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WHO WILL TAKE CARE OF MY DOGS?

By Chris Walkowicz, © Chris Walkowicz, 3/2000

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If you became ill or died tomorrow, what would happen to your dogs? Could they be neglected or mistreated? Would they end their days at a humane society? This fear caused me sleepless nights, particularly since I travel a lot, often with a dog or two accompanying me. I wanted to protect my traveling companions. I made copies of the document below for each vehicle. On the back of each copy, I typed my dogs' names and a brief description, with a statement that all vaccinations are up to date. I then laminated the copies for the vehicles.

Breeders have the greatest cause for concern. Although a relative or friend might care for one or two pets, we can't expect them to adopt five or ten - or more. Difficult as this might be to think about, I don't want my animals to suffer because of my procrastination.

Sample Protection Statement.

In the event that I, _____, become incapacitated and unable to make my wishes known regarding my (show/pet) dog(s), please honor the following requests: _____ is to be contacted as soon as possible at _____ (please call collect).

If she/he cannot be reached, please contact: _____

All expenses for the dog(s)" care will be guaranteed by them. If the dog(s) are not injured, they are to be cared for by the nearest, reputable boarding kennel and be kept in the best possible manner until arrangements can be made to transport them home.

If the dog(s) are injured, they are to be cared for by the nearest reputable veterinarian. I would prefer that my veterinarian _____ (phone) _____ be contacted regarding decisions on the dog(s)' care and treatment. If any dog(s) are injured beyond all hope of recovery, those dogs are to be humanely euthanized.

Descriptions of the dog(s) are attached, as are their health and vaccination records. The welfare of my dog(s) is my primary consideration.

Thank you,
Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Statement of Intent.

For more permanent foster care, I have attached a statement of intent to my will. Because it's possible for dogs to become senior citizens by the time probate is completed, I've spread copies around like a puppy in a pile of leaves. One copy is in a drawer with all the individual dogs' folders. My daughter has one, as does my vet and another good friend.

I update the statement periodically - ideally, when I add a new dog. But, at the very least, I make the necessary changes annually when I do my taxes. First, I found someone willing and able to distribute the dogs among friends who could care for the dogs temporarily. My daughter knows our pets well and agreed to help place them. While, in most cases, a friend would likely have better access and knowledge to place show dogs, friendship can change. Relatives don't. Of course, when contacted, most friends would immediately help, if not actually take over the chore, during such an upsetting and traumatic time for the family.

At first I wanted my youngsters to be placed with someone who would show and breed them to continue my line. Then I realized it wouldn't make much difference to anyone -- including myself -- if I were dead! I would want them to continue living in the style to which they've become accustomed - with comfy beds to nap on, snacks during dinner preparation, a loving touch and good physical care. If that includes showing and breeding, fine. But the priority is to ensure as few changes as possible and that my pets have loving homes. Some dogs may have difficulty adjusting. Or it might be almost impossible to find them a good home. These can include very old dogs, ones with chronic illness or disease, or those too shy or aggressive to change their allegiance. Rather than having them end their days bewildered or in fear, I have directed that they be euthanized.

Although a similar instruction was overturned by a court in California, this can be avoided if you use a statement of intent rather than a will. I instructed that my dogs be placed in my daughter's care with the stipulation that if she were unable to care for them or find them homes, they'd be euthanized. My vet knows and would acquiesce to my wishes. So this would be fait accompli by the time a will could be overturned.

Then I found people who would give my dogs good homes. I know these friends will care for the dogs as I would. I also know that if they cannot keep the dogs, they will provide a loving foster home until they can find a permanent home, and that they'll be as selective in choosing an adoptive family for my dogs as they'd be when placing their own pups. We elected to endow a small trust fund for each retiree (those no longer bred). This helps cover not only food but also, medical expenses as the dogs age. Too large a trust, however, can be challenged. All of the dogs are listed with registered name, call name,

description, year of birth, tattoo number and microchip if appropriate. A clause covering any other puppies or adults living with us at the time is included. This statement of intent gives me peace of mind.

Sample State of Intent Concerning Pets.

In the event that we, the owners of the following dogs, should be incapable of caring for our dogs any longer, or in the event we should die, ownership of said dogs should pass to

_____. In return for the amount of One Dollar, she/he will distribute these animals per the following suggestions, or as she sees fit. She/he will also endow a \$500 trust fund for each retiree, i.e., dogs no longer used for breeding.

1. In the event the above party is unable to care for them or distribute them:

_____ should be placed with _____ or with a good pet home.

2. All puppies and any other dogs owned by us or living with us should go to the above people for sale, dispersal or keeping.

3. In the event the above people cannot or will not take charge of the dogs, they should be euthanized.

4. Descriptions:

Name _____

Call name _____ Sex _____ Birth date _____

Color _____ Weight _____

Tattoo/microchip _____

Identification of these dog(s) may be made by _____

_____ or my veterinarian _____

confirmed by _____.

5. Medical records are at _____,

Registration and files on dog(s) are in _____.

DATED:

WITNESS:

Attach a sheet with everyone's name, address and phone number. I added a clause saying that everyone who allowed our dogs to live with them, or anyone taking one of the dogs above seven years of age should be allowed to choose one of my prized collection of statues, books or art.

Now, sleep peacefully.