

The Heartache of Breeding... The Ups and Downs

Until recently we had mostly known only the joys of breeding a few select litters. There is always the excitement and expectation of healthy puppies and uncomplicated deliveries, even though realistically the odds are that eventually something may go wrong. All pregnancies must be watched and monitored carefully. We have quickly learned that there is always the chance of having puppies that are too large and the bitch cannot deliver them on her own, or of a premature delivery, as well as a number of other occurrences that can go wrong along the way. If you are well tuned-in to your whelping bitch, you will have a good idea of when to take her into the vet for a C-section. I feel that I have always been especially tuned into all of my dogs, especially as they get closer to delivery.

I had been up and down most the night monitoring one of my best girls. She had been nesting heavily but never did make it to the pushing stage, so I decided I should take her to my vet early the next morning. We arrived at the vet shortly after 9:00 a.m. on a Sunday morning. Joy knew something was going on and she looked at me with great anticipation and excitement in her eyes. She had been a wonderful mom in the past and surely could sense that she had new babies coming soon. I remember how I comforted her on the drive to the vet, telling her that she was going to be fine, and in return she looked at me with her happy, sweet, smiling face, so full of love.

We had been through a c-section before with another girl, so we were allowed to go back in the operating room to help the vet attend to the puppies when delivered. Just as my vet was getting underway preparing the incision site, I suddenly noticed that Joy wasn't breathing, I quickly exclaimed, "She's not breathing!" The vet checked and said that her heart rate had dropped, at about that same moment, Joy took her last gasping breath. My husband and I were overcome with a sickening feeling. We were asked to leave the room as the vet and assistant (her husband) began doing all they could to bring her back. Joy apparently had an allergic reaction to the anesthesia.

The vet made the decision to quickly try to save the puppies. We were blessed that five of the six puppies were saved. In an instant, what should have been a very happy moment turned deeply saddening. We now had five puppies and were very unsure of how to keep them alive...without their mom. We had never been in such a situation before. The reality was difficult to accept. We had five puppies, just barely an hour old, and had just lost our best bitch.

We immediately began calling people we know in our Cavalier Club in Houston as well as people that we know within our own small Kennel Club in Victoria. It wasn't long before we began getting references and calls back. We first heard from Cavalier Club member, Mickie Newton, then Tony & Simone Giles. Then our puppy lifesaver, Gwen Wichert, called. Gwen had a litter of two puppies, two weeks old, which had been born premature and were very small. Gwen said that she had helped others with a Cavalier "wet nurse" before, and invited us to bring our puppies over. The puppies and the new mom (Pixie)

needed 24-hour care to monitor the puppies and make sure that Pixie was producing enough milk for the now seven puppies. With Gwen's busy upcoming week, Cavalier Club President, Dana Moore, volunteered to care for the puppies at her house. Dana tended to both Gwen's puppies, *and* our puppies for the first week...making sure that they were nursing and gaining weight, weighing them daily. Dana even went above our expectations and called her vet to have a procedure done where donated blood is spun and then injected into the puppies to help them develop natural immunities, since they did not receive their mother's colostrum. It turned out to be such a blessing to have Dana caring for our puppies, because that same evening our son Joshua had to be hospitalized, for the first of several days, due to a particularly serious virus.

After the puppies first week, they were all doing well, so Gwen took them to her house. Upon their arrival at Gwen's, her nine-year-old dog, Lacey went into "mama dog" mode and her milk came in to help with the increasing demand of the hungry puppies. What a miraculous site, the puppy-pen full with *two* mama dogs and seven puppies! Gwen set the puppies in front of her computer web-cam so we could see them grow. At four weeks old, they showed some interest in more "solid" food, so we made the trip to Katy to pick them up and bring them back home with us. At our home they had *another* new mom as *our* dog, Zoe, had decided that she would finish the job of raising the puppies! Zoe acted as if I had just given her the best gift she had ever received. She tended the four-week old puppies, as if they were her own newborns...she would rarely leave their site. Aren't Cavaliers amazing?!!

We have learned a lot from this experience. First of all, how very hard it was to lose our precious Cavalier, Joy. She was our first loss and I know I will always miss her sweet, smiling face. She was *always* happy and our very best people greeter. She absolutely reveled in being bathed and blow-dried. It was, in fact, one of her favorite things. She would *ask* to be bathed, always nuzzling her head into me as I would dry her. Her name was Joy, and her name fit her so well. While it can be rewarding, for anyone that thinks that breeding is easy...it is not. Finally, we learned that there are truly wonderful people within our Cavalier Club, members ready to go beyond what we had ever expected. People that really care. We feel very blessed and thankful to be a part of such a fine group of members. We know, and have seen for ourselves, the importance of being part of a club that truly cares about the breed.

Our Most Sincere Appreciation to Gwen Wichert and Dana Moore. With special thanks and admiration to Pixie, Lacey, & Zoe.

Dave and Jennifer Snell

