



## A New Puppy for Christmas!

# ANIMAL CRACKERS

That phrase conjures up visions of a cuddly bundle of fur on Christmas morning. Children giggling with glee with the present Santa brought for them and the flurry of activity surrounding the

new family member is sure to provide quite an exciting time for all. Just envisioning that scene has me grinning from ear to ear conjuring up the same warm, homey feelings like that of a Norman Rockwell Christmas card.

While this may be exactly the kind of Christmas morning you would like your family to experience, I implore you to think long and hard before taking this step. Not long after the thrill of the new pup wears off comes the responsibility of taking care of this new family member.

The care and expense that a puppy brings with it are all too often underestimated. Just recently, one of my clients got a new puppy. Their adorable dog unfortunately got very ill resulting in vet bills well over \$1,000 dollars before they owned the dog for 3 weeks! Now, this was certainly an out of ordinary situation but it can happen. At the very least, proper care for a new pups first year of normal vet care can easily rise into several hundred dollars.

What about the normal daily care this puppy will require? Housebreaking, exercise and feeding the new puppy can be difficult to schedule around work, after school activities, homework, meals, shopping, etc. Services such as PetMinders, Inc. offers can help assist in the pup's daily care providing dog-walking and feeding services. Care for the pup when the family goes on vacation can also be provided by PetMinders, Inc.

More often than not, a new puppy is purchased to meet the desires of ones children. I certainly believe that teaching a child to properly care for their new furry friend is a wonderful way to build the bond between the child and pup and teaches the child a sense of responsibility and caring. Is your child old and mature enough to benefit by this new set of responsibilities? Are you prepared to pickup the slack when your child, for whatever reason, can't care for the animal? These are important questions to ponder and answer as honestly as possible.

If you are not sure if going the puppy route is the right thing for your family, why not try fostering a dog. Service dog associations such as the Seeing Eye are constantly seeking foster homes to help in the raising of their service dogs. Taking one of these dogs into your home is a wonderful way to experience dog ownership and get it ready for its future job. There are also rescue organizations constantly looking for temporary homes until they can find permanent homes for abandoned

dogs. Fostering a dog is a temporary situation and can give your family a taste of what it is like to care for a dog and all its responsibilities.

Another option to expose your family to dog ownership is to volunteer at a local shelter. Shelters are overwhelmed with caring for their animals. Many of these animals are there because people, who initially had good intentions, just found themselves overwhelmed by the cost and responsibility of canine care. Volunteering a couple of hours would be greatly appreciated by the shelter animals as well as the staff and give you a sense of what dog ownership is all about. Who knows, while volunteering you might just find the perfect dog to bring into your household.

So you've done your homework and decided that a puppy is perfect for you. The unconditional love that your pup will provide you with is a joy to experience. Your puppy will always be happy to see you and no matter how tough a day it's been, a wiggling tail and a wet nose is sure to make the world seem right again.

Have fun with your animals. They are counting on you to provide them with a safe, loving, nurturing environment.



*Mary Lou Hanlon is a longtime resident of Warren and is the owner of PetMinders, Inc, The Kennel Alternative. PetMinders has been providing professional petsitting and dog training lessons in the privacy of clients homes for over 15 years. Mary Lou is one of the nations top agility competitors. She has competed both nationally and internationally and has received numerous awards in both dog obedience as well as agility. She can be reached at 908-755-PETS(7387) or via email at petmindersinc@yahoo.com.*