

Susie Stone

WFA Board Member



My First Westie: Tough Lessons

The first Westie I ever saw lay quietly in the front seat of the owner's car at the restaurant where I'd met my parents for lunch. After a well-deserved post-harvest break, my parents met me mid state on a cool, pleasant fall afternoon. When I spotted the dog, he sat up and cocked his head to one side, like they so often do. Then he quietly circled back onto his bed, and I was changed forever.

Without doing any research whatsoever, I began my search. I found a puppy for sale from the classifieds, and when I saw the deplorable conditions he was in, I had to save this puppy. Duffy came from what I found out later was one of the most notorious puppy mills in our area. And I endured ten years of heartache and misery that comes from these ruthless breeders. I

have to take responsibility for my part, because I did neither research ahead of time nor much after. Duffy was such a cute puppy that I didn't see all the signs and symptoms until years later. Just a few: the breeder was willing to sell the puppy at barely 5 weeks. Both pups were terribly shy, afraid almost. They smelled horrible, and all I remember about the mother was that she was filthy and very thin. The female's face was misshapen, probably a very bad bite. But I was determined to get a puppy! Later on temperament and health problems taught me way more than I ever wanted to know! I loved that dog, but I would not wish my experience on anyone.

After his death at age ten, I realized that I still wanted a Westie, but this time I vowed to take my time and do my research. The West Highland White Terrier Club of America "Westie Profiler" shocked me! (I flunked). The health survey results at that time named Temperament as the biggest health problem in the breed, and boy could I relate! I found that both genetics and the way pups are raised contribute to their personalities and overall health. Getting acquainted with legitimate breeders was daunting. Armed with information, I visited every litter possible, some in lovely backyard breeders' homes, some in the same horrible conditions Duffy came from, and with much insistence some legitimate Westie breeders' homes. Always I vowed to wait for the right puppy, and after visiting my first dog shows, I decided that I wanted a healthy pet from a reliable breeder.

The Outlaw Jesse James

Then came the FBI background check! The interrogations! "Who are you?" "What's your history?" "What are your intentions?" "Fill out this multiple page form!" "And don't hold your breath!" I laugh about it now, and I understand the whole thing completely. I would be buying a member of the family! I eventually got a fabulous pet, JJ, who is now a healthy, thriving fourteen year old patriarch and the love of my life. The contacts I made led to my first show dog and the rest is history. From mentors I learned all about the dog show world, but also that Westies were bred to do a job, and my other three kids are having a blast with Tracking & Earthdog.

Ch Rimes Percival Payne x Ch Stonebriar Cotton Jenny

I was blessed to have 8 healthy, happy puppies the first time whelping my foundation bitch,

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(with help from lots of mentors!) and that's when I learned the importance of good health in our Westies. The Westie Foundation of America (WFA) was a fabulous source during that time. Raising puppies taught me the importance of good nutrition, careful genetic study, proper socialization and the piercing pain of parting with one. There is heartache too when we find out one of our beloved dogs has Craniomandibular Osteopathy (CMO) or Atopic Dermatitis or has produced some genetic defect, but as long as we are armed with information, we can try to reduce or eliminate these in the future.

The journey has seen stumbles, tragedies and triumphs. I wish I could talk to everyone who is considering a Westie from anyone other than a reputable breeder. I'm still researching and learning. I've witnessed great progress in improving Westie health though there is much left to do. I was honored when asked to serve on the WFA's board of directors, and it is amazing to see all the others who dedicate so much time and effort to this terrific organization. It's heartening to see all the breakthroughs recently in health issues for our canine kids. I've been blessed to meet wonderful people who have been mentors, new pup owners and very dear friends, and of course, lots of gorgeous, fun canine friends. So I must thank that quiet, curious and beautiful first Westie that I met as he waited patiently for his loved ones.