

**Labradoodle Love:
A Maine breeder's story
Excerpt**

USING A CRUMPLED paper towel, pulling and pushing puppy poop out of plastic chicken wire onto urine-soaked newspaper in the tray, Kelly Corbeil, 40, wrinkles her stubby nose at the smell, scrunching up her full, oval face. “I have the world’s most sensitive nose.” Straight blond hair falls across her face as she tilts the black tray up to rest against the back of the toilet, seat cover down. “Go, go, go,” she mutters beneath the narrow screen-less window that’s open halfway for ventilation. Bath towels hang just behind Kelly in the long narrow bathroom. The off-white tile floor is new; its edge meeting the worn, Pepto-Bismol pink carpet of the bedroom.

The poop trays are cleaned twice a day after feeding times: once in the morning, once in the afternoon. Turning back to the tray, Kelly uses both hands to guide it into the bathtub lined with shampoo, conditioner, and body wash. Struggling for the perfect angle to scrub the tray, she explains, “I used to have to use a toothbrush. It took hours. I finally asked my husband to buy me a hose.” Leaning, one knee on the edge of the tub, she sprays the plastic tray and grate, her ample rear end straining her black sweats.

Each litter of puppies—there are two currently in residence—uses two trays, four trays total to be cleaned twice a day now. Kelly just ordered new trays, that will be narrower and longer, easier to fit into the tub. Kelly grabs the plastic garbage bag she’s filled with urine-soaked newspapers and ties its top in a knot, tossing it out the window. She’ll pick it up when she gets the mail later. “Hopefully, it won’t rain before then,” she mutters, rinsing her pale, full hands in the sink. She scrubs with soap, splashing water all over the basin, leaving the trays in the bathtub, soaking in a special kennel sanitizer—

Lemon 256. Once, months ago, she forgot to turn off the water while soaking the trays, and flooded the bathroom. The water ruined her oldest son, Ryan's, basement bedroom. Bob, her husband, had to remodel both the basement and the bathroom. A dog breeder, Kelly Corbeil raises at least 3 litters—up to 21 puppies—a year in her Lyman, Maine home.

ROCKY, 8 weeks old, is ready to go to a new home. Earlier in the day, Kelly carefully bathed him in the kitchen sink. She trimmed the fur on his back end and around his eyes, and ground down his nails with a little file that sounds like a dentist's drill. Strong, round arms wrapped him in towels and held him close, telling him that he was a “Good dog, yes, a good dog.”

He looks adorable, all apricot fur, brown expressive eyes, and big Clifford-style feet. He yips with excitement and bounces into corners chasing a miniature rubber duck as his new owners, mom, dad, and two children look on approvingly.

“Each puppy goes home with a binder,” Kelly explains in her thick, Downeast accent, pronouncing binder “bindah.” On the couch, she leans over the binder, turning the plastic sleeves, as she instructs the new owners on how to train Rocky to ask to go outside. “Tie these bells on a string and hang it by the door,” says Kelly, pulling 2 jingle bells out of the gift bag she's prepared. “Each time Rocky looks like he needs to go out, touch his nose to the bells and say “out”.” She explains that when he's older he'll do it himself. “And you can encourage him by giving him a treat or something. It usually takes about two weeks.”

Kelly turns another page and points out a yellow sheet that shows Rocky's family tree, going back three generations. Kelly lifts a fake leather satchel with three heart shaped pictures on the front, and she points to the photos. "That's mom, that's dad, that's Rocky!" The new owner coos, "How sweet!" Kelly smiles and pulls out the other goodies: a plush toy, a bag of food to help the puppy adjust, poop bags, and a Ziploc bag with a baby blanket inside. "This blanket has the scent of all his siblings on it. Put it in his crate; don't wash it. The bear at the top will come off; all the puppies pull it off."

The new owners ask about his "little surgery." Rocky was neutered earlier in the week. Kelly believes in neutering most of the puppies before they go home, even though there is controversy among veterinarians about whether neutering or spaying at 7 weeks is too young. Kelly says that the puppies recover; they're playing when they come home. Rocky is playing now, rolling on the shiny wood floor and dragging a fuzzy pull-toy three times his size under the nearby dining room table. The kids should just be careful not to bother his stitches, says Kelly and explains that the vet should see him within the next seven days. She asks if they brought the check with them. The husband nods and hands over an envelope containing \$2,500. A carefully bred Labradoodle is an expensive dog.

Kelly lifts Rocky into the new owner's arms. She hugs everyone, then waves goodbye as they pull out of her long driveway on their way home from Maine to Massachusetts.

Considered great dogs by many and increasing in popularity, Labradoodles are created by mating a Labrador Retriever and a Standard Poodle to blend the personality of the Labrador Retriever with the intelligence, sensitivity and low shedding quality of the

Standard Poodle. The breed was initially developed in Australia as an allergy friendly seeing-eye dog in the late 1980s and became popular, spreading to the United States a decade later. Intelligent, attentive eyes, floppy ears, and a short nose characterize the loveable Labradoodle's face. The coat is soft and curly or fleecy and straight; the tail stands in an upwards loop and frequently wags with friendliness. The coat can range from black to cream. Some noses are apricot or chocolate, instead of the expected black. Kelly loves the goofiness of the Lab, clearly evident in her dogs. Labradoodles can lie flat on their bellies, with their legs sticking straight out behind them, just like people.