**HAPPY ONE WEEK BIRTHDAY!**

Rose and Gamble’s puppies are one week old. What an amazing week it has been from whelping to today. The wee neonates, wet and hungry, now all double in weight, are thriving. Rose has settled deeply into motherhood with an ease and demeanor of serene elegance. She is beautiful. I am both proud and humbled by her devotion to her puppies.

At Foxhaven, we seek to respect the balance of nature and nurture. In this instance, we did everything in our power to select a sire that complimented the dam’s phenotype and improved or safe guarded the genetics essential for a healthy collie. We follow the protocols and philosophy of puppy rearing espoused in *Puppy Culture (PC)*. As a former teacher, I think of it as an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for each puppy with an emphasis on social-emotion goals at the age up to 12 weeks. It is nurture with a capital “N”.

This first week focused first on providing the dam, Rose, with a comfortable quiet and safe place to whelp and nest with her puppies. Our guest room is a perfect place. I can sleep next to her whelping box to offer support and the back door leading to a deck & yard private from the other dogs in our home. The result is a picture of a peaceful mother and thriving calm puppies.

We also gently stroke the puppies often. No doubt, an enjoyable task for everyone. I smile so much my face hurts and my heart swells. Technically, stroking a puppy stimulates the glucocorticoid receptor (GR) gene. At birth, the gene is dormant. Licking from the dam stimulates and activates the gene. The licked and/or stroked puppies grow up having a more relaxed response to stress. I’d wager that these puppies are golden, with the attention Rose and I give them.

Except for nail trimming days, we also do Early Neurological Stimulation beginning at day three. The theory here, in a nutshell, is the exposure to very low levels of stress (being gently placed in a supine position for a few seconds, for example) help build resilience in an adult dog.

The nearly 24/7 intimate time with the puppies in their nursery and the PC “homework” assignments help us become better observers of nuance in each puppy. Emily was the first puppy to begin using her hind legs a bit and graduate from the seal crawl to a weeble-wobble. Annie is actually beginning to mouth her sibling. I swear Splash and Liz squeaks are on the verge of becoming barks. Kayce is the most stoic and calm, loves to cuddle. Little Peanut is a mighty milk-seeking missile deep diving under her mom for the best nipple. Hawk and Liz were the first to wag their tails while nursing. All are precious and darling.

More tender and dear is my heart space. It expands more than I ever imagined possible. These little beings are, in fact, making me a better person. I can’t wait for next week and their eyes opening. They grow up too fast it seems; oh, how I treasure these wee weeks.

