

Abbey, Her Puppies and Me

By Neville Barlow

When Abbey gave birth to her puppies I was well prepared – a room ready, an enclosure, a water-proof electric blanket, scales, feeding bottles for emergencies, sterilising fluid and so on. However I did lack the all-important experience as I had never reared puppies before but we did have a veterinary nurse staying with us at the time – a great reassurance. However, from the start Abbey showed her independence of spirit dropping her 7 new born puppies round the room and then promptly leaving the room! She showed no interest in making a bed, licking them or providing those vital early feeds. Gradually over the next few hours, I was able to rely on my good relationship with her and coax her back into the room, lie her down and holding her there, start those essential feeds. I soon learned that if I relaxed my hold on her, she would flee the room, leaving the small blind puppies either swaying from her under-side as they frantically clung on, or left deposited round the room, all squeaking away furiously for more food. I would then patiently round up puppies, bring Abbey back in and start the process again.



As the 3-4 hourly day and night feeds developed a rhythm of their own, Abbey and I understood each other better and worked more efficiently together. She became far more relaxed, though still I needed to lie full length on the floor, propped up by my elbows, holding her gently, whilst moving the puppies along her nipples as they sometimes fell off or were pushed off by rivals. Cleaning and toileting – normally undertaken by the mum posed similar problems but with the aid of YouTube I learned what was needed, massaging their abdomens and keeping them continent.

I worried too about Abbey's milk as I had heard horrendous stories about infection, milk drying up, and the mother and puppies being lost. Powdered milk and syringes were in readiness if necessary. Thankfully Abbey kept well with extra convalescent type food supplied by our vet to replace all those calories lost through feeding the puppies – always a considerable strain on the mother's resources.

By the time the puppies had reached the weaning stage, around 6-8 weeks, I think Abbey and I were both relieved – with little sleep for weeks but now a light at the end of the tunnel! By this time I had moved the puppies from the upstairs room – kept at regular 75 degrees F, to the large kitchen downstairs with access to an enclosed yard on sunny days.

When Abbey walked into the kitchen she was always mobbed by her puppies, crowding round her like a much loved film celebrity. By this time Abbey's response had mellowed a little – she would occasionally lick one, or gently pick it up in her mouth.

All the puppies thrived – 5 went to good homes and we decided to keep 2 a male and a female. Abbey actually enjoyed her 2 growing puppies, Badger and Diamond, for the next year, but sadly then developed a complicated immune disorder of unknown origin and despite major treatment by our vet, she later died.

Abbey was the best dog that I ever had, despite her difficulties in coping with motherhood. Like most dog 'owners', I always remain deeply appreciative for what she gave to our family, and her beautiful puppies, and she lives on through our shared treasured memories and through her puppies too.