

## So You Want a Ridgeback?

We spent 5 years researching dog breeds, hoping it would help us choose the most suitable addition to our growing family. Ridgebacks won by a landslide against all the other breeds we researched. When we reached the point of being ready to purchase a dog, we spent months researching breeders in our state and doing everything we thought would help us purchase from a reputable breeder and bring healthy dogs home. Unfortunately, we didn't realize there was *a lot* we didn't find in books and even more we wouldn't hear from certain breeders. We also didn't know at the time that Ridgeback rescues existed and we were not able to find any Ridgebacks to adopt locally, so we went ahead with one of the breeders we found on-line.

We bought a brother and sister from the same litter from a Houston breeder. We were a little hesitant to buy two puppies, but the breeder told us how excited she was that the two would stay together, etc. and we believed her. The puppies were gorgeous and we loved them immediately, but it wasn't long after we got them home that we noticed our male didn't walk normally. Within a month, we were at the vet getting expensive x-rays to confirm that he had hip dysplasia. Around the same time, we were at the vet again, with the female ("Remi") this time, to learn she had bad skin allergies. We spent thousands of dollars on both dogs, resolved the skin allergies, created a plan with the vet to address the hip dysplasia, and hoped it would be the last vet expense for awhile. Unfortunately, we were wrong.

The first text came when I was out - my husband telling me Remi was choking and convulsing. He had no idea what was happening and was terrified. A week later it happened again and I was there to witness Remi having a grand mal seizure. I cannot adequately describe the fear and horror of watching our strong, loving girl go rigid and fall to the floor, convulsing, as her eyes turned completely white and she lost control of her bladder. After each seizure she was disoriented and confused. It was absolutely heartbreaking to watch, especially for our two children. Remi was seizure free for 5 months and then began having cluster seizures, which meant another trip to the emergency vet, where the seizures worsened.

We found out soon enough that contacting the breeder was a waste of time. Only after reaching out to Etosha Rescue did we realize that our breeder was not reputable at all, and she has bred dogs *knowing* their ancestors came from infamous Texas puppy mills with a long history of producing dysplastic dogs with epilepsy as well as other congenital and inherited defects. Remi has been seizure free for two months on her current medication, but we live in fear every day of the possibility her seizures will return and her medication will no longer be enough. We live with the realization that there are behavioral issues we face which are out of her control and are simply a result of the medication. We are always listening at night for every small sound which could

indicate the onset of a seizure, and we know the day will come when we lose the battle against her epilepsy.

Our male is currently healthy and fairly active, but we are aware of the complications and problems he will face as he ages. He already limits his own participation in activities he enjoys because he feels pain in both hips. We have been fortunate financially to be able to care for the dogs so far, and we have been blessed with good mentors to help us keep them in our family, but there have been times when we have questioned if we would do it all again if we knew then what we know now.

Pedigrees and OFA certificates on ancestors DO matter. Beware of breeders who ask you to “meet them somewhere” other than their own property, or those who lack complete pedigrees and have little or no knowledge of breed history and basic care/training requirements. Beware of breeders who are willing to sell more than one puppy to the same person too, especially without a spay/neuter agreement attached to their meager paperwork. And check around for other options. Ridgeback rescues in Texas have plenty of dogs -- and occasionally puppies -- looking for a good home. We truly hope our story will help someone else avoid the same struggles we've encountered and the ultimate heartbreak we will face as a result of our inexperience.