

Why do bad things happen to good breeders?

By Holly J. Goldman-Craig

This past January we were anxiously awaiting a long, carefully planned litter of Cardigan Welsh Corgi puppies.

My bitch, Emma, had a textbook whelping. The normal pre-labor stuff for 24 hours, she started third stage labor at 4:00am, water broke at 6:00am, first pup born at 6:55am, second at 9:00am and third at 9:20am. It was an easy delivery for her and for that I am so, so thankful.

The first puppy was hard to get breathing but I did get her going. On the small side for my girls, only 8 oz. She was plump and beautiful. The second puppy was small (5.5 oz.) and he never took a breath. Number three was also small (6 oz.) and she too never took a breath. And we worked long & hard on these pups trying to get them to breathe.

Emma loved her puppy! She is one of the best mums I ever had, and I have not had a bad one. I never saw the pup really sucking, but she was always snuggled up with her mum, hidden by Emma's belly fur. Whenever I would try to force the pup to take a nipple, she would not hold on. But, since she had no competition, I was trying not to worry, but my gut told me otherwise.

When the pup started to get weak, I was preparing to milk Emma to feed the pup when a friend asked if I had checked for a cleft palate. I had never had a cleft palate before so I never thought to look. Sure enough, the middle 1/3 of the puppy's roof of her mouth was missing. We were in tears. Since Emma loved her baby and wanted it with her, we let nature take its course. She was so loved by us and her mum for her short stay on earth. Emma was so sad when her puppy passed, as were we.

How could this happen? We did everything by the book, following veterinarian recommendations. Why?

Questioning everything we did, I looked back over the events that took place during the two months of Emma's pregnancy. I brought Emma to the largest indoor show circuit of the year for a CERF clinic when she was 3 weeks pregnant. Emma has been to shows before, she is 1/3 of the way to her Championship, so I did not think anything of it. What I didn't realize was that I probably exposed her to the herpes virus at a critical stage of pregnancy.

This link is very educational on the canine herpes virus.
<http://www.showdogsupersite.com/kenclub/breedvet/vhr2.html>

When a breeding bitch is previously exposed, most often at dog shows, they usually carry a high enough titer so their pups are unaffected by the virus. Emma may not have had enough exposure to the virus from previous shows to give her the titer she needed. This article states that exposure can cause low birth weights, stillborn pups and birth defects. I took Emma to the show when she was 3 weeks pregnant. Three to four weeks of gestation is when midline closure defects (cleft palates, open abdomens, etc.) form.

The article also states that stresses may activate the virus. I had given Emma a booster vaccine the day she came into season, which my vet approved. This could have stressed her immune system in the time frame. Also after consulting my vet I used a veterinary prescribed spot-on flea control while she was pregnant. And I did not skip her monthly heartworm prevention. All of this could have stressed her immune system while she was pregnant.

We were not able to definitely diagnose that it was herpes as the pups were frozen. Necropsies cannot be done on a frozen body for herpes. So will we know for certain if it was herpes? NO we will never know.

If herpes was the reason I lost this litter, Emma will not have a problem with herpes for any subsequent litters as once exposed they will carry the immunity from subsequent infections. So we will rebreed her next season.

I do know that next time I will keep my pregnant girls safe in the seclusion of my home.

I know I will make sure that they have been vaccinated well before their heat cycle.

I also know that with where I live I can safely skip our monthly flea and heartworm medications for the two months of pregnancy.

When you breed dogs, you always take chances and risk the lives you love. We are so thankful that we have Emma, who is happy & healthy after all this. We did lose her grandmum during a c-section. Put in perspective we are very lucky and thankful for what we do have.

And please do not think "that can't/won't happen to me." If you breed dogs the question is WHEN IT WILL HAPPEN TO YOU. Breeding dogs is a labor of love. The joys that it brings does outweigh the devastation. That is why we continue.

