

**PERSPECTIVES:  
OWNERS OF DEVOCALIZED DOGS AND CATS**

Who would surgically alter a companion animal's voice? Those who keep dogs or cats for profit or hobby, such as breeders or sled-dog enthusiasts, when they—or neighbors—don't tolerate the sound of many animals. Those who exhibit dogs, to keep them quiet in the ring or while traveling between shows. And sometimes it's an uninformed or irresponsible pet owner. Putting a naturally noisy breed in an apartment invites complaints; so do dogs who are bored, lonely or not getting enough exercise.

Cutting vocal cords doesn't resolve the animal's distress *or* the owner's irresponsibility. And it doesn't guarantee the animal a lifelong home. Devocalized dogs and cats are abandoned just like any other; some are sold without disclosure to unwitting pet owners. The most fortunate animals find new homes with people who will provide the proper environment, training and care—and who are able and willing to pay for the lifesaving corrective surgeries devocalized animals require when internal scar tissue obstructs their airway.

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When I was working as a taxi driver I met a woman with many cats; she let me keep one. I started noticing he would try to meow but nothing would come out. My vet told me he had been devocalized. My cat will bob his head back and forth trying to make noise, but he just can't. Sometimes it looks like he's having a seizure. He gets his frustration out by acting up and often scratches me. I could never give him up. If he was with another owner he probably would have been surrendered by now. No animal should have to go through this.

**MICHAEL MOISSON, CHARLESTOWN**

We adopted a young Yellow Lab who had been devocalized by an AKC breeder. Stella experienced traumatic respiratory problems, which our vet said was a direct result of the devocalization. Two very costly surgical procedures saved Stella's life by removing the scar tissue that blocked her airway. But it couldn't save her voice; she is permanently mute. Yellow Labs are a breed that rarely barks. We find it astounding that Stella was devocalized.

**DOTTIE VENETO, QUINCY**

Fritz , our Black Lab, was kept with a breeder until he was nine months, which is when his hip x-ray came back as fair and not excellent. He wasn't "perfect" enough to breed, so he was devocalized and then put in a cage outside and ignored. That's when we came in and got him. Fritz sounds hoarse as if he's smoked 50 cigarettes a day and he gags when he eats or drinks. Even water won't go down comfortably.

**KATE SANDERS-PEDERSON, WAYLAND**

My husband and I adopted a Belgian Shepherd whose breeder devocalized and then didn't want him when he stopped winning ribbons in dog shows. Logan tried valiantly to bark. Instead, he was only able to wheeze, cough, gag and make terrible retching sounds until the day he died.

**GAYLE FITZPATRICK, PLYMOUTH**

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I adopted a 3-year-old cocker spaniel who was ordered devocalized by her breeder; after spending the first years of her life in a cage, she was given to a rescue group. She can't bark at all, only whine, and just a little exercise stresses her. When the rescue group had Demi spayed, scar tissue that developed as a result of being devocalized made it difficult to keep her airway open during the procedure. Devocalization will put her health at risk for the rest of her life.

**CYNTHIA MARTIN, TAUNTON**

Devocalization is more common than you think. I adopted a devocalized Chihuahua. Candy gagged frequently; we had to monitor her meals for fear she would choke. Devocalization is unnecessary if one chooses and cares for a dog responsibly.

**JOHN PERREAULT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BERKSHIRE HUMANE SOCIETY**

We adopted Lady from the humane society where she had been surrendered **twice** after being devocalized. Our home is her third. It is sad for us to hear the raspy, hoarse sounds she makes, punctuated by coughing and gagging.

**GENE AND FRAN NADEAU, PITTSFIELD**

My family got an eight-month-old Australian Shepherd puppy from her breeder. After a few days, we realized Phoebe's voice was constantly hoarse. We called the breeder, who said she automatically devocalized all her dogs. We were appalled. Over the years, about 75% of Phoebe's bark returned. However, she still sounds like she has laryngitis. Her frequent, uncontrollable coughing and gagging persist. It is heartbreaking.

**MARJORIE HALPERIN, WAYLAND**

As the adopter of a now deceased devocalized dog, I can tell you firsthand that her voice was painful to hear. Without knowing my dog had been devocalized, I could not identify what was wrong with her. It was only later that I learned the wheezing was the result of cut vocal cords. It is unethical to put an animal through surgery for barking.

**MA STATE REPRESENTATIVE (RET.) WILLIE MAE ALLEN**