

## **A Year of Loving Dangerously** **A First-Time Puppy Raiser's Perspective**

I would summarize the puppy-raising experience like this – it starts with feeling overwhelmed for a few weeks, which is soon followed by a year of total joy, and ends with a short, but intense burst of emotional trauma. Sounds like fun, eh?

Those first couple of months caught me off-guard and were certainly overwhelming and stressful at times. I often wondered what I had gotten myself into. However, with time and a lot of help from others, things got better, much better. As these first couple of months ended I made the decision to love her completely, to let myself get attached, fully knowing that saying good-bye would not be easy. I decided to love dangerously.

As we began the next year, my goal was to socialize Polly so she would be well behaved and confident in a variety of situations. I also did my best to teach her the commands she needed to have, all 30 of them! Little did I know what she would teach me.

I may have taught her to sit, stand, and shake. But the lessons she has given me are so much more powerful. She taught me about patience, and how to nurture growth by making learning fun. She turned my house into a home. She taught me that a life consisting of playing, eating, sleeping, and socializing is pretty darn great. But the most important lesson was the reminder of how important it is to live and love for the moment. Knowing that my time with Polly was limited, it pushed me to enjoy every day we had together, all 365 of them. If it takes 30 days of repeating a behavior to make it a habit, I expect this habit to continue well beyond turn-in day! That is the greatest gift anyone can receive.

The question most people ask, especially right before turn-in is “how can you give her up?” I could say that I signed a contract agreeing to turn her in, and if I don't someone will come after me. But the best answer I can up with is “*we do what's difficult to achieve what's extraordinary.*” I'm willing to go through the hard part of saying good-bye if it means she will be that miracle for someone who really needs her. It would be so amazing, so extraordinary, for her to be that long-desired and cherished companion for her graduate. (And if she ends up coming back to me, well, that would be extraordinary too.)



My 16 months of raising Polly are now coming to a close. I know I was lucky to be Polly's puppy-raiser. She was a gem that just needed some polishing to allow her to shine. It's been an amazing experience that has exceeded all my expectations. Now it's time for her to move on, as she has a greater purpose to fulfill with her life.

As I face the reality of saying good-bye, it feels as though a part of me, a part of my heart is being taken away. But being a puppy-raiser causes your heart to grow bigger, so you can handle losing part of it.

As I approach our last days together I do so with tears in my eyes and hope in my heart. But I know my tears are nothing compared to the tears that have been shed by her potential graduate. Those tears of frustration that come from the desire to be independent, and to just be accepted by society. My hope is that Polly will change all that for her graduate. My hope is that as a team they can experience all that life has to offer, regardless of disability.

So my dear sweet Polly I have given you my best, and now it is your turn to give your best. I know all the pups we raise are special, but as my first you will always have a special place in my heart. You never forget your first girl. So here's to you Sweet Polly Girl.

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