is in print, the 2nd Chance Swissy parade at the Blue Ridge will be history. George designed a wonderful logo and we plan to start incorporating it into Rescue soon. The moniker aptly describes what "Rescue" is all about — giving rescued or re-homed Swissies a 2nd chance at happiness in a loving and appropriate home.

We give our sincerest and deepest thanks and appreciation to those who have generously donated to Rescue, or donated their valuable time. Whether they traveled to ID a dog, transported, fostered or performed any other function of rescue, without your generosity and willingness to help, we could not do our job. I'm sure we speak for the rescued dogs when we say, "Thank you!"

Pat & Donna

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