

Hi guys!

I'm Elfie Tromp and I have the honour to open the 10th Afghan Hound World congress. For those of you non-Dutchies that don't know me, let me quickly introduce myself; I'm a writer and radio host and published the novel Underdog and the longread Alfateef which is Dutch for 'alpha bitch'. Both stories are set in a world that I know very well and have grown up in, that is the world of dogbreeders and particularly those of Afghan hounds.

Just to get a sense of the room, who of you had Afghan Hounds for less than 10 years?  
Who has been in their company for 10 to 20 years?  
And who started their afghan love affair for over more than 20 years?

So we've got a room full of experience and love!  
Because that's really where it all starts, doesn't it? With love!  
With a pair of rum coloured eyes set in an aristocratic, strong face that stare deep into yours.  
And we all know there's nothing quite like the gaze of an Afghan hound, is there?

I've owned rats, a shetland pony, a cat and have been entwined with a chinese crested for over a decade, but none can match that esoteric sight of the Afghan. I have often felt comforted by the afghans in my life, but I've also felt shy in their presence. Like they could read me better than I could read them. That's a sighthound for sure! It's uncanny and at the same time deeply comforting to experience that a dog was able to tell my mood better than I could.

Lovingly welcomed to the pack, it read on my baby card. My first memories is that of craning my neck and looking up to long slender leg and getting a delicate lick on my forehead. As a teenager I used to take naps on the dog bed, cradling one of the redhaired afghans that happened to lie there. I remember my breakfast getting snatched, being comforted by a wakeful afghan at my side when I was sick too sick to go to school, being welcomed so enthusiastically when returning home that I was thrown off balance and showered with kisses. And as I grew older and moved away, I left the afghans, but not my love for them.

And when the love for one dog becomes the love for a breed, and you get to know the rich culture and history, than you are only one step away from being a proud member of the Afghan hound love cult. And I can safely state this room is full of active members!

Watching and loving dogs, is watching and loving human history. A dog is a piece of living human history, as all breeds are the result of human needs. Did we live mountainous areas with little vegetation and needed a strongwilled hunter on our side, that was able to run for long stretches and see farther then we could? Enter the sighthounds! Every part of our dogs are bred the way they are for a specific reason and we should always be wary of beauty trends when it comes to dog breeding, because it is not beauty per se we should focus on, but love. Especially in times like these.

And perhaps you've picked it up from the tone of my voice, but we're entering into the more serious part of my chat. Oh yes, beware!

Animal rights organisations have successfully influenced politics to ban dog shows in Luxemburg, and they are lobbying right now to do the same here. Dog breeders are continually getting bad press as uninformed journalist step on the train of hubbub that label all dog breeds as sick, inbred dogs.

The licensed professional dog breeder that obey the rules set up for moral and healthy breeding, and breed with passport and pedigree suffer in Holland greatly from the disheartening practices of dog breeders that neglect these standards, offering potentially inbred or sick animals through the internet for half prices. It is these pound-breeders that we need to stand up to.

We, as proud members of the afghan hound love cult do not only get to celebrate the beauty and divinity of the Afghan, but we are the gatekeepers of keeping such an ancestral breed uncorrupted and well. And making sure they thrive healthy in the future.

We should be on the front line with these animal rights organisations. Not fencing them off, but informing them, making a strong fist for ethic regulations of dog breeding and dog loving, making the dog shows once again a sport worthy of praise and awe. One in which the prestige that comes along with the winning is not the main motivation to enter contests. But the love to work together in unison with a breed so refined, that it lifts us humans up a little.