

It's January. It's cold, it's wet and it's grey. At 6 1/2 weeks, we come to the most difficult part of the puppy training, crating. There is much debate about the merits and problems associated with crating. Those who are pro crate state the need for a security place or a den for safety when puppy is not being watched. They also tout the ease of house breaking since most puppies will not soil where they sleep. Those oppose to crate training tell stories of dogs being left for hours in crates. Dogs who have social interaction problems due to hours of isolation and boredom.

I believe that crate training is good tool that can be abused. I consider crates like a play pen. These puppies are like infant children. No one would leave a toddler unattended in the living room while showering. Puppies are the same way. At night, everyone is put in a big crate to sleep. It regulates their potties at night, and it teaches them to be diurnal. Many puppies become nocturnal because they sleep during the day while everyone is at work. Because I work from home, I can keep them up and awake during the day and sleepy at night. With all 5 in the same crate they sleep from 9 until about 7:15 a.m.

We are now individually crating puppies during the day. It is against a dog's nature to be by itself. The puppy is safe while in a pack, but alone can be in a dangerous position. Instinctively, puppies do not want to be separated and confined. They must be taught. For puppies that are less confident and rely on litter mates this is especially difficult. Not only are they dealing with isolation from the pack, but also from the buddy from which they are bonded. Coco and Neige are such pups. It is extremely important for them to learn to be by themselves so that separation anxiety does not become a problem.

Puppies are doing relatively well. Neige and Coco take the longest to settle in their crates. They are learning the "Quiet puppy" command. In each crate, there is tee shirt, and a chewy. They are crated after everyone goes potty and has good exercise. My schedule is after they have their breakfast and have gone out to go potty several times. We then run around the house for quite a while and play. As puppies start to wind down and become sleepy, that is when puppies are put into their crates. I try to crate for about an hour. They are not allow to come out of the crates until they are quiet. I usually can get about 40 minutes of good quiet puppies, but it takes about 20 minutes for everyone to calm down from the "hysterics". :0) I will continue for another week, and then we will start crating individually at night. Lots of sleepless nights for me for a while!

This week everyone had a field trip. We went to a Pet Boutique grand opening. Because 5 puppies are a lot to handle, we put everyone in a laundry basket to move around. All the employees were in love, and many of the customers. We brought plenty of hand sanitizer so that everyone could hold puppies. No one was put on the ground, and no one without hand sanitizer was allowed to pet the puppies. It was a great experience overall for everyone.

Star is growing by leaps and bounds. He still in the smallest, but only by an ounce or two. He is the target of his sister, Dolly and Pali, but he holds his own. He growls and barks and lets them know where to go and how to get their quickly. He is going to have a gorgeous coat. He is very good about going potty outside, and sometimes will not come in right away, simply because he hasn't finished going potty. He is such a good boy.

Neige is my sweet cuddly boy. He and Coco are best buddies and can be found playing together or curled up together taking a nap. His temperament will make the best pet, since he will bond so strongly to his family. I am working with him on being by himself so that he won't have separation anxiety. He loves to be held. He is going to be about 15lbs and still wanting to be held, just like his daddy Shelby.

Pali continues to be a handful. She is trouble looking for a place to happen. She is incredibly smart and confident. When everyone goes outside, she loves to stalk her siblings. As everyone is going potty, she is pouncing on them. It is not uncommon for me to have to pull her off of Star so that he can go potty in peace. She is also the first puppy to understand the door. When I say "lets go potty", she runs to the door. If it is really cold outside she runs to the door, and then runs the other direction. If she is outside, she will potty really fast and run to the door. She is the first to figure things out.

Dolly is Pali's accomplice. She watches Pali and mimics her. As puppies are trying to potty, Dolly and Pali are ambushing them. Dolly is a confident puppy and when Pali jumps on her, there is usually a sister fight. It is not uncommon to here shrill barking and growling from the two sisters jumping on each other, playing "queen of the mountain."

Coco is my calm quiet puppy. She adores Neige and follows him around like an adoring sister. She tries to stay out of the puppy fights started by Dolly and Pali, but occasionally finds herself in the middle of them. She will defend herself, but it isn't in her nature to start anything. The other day Star was hiding between a crate and the wall and barking at Coco. Poor Coco had her tail down and head down. She didn't know what to do with Star teasing her. I am also working with her to teach her how to be by herself and not be nervous.

We are now coming to back half of the puppy raising. Not this coming Saturday but next Saturday everyone will be microchipped. Weaning is progressing nicely. By Wednesday, puppies will only be nursing in the morning and in the evening. Everyone is eating dry food with no issues. They are quickly growing up.