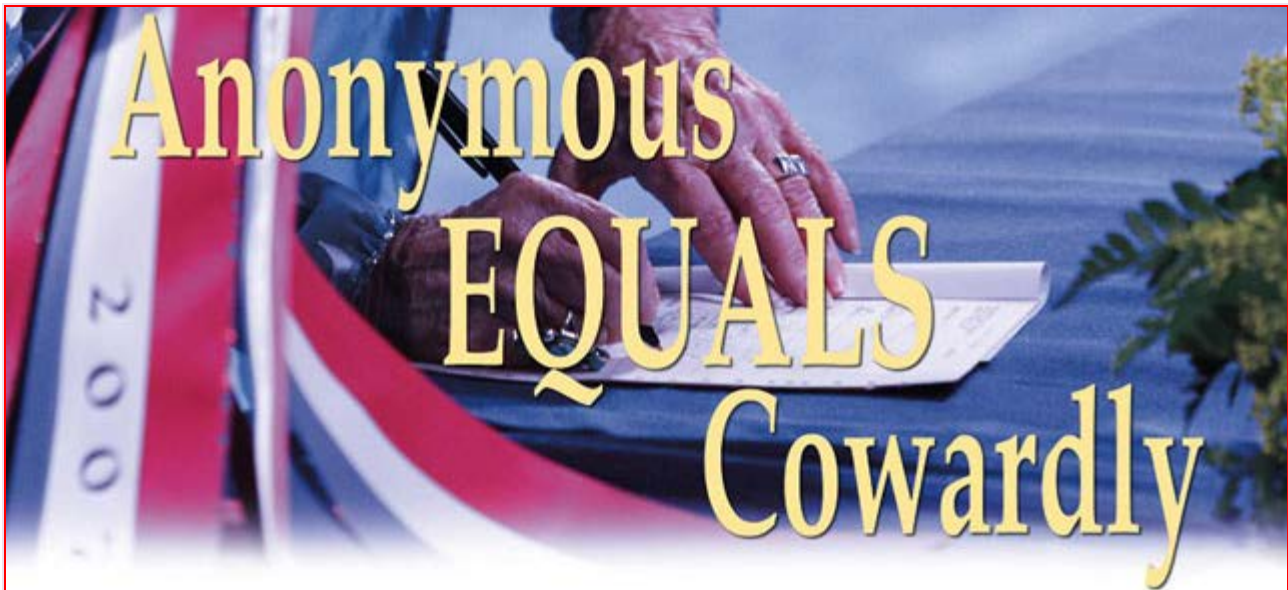


Anonymous EQUALS Cowardly...

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By Beverly Lehnig

The idea for this article came from a young judge friend of mine. I have known this particular person for many years now, first as an exhibitor and now as one of our promising judges. I had no reason to ever doubt her integrity as an exhibitor and I have no reason to now doubt her integrity as a judge. She is a tried and true dog person with no agenda except to give back to the sport which has given so much to her.

It seems my young friend received two anonymous letters, both of which upset her, and both of which questioned her judgment in two different Non-Sporting breeds. One pointed out that a dog she had rewarded had a disqualifying fault. The other was a copy of the breed standard with most of it highlighted in yellow. The letter concerning the disqualification even contained photos which supposedly came from the breeder's website.

I'm confident I'd be hard put to find any judge who has not received an anonymous communication from time to time. We all have. It is not a new problem and not one which is likely to go away. The only thing remotely new about it is that these unsigned tirades are sometimes now received by e-mail. I was the lucky recipient of one of these a while back. It was particularly vicious and referred to me, among other things, as a "cheap crook." I handled it as I always do by sending it to AKC although there is really nothing that anybody can do. As judges, we have to expect some of this sort of thing and learn to roll with it. I can't say I've endured very much of this type of abuse but even a little is upsetting, especially when you've knocked yourself out trying to do a good job of judging to the standard.

My friend posed this question: "If the person sending the letter has such little confidence in my judging ability, why bother to show to me?" She goes on to say, "If they wanted to help me in my efforts to judge their breed, wouldn't it be more advantageous to come to a show that I was judging, not enter a dog, observe my judging without a bias, then kindly approach me on a break to discuss constructively their breed?"

Of course it would, but exhibitors of this caliber don't really think rationally. There is only one truth for them which is that they didn't win. The tendency is to lash out and blame the judge for the loss instead of looking at the broad picture and finding maybe, just maybe, a good reason for the judge's decision. It boosts the ego to try

to deflate this "stupid" person and wear an air of self-righteous indignation.

My friend also notes as follows: "Have the exhibitors looked at the dogs, looked at what the judges pick and found a common theme between these dogs? All judges are judging by the standard but there is some subjectivity to it. What you might view as an important thing in the standard, I may not view it quite as important. Because of this, if we as judges show any consistency in our judging we will find a type in each breed as we become more experienced. Handlers that are smart people will look at their string of dogs at the moment and try to bring a dog that the judge of the moment could prefer. Herein lies the problem. Most handlers have several dogs in their string, are able to choose which dog show they are going to travel to, which improves their odds of winning. This is what they are paid to do. An owner/handler/exhibitor does not have the same options available. They usually have one or two dogs and of the same type because they are both from their breeding program. They are limited to going to shows within a certain range due to costs and a full-time job to support their hobby. Presenting their dog to its best benefit also becomes an issue because they are emotionally involved and don't have the experience of hours upon hours in the ring. Many exhibitors don't even realize that there is a written breed standard that they should hope that their dog conforms to."

My friend concludes by observing that "this sort of anonymous propaganda only makes the person receiving it mad." This is very true. It is meant to demean the judge to whom it is sent and it is also meant to make the person sending it feel superior. It's an "I guess I showed him/her" sort of attitude. Unnecessary, childish and cowardly. Yes, cowardly. Anyone can write a letter, or send an e-mail, or make a telephone call without identifying himself or herself. This does not make for an individual who is bravely and fearlessly challenging the authority of one who passes judgment on his entry. It shows a yellow streak, a deep-down distrust of one's own beliefs and opinions.

I am not alone in my belief that small, youngish women judges are a particular target for this type of abuse. And make no mistake about it, abuse is what it is. If it happened verbally in the ring, a bench show hearing would be the result. For some reason, a certain type of exhibitor thinks intimidation is the way to go. If this smallish, youngish female judge also comes across as a nice person, then to a certain mindset, it's Katie bar the door. I don't mean to sound negative but I've been through it and all it did to me was make me tougher and more determined. Well, time does solve everything. I'm still smallish but youngish no more. And my advice to my petite, forty-ish women judge friends is to add another layer of steel to your spine. You'll come out on top.

To repeat what I said earlier, every judge has been subjected to the anonymous letter factor. The best weapon is to firmly ignore it. Send the letters/e-mails to AKC and then forget about them. They can't take away from who you are and who you will become which is a force for good in the dog world and the sport of judging.