

# Even If It Never Happens... *It May*

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In 1961 was the first time I witnessed the miracle of life, a litter of puppies from my parent's foundation bitch, Ch Shady Lady of Pamper Hill. I was enthralled by the six little bodies all vying for their place at the drinking fountain. In my opinion, the only thing that might be better than

watching puppies with their mother, maybe the smell of puppy breath.

As adults, my wife and I have whelped about 35 litters in the past forty years. Just about every one of them has been unique. I look at breeding much like a tapestry, each strand was artfully woven together to form a beautiful balance trying to magnify the standard for our breed.

I have always prided myself on the care and understanding I have of each bitch I choose to breed and what their traits will produce given the male to whom she is mated. This past December, I was humbled and dismayed by how events played out.

Several days before Christmas, our Dam, Cayenne, went in for her X-ray for a puppy count. We knew she would have a small litter, as this was her third litter and she was not nearly as big as she had been previously. The X-ray showed two puppies. During the last 8 to 10 days of gestation, the spinal columns and skulls or crania of the whelps calcify and are easy to recognize on X-ray. This often can give you a good idea of the number of whelps to expect which I like to know as a breeder.

Our drama started on Christmas day. We were preparing for the family to come over. We had not yet prepared a whelping box as the bitch was not due for several more days. She lives with my daughter and we were planning on her coming to our whelping area the day after Christmas. But as with life, mother nature sometimes intervenes in ways that are not imagined. Cayenne gave birth to the two puppies on Christmas morning without really showing

any signs of pre-labor or labor itself. Quickly preparing the whelping box, mom and babies settled into their cozy nest.

That evening, mom and puppies were all doing well, puppy weights and temperatures were stable and all seemed well. Cayenne's temperature returned to normal and the night was uneventful. In the morning, everything looked good as it did throughout the day. Cayenne's temperature was in the high normal so we had no concerns. We monitor temperature for a few weeks after the dam give birth just to make sure there are no infections, etc. setting in. She was doing well and being the good mother she had always been. She hated to leave the whelping box and that was really status quo for her. She loved her puppies.

The following morning, Cayenne and her two puppies were doing well. The little girl had was not as active as her brother but nothing alarming at this time. The day proceeded without a hitch and that night everyone was tucked in and doing well.

Around midnight, Cayenne woke me up and was very persistent that I needed to let her out or at least get up and see what was going on. Everything still looked fine with the puppies and Cayenne went out and went to the bathroom. She came back in and got in with her puppies a minute or two. She again was in my face, wanting or needing attention. She wanted me to know there indeed was something wrong. I rechecked the puppies, they seemed fine but Cayenne was all over me wanting attention. This is her normally, a real attention hog, but not with puppies and not in the middle of the night.

I do not know to this day why, but I decided to recheck her temperature. It had suddenly spiked to 105.2. I immediately started getting dressed and calling the emergency vet clinic because she needed to be seen and immediately. Much to my shock, I was turned away from the first hospital I called. They said they were not taking emergencies. Although highly perplexed and more than a little panicked, I pressed on to try other emergency hospitals. After being turned away from four more hospitals, I found one thirty miles away who would take us.

Securing the puppies in a warming box, I took Cayenne and the puppies and headed for the car. It was around one in the morning on a holiday weekend and the roads were fairly clear. Driving forty-five minutes to the hospital, we arrived with only one incident. In the middle of the highway, going 75, Cayenne decided to climb into the warming box to be with her puppies. The problem was it was much too small and she would not be dissuaded. It was a cardboard box and it ripped down two sides but she and the puppies were where they were.

Arriving at the hospital, they took Cayenne to the back and left me standing to hold a box of puppies. They finally took me to a room. They told me they did not have an incubator or warmer I could use for the puppies. Now understand, this is a leader regionally as an emergency vet





hospital. It is on television so I know perfectly well that they had to have an incubator. They provided me a bear-hugger, which is a warm air machine that is used postsurgery but I did not think it was warm enough to keep the puppies temperatures where they needed to be.

The doctor told me they were stabilizing Cayenne and disappeared again for the next several hours. He returned and said that her blood work did not look bad but she was definitely fighting some infection. He said he was not an expert in ultra-sound but thought there might be some free fluid in the abdomen. It was now about 4:00 am, the puppies had not eaten in four hours and they did not know why her temperature was so elevated. He suggested that they could either hospitalize her and their ultrasound tech would be there Tuesday and perhaps they would have a better idea what might be going on or I could take her home and watch her.

It was very apparent to me that staying was not the best option. I told them that I wanted to take her. They said they would get her ready to go. As they gave her to me, they let me know that her temperature had continued to rise and was now 106.4. In the meantime, I emailed my Theriogenologist or reproductive veterinarian. Again, this was a holiday weekend and I knew he was traveling and was not sure if he would even get this email until he was home. I had made the decision that I would transport Cayenne to the Veterinarian Teaching Hospital, CSU, in Fort Collins even though they had turned me away the night before. I would stop by my house, which was on the way, and get some coffee and help. I called my daughter, Melissa, to meet me at the house and help me get the puppies and Cayenne up to the hospital.

We were still an hour from CSU. Cayenne was showing signs of significant disintegration. She was becoming lethargic. Melissa held her on her lap and we had the puppies

in a warming box between us.

About thirty minutes into our trip, as we were going through a narrow construction area on the highway, the female puppy started to cry. As I picked her up, she had a seizure, every muscle in her small body going stiff and then going totally limp. She stopped breathing. So some reason, probably the lack of sleep, I was calm and started giving chest compressions and breathing for her through her nose and mouth. This was all one-handed as I was still driving and because of the construction area, there was no place to pull over. What seems like an hour, but in reality was most likely a minute or two she began to cry and move. Melissa held her close to her skin and tried to keep her warm. She was responsive and cuddling up to Melissa.

Relief overwhelmed me as we pulled into Fort Collins getting closer to the veterinary teaching hospital. My phone rang and I saw it was a Fort Collins number so I answered it using the hands-free feature in the truck. Dr. Burns, my reproduction vet had gotten my email while traveling and called to see what was going on. As I explained all of the events, he immediately told me to have the emergency team contact him as soon as they finished their initial examination. As I hung up with Dr. Burns, we were pulling into the hospital.

Immediately, personnel came to the truck and took Cayenne promising to send others out for the puppies. A minute later, more techs arrived for the puppies. Directing me where to park, due to COVID, the hospital was not admitting most nonmedical people.

Melissa and I were finally able to gather our breath. We made it to the hospital, everyone was alive. Minutes ticked by, we said prayers and hoped simply for the best. The emergency vet called to let us know the plan. They were working hard to stabilize Cayenne and the puppies were warming up. The little girl was colder than what was hoped but she too was responding. She told us she would check back with us in a couple of hours. She also said they had also sent for the neonatal team and they were on their way into the hospital.

After having about three hours of sleep in the last 36 hours, Melissa and I decided to leave the parking lot and go get some brunch. We arrived back to the lot just in time to be invited in to get the puppies. They were hospitalizing Cayenne pending several tests. As we were escorted into the hospital to the reproduction room we were met by one of the Residents in Theriogenology and the head reproduction tech. I had met them both and had worked with them before. I felt they were very knowledgeable and assured me that Cayenne was indeed in good hands. They were very hopeful with the puppies but very guarded with news about Cayenne.

They went over tube and bottle feeding with me even though I had had some experience. They wanted me to be prepared for every two-hour routine I was about to



embark on. From experience, I know that two-hour feedings are never fun. Up every two hours to warm up formula, take temperatures, and then tube feed.

The emergency vet called with an update early evening. The news was grave. She was a bit more stable but there was an obvious source of infection causing the fever which was still unknown. The drugs and care they were giving were keeping things in check but they were not gaining. The ultrasound continued to show some free fluid in the abdomen. After consulting the entire team they had decided that the best course of action would be to immediately take her into surgery. This would be an exploratory surgery to find out the source of the fluid in her abdomen. Due to her high fever and how sick she was, they were very fearful for her life they gave her a 50/50 chance, at best, for her to survive the operation. To be honest, tears filled my eyes. I hated to think of her dying. They felt she would probably need to be hospitalized for two or more weeks. She simply was extremely weak and they too were afraid for her life. All I could do, at this point, was to give my consent and again be praying for Cayenne. They immediately rushed her into surgery and the doctor would call as soon as they had any news. This surgery was scheduled for four hours.

The puppies did well for the first eight hours but then the little girl began having difficulty regulating her temperature. You can only feed newborns if their temperature is above 96. Newborn puppies' temperatures run lower than adults and you would like to see puppies at this age about 98 degrees. Newborn whelps cannot digest their food if their temperature is too low and it sours in their stomachs and may kill them. We again stabilized her temperature and hoped for the best.

As a side note, it is always good to take your phone off of do not disturb in the middle of the night when you're expecting a call from your veterinarian. Four hours went by and then five and then six and I still had not received any news from the surgical team concerning Cayenne. I had briefly slept but was again up every two hours to feed the puppies. I was getting a little panicky and very anxious to know what was going on with our dog. I grabbed my cell phone to call the hospital to check-in, it was about 1:30 in the morning and seven hours since she headed for surgery. I noticed I had missed a call and a voice message from the hospital. With my heart racing, I listened. Cayenne had survived. The surgeon explained that the operation had gone as well as could be expected probably even better. Cayenne had a significant tear in her uterus which was the source of the infection. She indeed was septic but was doing as well as could be expected. She told me she would try me again after rounds at 9:00. I again was teary but this time tears of joy.

I learned the next day from some other hospital staff that Cayenne woke up from surgery and immediately stood up and started wagging her tail. I think that says a lot about how stoic the Bedlington breed truly is. They are

fighters in every sense of the word.

The surgeon called and again relayed the information from the night before but was very encouraged by Cayenne's progress. She thought that Cayenne would only have to stay hospitalized for a week or so rather than the full two weeks.

Unfortunately, tragedy struck again the next day we lost the little girl puppy in the middle of the afternoon. She simply had no more fight left. Her brother continued to do well.

That evening the surgeon again called with remarkable news. Cayenne could go home the following afternoon because there is no more reason for her to remain in the hospital. Cayenne's temperature was normal, she was eating, she was moving her bowels and she was doing phenomenally well.

Our celebration was tempered by the loss of the puppy, but we were indeed happy that she seemingly was out of the woods and would be coming home. As we picked her up the next day, we found out Cayenne had become a celebrity. She had spent very little time alone recovering. She had drawn the affections of the interns, the residents, as well as the techs and doctors. Everyone wanted her to crawl into their laps, wagging her tail and giving them kisses. That is a Bedlington.

I want to stress to other breeders, that a uterine tear is extremely rare in whelping. My reproduction vet had never seen it in his 30 years of practice. As of this writing, the medical team is still discussing the case as there has only been one paper published about canine uterine tears during labor. They are also continuing to discuss what the cause may have been. The team cannot agree on the findings.



*Cayenne  
and her  
little boy  
continue to  
do well.*