



## A Love Letter to You

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If you don't have time to read to the end now, please come back later and do so. I want you to know something.

This week I am filled with admiration for all of you reading this. I am compelled to express my deepest respect and appreciation for all who raise puppies professionally. You may ask what has stirred me to this emotional gushing? My first litter of PUPPIES!



**Anne, covered up in puppies**

I've had dogs most of my life, usually taking in strays. And I've worked in the pet industry for the past 13 years, entirely behind a desk! So when I took in an unwanted year-old mutt I saw in a

Facebook “yard sale” and found her to be with pups two weeks later, my education began.

Anne was so thin and undernourished when I got her that we started feeding her up right away. Little did we know that we were saving seven little wiggles inside her as well. By the time we started noticing changes in her nipples and then that “poofy” look on her underside, she was only days away from delivery.

Completely unequipped, I started ordering birthing supplies online, started feeding her puppy chow, and created a nice bed/box for her in the house. It got cold right about then, so getting her to sleep in the house at night wasn’t too much of a challenge, though she had only been outside at her last home.

Only a few nights passed, and she swelled up huge. Then one day she vomited and didn’t want to eat. Uh-oh. Here we go! And my stuff from Amazon.com hadn’t arrived yet! (Does anybody want an unopened nasal aspirator?)



**The Big Night**

She started labor, quiet and dignified, at about 1:30 in the morning. Oh, what a thrill when that first wet pup arrived!! From the very first moment she was the perfect mother. She opened the sacks, cleaned the babies, licked up the afterbirth, severed the cords...she licked so much that night that I thought her tongue must be sore. My special molasses-based Nutri-drops for whelping mothers had not arrived either. So I tried to help her keep her energy up all night with spoonfuls of sugar mashed into coconut oil. She loved it.



**First Arrival**

I only had to move the newborns out from under her bum. She did all the rest and I watched in amazement. My love for our Creator was growing by the hour as this little dog instinctively managed the whole event, puppy after puppy, even though this was her first time. Though I did wonder what happened to our own instincts about such things. Surely we had them at one time!

By 6am we had 5 beautiful puppies, all healthy and strong and suckling. Mom appeared to be relaxed and attentive. Finally I fell asleep. Then at 7am my husband had gotten up and he announces “Wow, seven puppies!” What?!? Yes, I fell asleep on the job! The last two had squirted out almost at the same time and I hadn’t even heard her panting for them.

So now what? I’m looking thru all the great literature I’ve read over the years, emailing my coworkers, researching online... but nothing could have prepared me for what happens after seven puppies are born in your living room. MESS!

Yes, the first week was sweet, but then they soon outgrew the whelping box (of course, it wasn’t a whelping box, just a big dog bed). So I fabricated a bizarre structure out of cardboard to contain the little family and still let mama go in and out.



**Puppy Palace #1**

Then I found out that they should have two sections, the bed area and another area. Since their eyes weren't open, I guess it was just the "outside" area. Okay, whatever. More boxes attached.

Naturally, the boxes weren't very stable, and when Anne leaned back against them to nurse, she would bust open our duct taped seams and let all the blind little puppies out into the house. My daughter, husband and I pooled all of our engineering skills (none) and came up with a system of punching holes in the cardboard with the ice pick that is still at the back of the junk drawer (the one that is imprinted "Columbian, Terre Haute IND." That abbreviation for the state should give you some idea how old the thing is, if you're old enough to know that state abbreviations were not always two letters!). Then we stitched the cardboard joints together with stiff string, and covered the stitching with duct tape. In other places that needed reinforcement, we employed little brass paper joiners (also from the back of the junk drawer) called paper fasteners. I thought "This should hold up for at least the first month."



### Tools of the puppy palace construction trade

Meanwhile, mastitis. Twice in the same month, in the same teat. Poor Anne could barely endure the puppies the second time around, when they had such claws and such voracious appetites.

Despite my warm compresses and the recommended antibiotics, she started weaning in earnest after they turned 3 weeks old.

Right, so puppy chow begins. And POOP. Happily, these puppies were plenty eager to eat the soaked chow and didn't go through a stage of rolling in it and licking it off each other. They just lined up and ate it. But the POOP! And WHY do they have to start jumping around in all the poopy papers as soon as I start folding them up for removal??? Okay, time for an outdoor space to play in while I clean up the indoor one.

My husband cheerfully obliged (what a partner!) by building a 10x10 yard right off our patio, using the gate we had made for a play yard for my daughter when she was two (she's 23). That yard never got made because my daughter was too hesitant to even go out without holding my hand, so the gate was still new. After two days with hammer and wire (and picking up some hardware in town) our babies were free to romp and poop and play with mama outside. Of course, the weather then turned bitterly cold and wet.



### **The play yard with the fancy gate**

Back inside, we had new issues. Now the puppies could get out of the door we made for mama. And sometimes mama would open

it for them just to spite me. I tried to expand their space by attaching a pet cage as a den on one end of the cardboard puppy palace, so that now they had three spaces, but it turned out that they didn't all fit in it to sleep and so were spilling out onto the cold concrete. Then they started chewing up the foam pad I had provided since the whelping box. Time for more changes.



### **Puppy Palace with add-on and crate den**

We tried rolling up the rug and letting them out in the living room, securing all the exit routes with crates and things, barely managing to keep up with their accidents. It wasn't working. Even with three of us, it was chaos. I'll never forget the smooth moves of the pup we called Big Head because his head was so much larger than all the others from birth. I had given them wormer for the first time and he made a big messy wet poop, but it was ON THE PAPER in the living room. I was praising him for going on the paper when he showed me what makes a dog a dog. He turned around, sniffed his mess, lifted one front paw high into

the air and planted it squarely in the middle of the mess. New name: Big Slob.

Finally the good Lord intervened in our madness. I knew just how I would like to partition off part of the downstairs living area for them but I needed a fence at least 10 ½ feet long. I browsed the internet and saw all these lovely solutions, but for \$75 to \$525! These were giveaway puppies that were already costing me for food, shots, vetting, wormer etc. etc. No, we had to put on our engineering hats again. We thought about boxes, old luggage, old lumber, plastic tubs, plastic crates... we didn't seem to have enough of anything to safely and effectively fence them in. This time I wanted THE FINAL SOLUTION... a pen that would last until they were adopted out. The cardboard palace was now a month old and had been licked, chewed, splashed with water, pooped on, and urine soaked to the crisis point (i.e. about to dissolve).

How did the Lord intervene? When a friend called, I moaned that I couldn't think about anything else until I got this solved. She's a good friend. She went to her attic and poked around. She sent me pics of long boxes (no! please no more boxes!), an old bookcase (not big enough), a pet gate (handy, but not big enough). Then she sends me the one that nearly brought tears to my eyes:



**Divine Intervention**

Eureka! A 16 foot long, 2 foot tall pet fence!! Just sitting in her attic! She bought it for \$5 at a yard sale last summer, when she thought she might get geese. I picked it up and installed it that night.



### The Final Solution

Now life is settling down a bit. The puppies have lots of room. Separate space for potty, food and play, and two crates that will fit everyone for sleeping. Mom takes one puppy now and then to help her dry up her milk. Mastitis is gone. I have my living room back, rug and all. And wonder of wonders, they are actually toileting on the papers (for the most part). They are 4 weeks and average 6 ½ pounds each.

I feel like I can breathe again. Occasionally some puppies are still falling out of the "den" and crying in their sleep, but I can finally come up for air after this insane month in puppydom. I can't write a letter long enough for all the insanity: Anne's pork allergy we discovered, the issues with our cat, the vomiting in the car, the

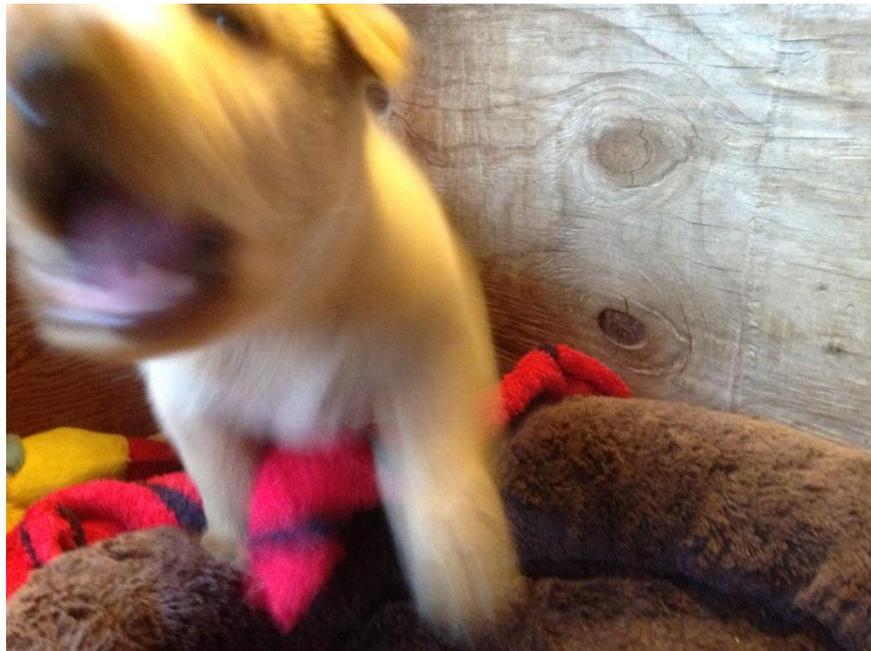
issues with the visiting 11 year old boy. But it's getting under control. Now I just have to keep up with nail clipping, training, worming and, of course, cleaning the pen and feeding. Oh, no, now begins the job of finding homes for them!

**How do you guys do this all the time???** Even with the right supplies and facilities... this puppy raising thing is exhausting! It has taken all of my free time and some that was not free. It has kept me up many nights, managing the nursing situation, waking every time the puppies yelped, or absorbed in internet research on my latest puppy-parent challenge. And I didn't even have to hand feed any pups! I only had one dog and one litter. I repeat: How do you guys do this?

You are my heroes now. I understand now what you do. You are awesome. And that you do it while fending off the hateful criticisms and attacks of animal rights groups and maybe your own neighbors... You are my heroes. I'm proud to know you. Proud to work for you.

And by the way, anybody want a puppy? Available after Jan 8.

Yours sincerely, Deb



Posing for the camera; not.