

## Puppy Frustration

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Despite the multitude of frustrations involved with raising a puppy, I have been pretty proud of the patience I have found within myself over the four months since we adopted our Boxer, Beta. She's howled the night away a time or two (or fourteen), made an art project out of our sofa, pulled on her leash, peed on the guests, on and on down the list of things that are perfectly normal for and perfectly annoying about puppies. Somehow looking at her merry little face and gait even in the wake of horrible behavior has allowed me to avoid getting angry with her. That is, until last night.

Beta is five months old now and we still struggle with housetraining. Every puppy training book I have read says that dogs naturally know not to eliminate in their beds, crates, etc. Beta never got that memo. From the beginning, she has peed in her crate, on the carpet and inexplicably, on the bed on which she has just been lounging. Messing up her crate necessitated daily baths, so on the advice of a trainer we pulled back on the crate training a little while she learned that outside is the place to go. We keep her gated in our dining room and kitchen. We take her out multiple times in the morning and have someone come around lunch to walk and entertain her. Sometimes when I get home in the evening, there's some urine on the floor, but overall she seemed to be starting to understand the concept of holding it and going outside. Yesterday, however, I came home to the triumvirate. Upon opening the door, I was struck with a foul odor, but all I could see were the thousands of pieces of paper all over the dining room. What is it? I thought. We already know not to leave any magazines or books within Beta's reach on shelves, on the kitchen counters, etc. Where did she get this?

It took me a minute to notice the Boxer puppy calendar that had been hanging on the wall five feet off the ground was missing (it took me until this morning to appreciate the humor in this). Amid the debris, I also found my gym class schedule and a Christmas card, both of which had been posted near the top of my refrigerator. I immediately processed that her reach has increased since the last destructive episode and took her out for a walk. On the walk, she pulled and pulled on her leash, requiring correction about every fourth step, but I persisted in patience. Coming back into the house, I was prepared for paper cleanup, but again immediately noticed the smell. A closer examination revealed that she had loosed her bowels upon the dining room carpet and her bed too. Three steps further and I came to her crate, which featured a giant puddle of pee. Again, she is not in the crate when we're gone, which means she made a special trip into the crate JUST TO PEE.

Oh, Beta.

For the first time, I just couldn't get my patience and resilience activated. She had broken me. As I cleaned up the paper, she lay at the open door of her crate whining for dinner and looking at her bowl and I couldn't drop the frustration, anger and helplessness I felt no matter how ridiculously cute she looked.

I've read so many books, followed the advice of trainers and for heaven's sake I work for the preeminent pet publishing company in the world. If I'm not immune to this kind of abject disappointment and frustration, who on earth is?

Of course I know the answer to that: no one. Puppies have so much to teach us, truly. For people like me who like to keep things organized and under control and who strive for perfection so much in their daily lives and relationships, the unpredictability of a puppy is a major adjustment. Over the few hours at home with my husband and Beta last night, I relaxed and watched her play, living forever in the moment she inhabits. She had forgotten whatever whipped her into that calendar shredding frenzy and I could forget the damage (none of it permanent) too.

By the end of the evening, I was lying on the floor with her little head resting on my upper arm and I felt myself letting it all go. She's a baby, after all. One with teeth, crazy-strong muscles and mysterious emotions I may never totally understand. Every day with her is an adventure. I can't expect perfection out of any part of the process of raising her, even myself.

So yeah, I forgave her. But please join me in keeping your fingers crossed for an intact house when I get home tonight and full housetraining in the next couple weeks!