



Wisconsin Puppy Mill Project Fact Sheet:

## Mr. Peabody's Story



By Eilene Ribbens, Exec. Dir. of the Wisconsin Puppy Mill Project

 **Dear Daughter, the letter began,**

***"I was at the Sheboygan mall today and saw a poor little Dalmatian puppy in a glass box in front of the Noah's Ark pet shop. No dog should have to live like that."*** It was the third letter I had received from my father in my whole life. He's not much of a letter writer. Perhaps he only feels the need to write when something is really important to him. I was raised with a love and respect for animals. I inherited a soft spot in my heart for dogs from my father.

My Dad was not the first person to share the plight of this poor animal with me. It's no secret that I am madly in love with Dalmatians. Perhaps people thought I would want to know about this little creature. I tried very hard NOT to go to the mall. I had heard sad stories about pets bought at these "pet" shops. But my father's words nagged at me and I decided to go "just to see if he was OK."

I got to the store in the middle of the afternoon. This little Dal was in a wire pen. He had a empty, filthy "food bowl" and a nearly empty, tiny dish of dirty water but nothing more to keep him occupied. I peered through the glass partition. Something about him looked different. He looked sort of bow-legged...odd, I thought. I asked to see him and a careless young woman opened the cage and set him on the floor. He began to sniff around, acting rather confused and not too interested in me. The clerk walked away and I heard her mutter under her breath as she left, "Little Dalmatian pain in the a\*s."

I carefully picked him up and he began mouthing me. It was winter and I was wearing a coat so I didn't take much notice. I asked Little-Miss-I'm-So-Bored-And-I-Hate-My-Job, "How much is this puppy?" She told me \$500.00 and I nearly had a coronary. I asked her to put him back where he came from and left.

But oh, the nagging aching worry when you love dogs and you have made fur to skin contact with one you think may not make it if you don't DO something. I called later on in the afternoon and was told that someone else had looked at him and was coming back for him tomorrow. I was relieved. Thank God that

little dog will get a chance out in the world.

Two weeks passed. My neighbor called, "Did you know that little male Dal is still at that pet store?" Please, please, please don't tell me this. I can't afford to help, I just can't. It will be trouble for sure. My husband doesn't want a third dog. Would my other two "rescued" Dalmatians even accept an addition to their pack?

I couldn't get this little soul out of my mind. I prayed every day to God to send some loving person to get him freed from that Animal Auschwitz before it was too late. God answered my prayers all right. Soon that little dog had found a new home with me.

When I got him home he was filthy and smelled as bad as anything I had ever experienced. I had to wash him three times before he was clean. His ears were packed with filth and dried feces encrusted his feet. His back was swayed and his feet were spread out like a web-footed duck from living a life on wire. He was frightened but seemed comforted when I cuddled him in my arms. My husband was furious.

This pathetic puppy didn't have a clue about going "potty" outside. He couldn't walk more than a few steps at a time. He could not support the weight of his own tiny little body and his legs crumbled under him when he tried to walk. His back and leg muscles were atrophied. As I walked my other two dogs I would set him down for a few steps, then pick him up and carry him inside my coat, then set him down for a few more steps. It was a painful process for both of us.

I made a little padded "den" for him in my bedroom and got up every two hours to take him out. There were accidents. By the second day, I realized I had a very big problem on my hands. The "pet" store offered a free vet check but by now I didn't trust them to recommend a vet. I had already seen too much of the results of their obvious lack of concern for this animal! I decided to take him to my own vet. I actually thought my vet would tell me he needed to be euthanized.

"Doc" said he thought the little guy might have a

chance. He told me the puppy had been malnourished. Then he told me something that chilled me to the very bone and made me cry. "You know, they underfeed these puppies on purpose. Everybody wants a puppy and an underfed dog will stay small. It gives more 'shelf life' to the product. Besides, the less they feed, the less they have to clean up." Because of where Peabody came from, a puppy mill, and the way he was treated before he came to me, my Vet told me to expect lifelong health and behavior problems with this dog. I wanted to scream.

Mr. Peabody is now just two years old. He was nearly impossible to house train, the result of being taken from his mother too early and having to eliminate in the cage where he had lived his whole life. He has hip dysplasia and arthritis. He is fear aggressive. He bit a lady on the street in a split second and we nearly lost our house because no homeowners' policy can be had once you have a "dog bite" claim. No insurance, no mortgage! I spent more money at the vet's than I care to admit. Many, many dollars are spent every month for the medications this dog needs to survive. There have been many tears. But, oh, I have this wonderful piece of paper that says he is an AKC purebred Dalmatian. I had him neutered.

I have learned so much from Mr. Peabody. I learned about Puppy Mills. I learned about socialization and the effects of cage living on an animal that was meant to have human contact. I have learned to loathe those "humans" who would make their profit on the heartbreak of people and the sick and genetically defective dogs they so ruthlessly crank out of their mills. To them these animals are nothing but a cash crop while people like me and shelters and animal rescue groups spend thousands of dollars and thousands of hours trying to "pick up the pieces" and save those animals that survive. Now that I know about puppy mills and pet shops, I am ashamed for having supported the "industry" by "rescuing" Mr. Peabody. But I will never be ashamed for sharing my life with him and trying to make the time he has on this earth as full of love and good care as possible.

My "Little Pea" will be safe with me as long as he lives...which according to the vet probably won't be very long. There was too much damage done before I ever met him. You see, this poor little creature never really had a chance.

#### **AFTERWORD:**

Peabody came from Noah's Ark pet shop in Sheboygan Wisconsin. Noah's Ark became so

notorious in the region that advocates circulated petitions regarding the conditions and demanded that the City of Sheboygan "do something" to clean up the store. When the City failed to act, advocates proceeded with a community wide boycott of the store. Their boycott, organized by Eastern Wisconsin Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (EW-SPCA), included newspaper classified ads asking people to boycott the store and an additional petition in which people pledged not to shop there. The store is now closed thanks to the efforts of humane minded citizens in the Sheboygan area.

From Peabody's "papers," I discovered that his "breeder" was Yvonne Skinner. She was licensed as a USDA Class A dealer when Peabody was born. As of June 2008, she is still operating in Reedsburg, Wisconsin but appears to have given up her USDA license. She has, instead, joined the ranks of "direct sellers" who currently are not licensed, inspected or required to adhere to standards of care.

We hope that Yvonne, along with other notorious direct seller puppy millers in Wisconsin WILL be regulated in the future and to that end, we will continue our push for legislation in Madison.

I'll never regret bringing Peabody into my life and into my home. However, I have since learned some valuable lessons:



**Please don't make the same mistake I did! Buying a "pet shop dog" is NOT a rescue!**

**PLEASE DO NOT PATRONIZE ANY STORES THAT SELL LIVE "PETS!"**  
**Don't buy food, toys, gift items, or anything else from them-  
 -in fact, don't go inside for ANY reason!**

*Note: On 16 November 2002, Mr. Peabody, aka "Pea Buddy," lost his battle against the effects of poor breeding and early abuse, and went to the Rainbow Bridge. He was 6 years and 3 weeks old. We mourn his death but celebrate his life. He will always and forever live in all our hearts.*

*It is to Pea, and all the other dogs like him, that we dedicate our fight to end the abominations known as puppy mills.*