

How Do We Rescue? Let Me Count the Ways*

**With apologies to Shakespeare*

By Nancy P. Melone, Ph.D.

Breed rescue gets done in many different ways. Some clubs are quite active. Others are not. Some clubs have restrictive rules on the type of BMD they will accept into their rescue program (e.g., only pure bred, no behavior problems, only in our club region) and other clubs are more lenient (e.g., Berner mixes; redeemable behavior problems, rescue when the breeder doesn't). In part, the orientation of a club's rescue operation is driven by club member attitudes and/or the size of the club's rescue budget, which in my experience, tend to be correlated. If there is no interest in rescue, the rescue budget is small. If there is interest in rescue, a priority is placed on fundraising for the rescue budget and on actually rescuing dogs. When a club's annual rescue budget is only a few hundred dollars, a club is not going to rescue very many dogs in a year¹.

Until recently, my club's annual rescue budget averaged about \$300, and we didn't rescue more than one or two dogs per year as a club². On the other hand, did club members rescue BMDs? You bet they did. How? We rescued as individuals or in small groups when there was a need – in our own geographic region or in other regions.

What you typically find when club rescue philosophies or budgets are not aligned to support a strong rescue mission is that small groups of like-minded BMD owners band together to do rescue when and where it is needed. They use their own money, pick up the dogs themselves, vet them, get to know regional shelters who get BMDs, work deals with vets who are into rescue, and get a reputation in the breed rescue scene in their region (among vets, other rescue groups and potential foster/adoptive homes - in short, people upon whom you can depend). Often, this private



activity melts geographic boundaries that might otherwise define a club's rescue "jurisdiction".

The best individual breed rescue people run the show similarly to how any breed club rescue would -- for example, I recently placed two BMDs (tipped off by a Berner-I message referring to a Petfinder ad from an Arkansas shelter). I worked with another BMDCA friend in Arkansas to pull this off, and then I drove the 20 hours to pick up the two BMDs from the shelter to bring them back to Pennsylvania. No club was involved although I did contact privately an international breeder friend who is a member of a Western European BMD club. After some research by my out-of-state colleague, we obtained a pedigree suggesting that at least one of these puppy mill bitches (and possibly both) were imports bred by a person who has been a problem breeder for the Western European breed club³. Happily, these two matronly BMD girls (4 and 5 years old) are now living with an older woman who was able to offer them a wonderful home on a farm here in Western PA.

This rescue brought me immense personal satisfaction, and in the process of working through this placement, I revised my views on placing dogs with older people (assuming a good support system is present). Akin to a reputable BMD breeder, I developed a policy where I am listed in the elderly lady's will as the guardian of the dogs should that role be required of me. In part, what prompted me to think about this issue was the thought that I might one day be considered an unacceptable adoptive home for a Berner simply because I was a woman of "a certain age." Age only matters as it relates to the prospective owner's ability to physically, mentally or finan-

cially care for the dog. Many older dogs do quite well with older owners and vis-a-versa.

People rescue for many reasons, but the biggest and most honorable reason is because there is a need. Some regions of the country with a rescue need have a club ready to do the job -- and that is good. Some areas with a rescue need have clubs that either cannot or will not do the job. In other areas of the country, there are no clubs nearby to rescue the breed. In these last two situations, someone must step up to the plate if a dog is to be rescued from a poor situation. Often, in such situations, rescue-minded individuals (many of whom are BMDCA members) quietly and unceremoniously do the job.

I have been part of rescue through my club, as a former BARC Trustee, whenever my rescue friends call me for help, and on my own. In my mind, there is not a single best way to organize breed rescue, but through cooperation, we work together to get the job done -- wherever and whenever there is a need.

Notes.

1. As a former BARC trustee, I have specific knowledge rescue costs (based on data from approximately 300 dogs). During my tenure on the board, we allocated approximately \$300 per rescue. This generally covered the cost of food, drugs (e.g., antibiotics, pain control, flea and parasite control) and necessary veterinary care (spay/neuter using safer anesthesia and a discounted rate from the veterinarian).

2. As a result of taking on many new breed-related activities under the leadership of Dr. Mary Dawson, including an annual regional specialty, biennial draft tests, and other breed-related events (matches, Berner Olympics), our club rescue budget is now fiscally very healthy.

3. The shelter does not receive pedigree information from the puppy miller (his condition) on these dogs so we much research their backgrounds on our own.

