**HAPPY THIRD WEEK BIRTHDAY!**

The puppies are getting used the bigger world as they gain facility in walking, seeing and hearing. Their first “startle response” was at 19 days, which meant we were indeed entering the first socialization stage. So, they began pre-school at “Montessori Puppy” (20 minutes, twice daily). Here they were introduced to a novelty item or experience each day in their larger more open classroom/play room. That space is actually our living room with floors covered with a king size plus waterproof bedspread. They also get to hear and smell the goings on of the household with the kitchen being near due to our open floor plan.

In essence, we want to encourage them to explore and be curious; like any well curated pre-school. Items are made available that are developmentally appropriate for the puppies to investigate at their leisure. Some novelty items were soft and bigger to snuggle and climb upon; others made crinkly or squeak sounds; and still others played music and counted to five in French when stepped on! They to will get to enjoy cuddles from several dog loving friends and get sniffed by their gentle grandma wheaten, Sophie. Nails were easily ground with an infant dremel versus infant nail clippers. A litter box, filled with shavings (horse bedding) was added to their whelping box and a weaning extension added.

They began lapping warmed goat milk mama Rose got as snacks in the whelping box at about day 19. That told me they were ready to slowly begin weaning. They thoroughly enjoyed goat milk for a few days prior to introducing puppy food gruel/milk. They love it and clean their plate every meal. We are pairing the food with a puppy call, “*Puppy Puppy Puppy*” sung in a happy voice, served with the inevitable grin. After just a few times, they now come running over to the food dish. The puppies still think dessert, a mama Rose milkshake, is the best part though; especially since it is served with a warm cuddle, spa treatment and a nice long nap.

They now have incisors and molars breaking through too; mama Rose can testify. They are mouthing each other, the pig rails, toys, and will be offered raw meaty bones soon. The bones are a great enrichment and exercise activity for them. A novel, soon to be regular experience, they will, no doubt, thoroughly enjoy.

Our job as caregivers this week was to balance the “everything new” in their world to empower exploratory behaviors yet not overwhelm the puppies with too much sensory input. We play classical music when in their weaning pen in the guest room; as well as, some environmental sound recordings (fireworks, traffic sounds, baby crying) at low volumes. We also, will initiate a very brief startle response (shoe drop, door slam) a few times. The puppies will look up, but within a second should go back to whatever they were doing. All these activities, properly time, help grow dendritic connections and build a resilient nervous system.

My hope is that next week as we begin our “classroom” exercises, the puppies will be comfortable and have the faculty to eagerly engage. Like their teacher, they will enjoy learning!

