

CHAPTER TEN

A New Beginning

In my beginning is my end.

— T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

The day you go to get your new puppy always has a bit of magic about it. It is a day of anticipation and excitement, dreams and possibilities, hopes and aspirations. Puppies have a way of reducing even the most serious adult to spontaneous displays of childlike delight. It is part of their charm. A puppy touches something very deep in us, and when we first hold one in our arms it is easy to be swept away with blind enthusiasm. Who would suspect the challenge that awaits us?

Nevertheless, magic is deceiving. Whether this day is *truly* blessed remains to be seen, and so we offer a word of caution: enthusiasm that is not grounded in reality, supported by knowledge and understanding, has a way of fizzling when ordinary problems develop. Once the puppy passes the novelty stage, once he becomes a familiar part of your household, the true nature of the relationship becomes apparent, and second thoughts may arise. New owners can quickly lose interest. A more substantial foundation than mere enthusiasm is required to sustain this relationship.

Beyond the joy and emotion of getting a puppy, beyond the good feelings this new bundle of life inspires in us, lies a deeper, more profound reality that should be the anchor of any relationship with a puppy: adoption. Adopting a puppy means bringing him into the heart of your life, and develop-

ing a healthy relationship demands plenty of hard work and dedication from you — especially now, at the beginning. The day you adopt a puppy begins a new phase in his life, one rooted in his earliest experiences, yet now poised to take fresh expression in *your* life. How he develops now depends largely on you. The puppy is no longer the breeder's, no longer his mother's. Today he becomes your puppy, a new member of your family, and this means you become parent, companion, pack leader, peer — the puppy's closest friend.

If this sounds sentimental or idealistic to you, think again. Canines are among the most sociable species in the animal kingdom. Whereas a wolf pup is naturally integrated into the wider pack with his brothers and sisters, your pup does not have that possibility. Instead, he adapts himself by establishing his closest social bonds with you and those you live with, treating you as his fellow pack members. It is now up to you to teach your pup his proper role in *your* pack family, a process that begins the moment you adopt him.

As we have seen over and over again, a puppy builds on previous experiences, and this is no less true of his first few days in your home. Good habits start from the beginning. Planning ahead, taking the time and energy necessary to help your pup make a smooth transition to his new home, increases the probability that his good behavior will continue to develop into maturity. The opposite is also true. High amounts of stress, careless house-training procedures, pampering, and improper discipline, to name just a few potential problems, can get the relationship off to a rocky start and lead to serious problems later on. Since it is reasonable to assume that this puppy will be an intimate part of your life for the next ten to fifteen years, it makes sense to put serious thought and effort into these first few days in order to establish a sound framework for the future.

With this in mind, let us take a detailed look at your pup's first few days with you. During this time, the guiding principle underlying your approach to the pup should be to minimize unnecessarily stressful experiences and to establish a natural rhythm that your puppy can easily adjust to. Since there are many things to remember, having a clear set of guidelines to follow will help bring order and understanding to a potentially chaotic period and reduce the stress you and your puppy experience. The following suggestions will get you and your pup off to a good start, one that you will appreciate in the months and years to come. "In my beginning is my end."

At the Breeder's

Have as much of a consistent environment available for your pup especially during its first week of adjustment.

We have never had a car-sick pup. Labs do not have the sensitive stomach some smaller breeds have.

Some people use the Puppy Aptitude test but we have not found it particularly helpful in the long run. Personalities can be hard to know at 7 weeks old, but if we have something notable we have seen, we can let you know.

We will provide a written health record as well as pedigree and AKC registration slip

A puppy should be adopted only when someone can stay with him most of the time during the first week to promote house-training and socialization. This may mean sacrificing a week of vacation time; however, the long-term benefits make it worthwhile. Speak with the breeder ahead of time and arrange to pick up your puppy in the morning of the first day of a long weekend or planned vacation. This will allow the puppy to spend most of the first day with you and will hasten his adjustment to you and your home.

Ask your breeder not to give the puppy food or water the morning of pick-up. Most do this routinely, but it is best to check ahead. Fasting will not harm the pup and reduces the likelihood that he will get carsick and vomit on the way home. Also, we advise that you drive to the breeder's with at least one other adult, since it is difficult to drive and watch the puppy at the same time. If you have a long car trip ahead of you, you might consider carrying a crate in the car; however, if you do this, the pup should be exposed to a crate several days beforehand by the breeder.

If your puppy has already been selected for you, you will naturally want to spend some time with him when you arrive at the breeder's. When you first meet your pup, sit or crouch down to his level and start playing with him. We like clients to spend ten or fifteen minutes making friends with the pup before we start answering particular questions they may have and going over the necessary paperwork. This gives the initial excitement and anticipation a chance to settle down and helps everyone pay closer attention to instructions during the interview.

New owners ordinarily have lots of questions to ask the breeder, so it is wise to make a list of them beforehand. Aside from specific questions about the way the puppy was raised and the type of personality he possesses (in the litter as well as by himself), you should also ask how he scored on his Puppy Aptitude Test. These results will suggest specific guidelines for handling this particular pup and will help you to avoid management errors during the first weeks.

Make sure that you get a written record of the immunizations and wormings that your puppy has received. If your puppy is purebred, you should receive a copy of his pedigree and the AKC registration slip. Though you may have a particular type of dog food in mind for your pup, it is always

Leaving the litter is the most stressful thing you dog will probably experience in its life. Some ideas to help the transition from the Monks of New Skete:

best to continue feeding the brand that the puppy is currently eating for at least several more days, gradually changing to the new brand. Sudden changes in diet add to stress and can lead to diarrhea or loss of appetite. If you do not plan to use the brand chosen by the breeder, ask if he could give you several days' supply to help wean the puppy onto the new food.

We use Eukanuba Large Breed Puppy chow. They provide 2 pounds + a \$2 off coupon. If you change foods mix this 1/2 and 1/2 with your new food for a gradual change

The Ride Home

Keep the ride home as relaxed and low-key as possible, allowing whoever accompanied you to do the driving. Unless you are using a dog crate, cover your lap and the seating area next to you with a towel or old bedsheet in case the puppy gets carsick. Let the pup ride in your lap or lie on the seat next to you, and keep one hand in gentle contact with him. It is best to avoid any kind of coddling or doting behavior, especially if the pup starts to whine, since this only reinforces whining as an attention-getting behavior. A certain amount of whining is to be expected; if things get too noisy, try putting the pup on the floor between your feet: the vibrations of the car often have a calming effect. Do not punish the pup for whining or vomiting. On the way home, stop periodically and let the pup stretch its legs, but stay away from any area that is frequented by other dogs, since your pup is not yet fully vaccinated and is vulnerable to contagious diseases.

Introduction to the House

When you arrive home, first take the puppy outdoors to the spot you have chosen for his soiling area and wait for him to eliminate. Normally after a car ride the puppy will have to relieve himself, and when he does so, be sure to praise him enthusiastically. Then take the puppy into the house and allow him to walk around and explore, keeping a close eye on him from a distance. Do not be surprised if the pup seems a little disoriented at first. Even the most outgoing puppy will experience strain or confusion in a strange environment,

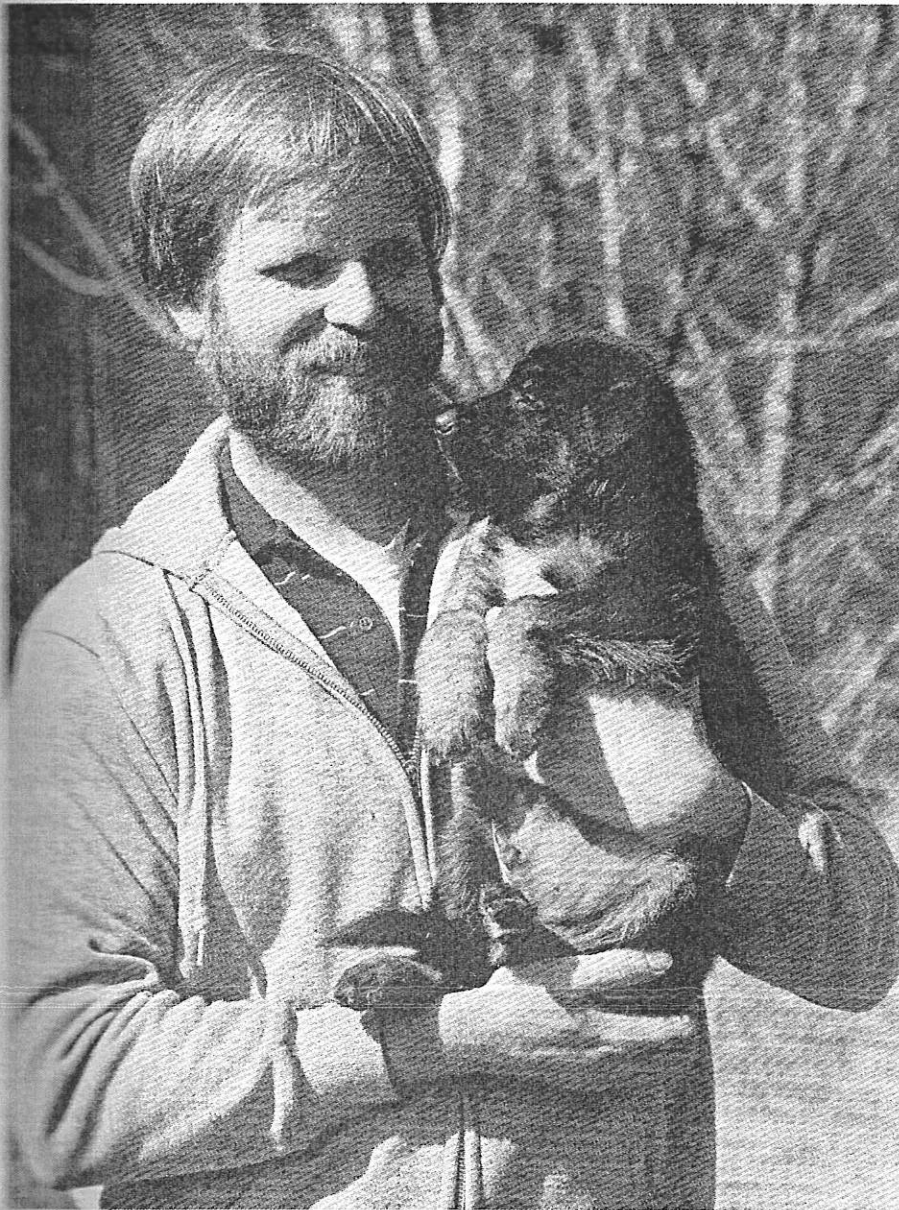
separated from his littermates. Be calm and reassuring, and allow the pup to adjust at his own pace.

If, while exploring, the pup shows interest in chewing something inappropriate, gently distract him by focusing his attention on a squeak toy or meat-scented nylon bone. Do not discipline the pup at this time. Should the pup not seem interested in the bone, entice him to play by some play-inducing gestures such as quick hand clapping or rubbing your hands along the floor. If he starts to follow you around the house, encourage him. Tap the side of your leg (or use keys if the pup is used to them) and call his name as you walk, praising him as he comes along and investigates the different rooms. During these first days, whenever your pup begins to focus his attention on you, either to follow or to simply look up at you, say his name in a cheerful, pleasant tone of voice that encourages him to hold the eye contact. These simple dominance exercises quickly teach your pup his name while presenting you as his leader in a way that builds confidence and trust. Conclude the session by crouching down and playing with him on his level for a while.

Keep the introduction to your household quiet and unforced, allowing the process of bonding to develop in a relaxed and gradual manner. For the first few days, it is important not to overwhelm the puppy with visitors who are curious about the new arrival. Save introducing your pup to friends and relatives until you are certain he has made a smooth transition, usually after two or three days. Then you may initiate a variety of important socializing experiences, described later.

Usually puppies are not interested in eating as soon as they get home, since everything is unfamiliar. Hold off feeding your puppy for at least a couple of hours until he has begun to settle down. Then, offer him some food, and when he has finished eating, take him out to his soiling area and wait for him to eliminate. Puppies typically have to urinate and/or defecate following eating and drinking, waking (short naps included), vigorous play activity, and chewing a bone. If you should wait ten to fifteen minutes and the pup still has not eliminated, take him back into the house for several minutes and then try again. Repeat this procedure as necessary. When he has finished, praise the puppy and bring him back into the house. He should now be ready for a nap.

Young puppies still require plenty of sleep and should have several naps during the day. Choose an area where the pup can be kept safely when he cannot be supervised and which is not isolated from family activity. Usually, the best



The correct way to hold a puppy.

location for this is the kitchen, since it is large enough for the puppy to move around in and can be easily blocked off with one or two dog gates. Make sure the area is puppy-proofed from anything that could be dangerous for the puppy when left alone, such as electric cords, small and chewable objects (rubber golashes, shoes, etc.), and anything made of wood. We also recommend keeping a shipping crate there to serve as the pup's den during the day. As described in the next chapter, throughout the early stages of house-training, you will be alternately keeping your pup in either of these two confined areas. For this first nap, leave the cage door of the crate open (you can tie it so that it does not shut if the pup knocks into it) and have comfortable bedding or fake fur in

the crate itself. Puppies will naturally seek the security of the den atmosphere on their own. Do not be concerned if the puppy initially starts to whine in his confined area; wait for him to relax and fall asleep and then periodically check on him to see when he wakes up. When he does, take the puppy out to his soiling area and let him eliminate.

During these first few days, it will be necessary to pick the puppy up from time to time; young puppies are rarely conditioned to a leash at the breeder's, and this will take you at least several days. While you should encourage a pup to walk on his own whenever possible, unfamiliar experiences such as walking up stairs may require some initial help. There is a right and wrong way to do this. Whenever you pick your puppy up, always use both hands. Place one hand between the forelegs to support the chest and the other behind the thighs to support the rear. This ensures that he is perfectly balanced and unable to wiggle free. *Never* pick a puppy up by his front legs alone (since this could dislocate his shoulder) or pick him up by the scruff of the neck (which could be traumatizing). Also, puppies occasionally solicit attention by approaching their owners and whining. A good response to this is occasionally to pick the pup up and pet him briefly, making eye contact at the same time. This reinforces the positive dominance of the owner and is an effective way of having your puppy key into you.

The First Night

The first night a puppy spends away from his littermates is often traumatic for both owner and puppy alike. The pup's incessant whining and squealing, restlessness, inability to sleep, and the need to eliminate can all contribute to making your first night together miserable. In the face of such disturbances, the temptation will be simply to isolate the pup in a basement or far corner of the house and face the consequences the next morning. We hope that you will not do this. This only compounds his sense of isolation and may make it difficult to teach him to be alone in the future.

It is helpful to understand that when a puppy becomes anxious during this first night, he is reacting naturally, according to a separation reflex. In the wild, when a wolf pup is separated from his pack, he becomes highly emotional and begins to whine, bark, or howl. This is instinctive behavior

that helps reunite the pup with his pack, which is essential if he is to survive. This same instinct is at work in your pup.

The best method we have found to prevent night trauma is to let your puppy sleep in your bedroom on an old sheet or blanket, tethered next to your bed. This works because the pup will want the security of being with you. We prefer this to using the crate, since most pups will not be used to the crate this first evening and will tend to make a lot of noise in it. Before retiring, take your puppy out to eliminate and walk with him around the backyard for a while. Give him the chance to get a little tired. When you are ready to go to sleep, tether the pup with a leash and place him on the bedding so that he is right next to you. This does two things: first, it helps the pup to adjust to you as part of his new pack. In a seven-hour block of time, the pup continuously smells you, listens to your breathing, and accepts the security of your leadership. Second, it prevents the puppy from getting up in the middle of the night to eliminate away from his bed. Remember, puppies ordinarily will not soil in their sleeping area.

It is normal to expect some whining this first night. Should the pup start to do so, reach down and quiet him without a fuss. Do this calmly, soothing him at first. If whining persists, a gentle scruff shake along with a low "No, go to sleep" may be necessary (see chapter sixteen for more details). Do not put the puppy in bed with you. The pup will come to expect this and the practice can lead to a number of behavior problems later on in life. If the pup has been quiet for several hours and then begins to whine, he probably has to go out. Dealing with all this is part of being a new parent and may be necessary for the first few nights.

As soon as you rise in the morning, get dressed quickly and take your pup immediately to his soiling area. Let him empty completely; puppies will sometimes eliminate several times first thing in the morning. When he has finished, praise him cheerfully and return to the house.

Trip to the Veterinarian

For as long as your puppy lives with you, he will require periodic veterinary care for routine shots and check-ups, treatment for minor illnesses, and possibly emergency health care. All will mean trips to your veterinarian. Your puppy's