A record of our first whippet litter, whelped June 24, 2000

When my daughter and I got our first whippet in 1992, I'd been showing and breeding collies on a small scale for nearly 20 years. I hadn't always been active in the show ring—I took two breaks for having children—and bred very few litters. But I'd whelped and raised a number of pups for my collie mentor, Anne Cross of Shadowmont Collies, and I stayed in touch with the dog world, even during my "sabbaticals."

My daughter and I had been showing collies very actively during the late '80s and early '90s. She was much better at it than I was and often helped people show other breeds. One day she announced that she wanted her own breed. "No matter how long I have collies, you will have always had them longer," she explained, with indisputable 14-year-old logic. I didn't exactly agree to the addition of another breed, but she began the Great Breed Search.

Every weekend on the way home from dog shows, she pored over the show catalogs. In the back of each one is a list of all AKC-recognized breeds. She crossed through the ones she knew she didn't like and the ones she knew for sure I wouldn't approve. Weekdays, after school, she spent afternoons in her room studying books about the breeds remaining on her list. At the dog shows, she would disappear for hours and I'd find her talking to the owners of various breeds. I didn't pay a lot of attention to what she was doing. After all, she tended to get pretty obsessive about things for awhile and then go on to something else. I also think I was in denial. I really couldn't imagine owning any dog other than a collie.

One day she announced her decision: She wanted a whippet. "A whippet?? For heaven's sake, dear, they are skinny and have no hair to speak of and they have their tails tucked all the time! I'd be forever trying to feed it and make it happy!" She just smiled. "But they're very sweet, Mom." I doubted that. They didn't look sweet to me. They looked, well, aloof. I figured that was the end of the matter.

Then I went out of town on a business trip. Her father took her to a dog show while I was gone, and I came home to find a skinny little white dog with big reproachful eyes curled up on our sofa. Sporting Fields Hamlet had arrived. She had effectively talked Jan Swayze, of Longlesson Whippets in Atlanta, out of him. I'll never know how she accomplished that.

Hamlet taught us about showing whippets, introduced us to the whippet fancy, and, although he never finished his championship, they eventually became a very successful Junior Showmanship team. More importantly, he won my heart.
Fast forward over the next few years: her father and I divorced (Nothing to do with that whole Hamlet thing. I'd forgiven him that.) and my daughter got married. She has a wonderful husband and lives in Columbia, South Carolina, with Sporting Fields Airborne (Alexis). Alexis, incidentally, arrived one year after Hamlet. It's true that you can't have just one.

I moved to Lexington, Virginia, in 1998 to marry Walt, whom I'd met on a dog email list a couple of years after my divorce. Smartest thing I ever did...Walt is as devoted to dogs as I am and knows a great deal about genetics and breeding issues. We think that between us, we "get it right" at least most of the time.

Though Walt and I will both always love collies, our last senior died in the summer of 2004, and I'm afraid the whippets have taken over. Old Hamlet with the reproachful eyes lived with Daughter and Alexis until summer of 2003, and then he came to Virginia to live with Walt and me. He's still reproachful, a bit grumpy and a little arthritic (Hamlet, not Walt), but still as much a snugglewhip as ever and we're delighted to have him gracing our sofa for as long as he can.

Though I've never met a whippet I couldn't love, they don't all need to be bred. Walt and I didn't breed our first litter till 2000. It took us that long to acquire whippets that we honestly felt had something to contribute to the breed's future. On the following pages is a chronicle of the Litter 2000 experience.

By the way, I was right. I do spend most of my time feeding the whippets and making them happy.

6-11-1999

Ivy finished her AKC championship today—now we can discuss whether we want to breed her.
Raising a litter of puppies is a lot of work and then there is the whole question of selling them, keeping track of them as they grow up, and...well, being responsible for a bunch of little lives that won't be here if I don't create them.

I've never figured out what it cost to finish her championship, but it was easily upwards of $2500 over the past two years, if you count entry fees, gas, motel rooms, food, and miscellaneous travel expenses. My daughter Johannah and I showed her ourselves, so we didn't have professional handler expenses, though it might have been cheaper to do it that way. Competition in the whippet ring is stiff, and everyone loses more often than wins. It took awhile to finish Ivy. I went through a divorce, a move from South Carolina to Virginia, and a new marriage during the time between her first show and this one.

**Expenses: Total showing expenses about $2500**

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**8-1-1999**

After much discussion, we've decided that yes, we want to breed Ivy. It will be my first litter in over 10 years and our very first whippet litter. I bred and showed collies before whippets and we're still active in collie rescue. We had three whippets before we got Ivy, two of whom are living with Johannah in Boston now, but Ivy is the first one we really believe has "something to contribute to the breed." The timing is not great for us personally; we have a lot of other stuff going on in our lives right now, but Ivy will be four in January and it's now or never. It's an expensive proposition--you hardly ever make enough money on a litter to even cover the expenses--but it's something I've been studying for and planning for years. We've looked at our finances and it seems to be something we can afford to do. So we're going to go for it!

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**8-3-1999**
We've been going through magazines and American Whippet Club annuals looking at the ads with an eye to choosing a sire for Ivy's litter. Jodi Stanner, Ivy's co-breeder in North Carolina, is really excited about it and is helping us look for a stud. There are truly some beautiful whippets out there! We're trying to find out details about the ones we're most interested in. Most important to us is temperament. Whippets have to be good pets before they can be good show dogs.

10-9-1999

One of the sires we were considering is very "barky." Ivy is a quiet girl and we want to maintain that in her puppies, so he's out of the running for now anyway. That's a disappointment. He is not too far away and belongs to a person we like a lot. Another one we considered is promising, but the owner is very difficult to work with. Don't need that. There are plenty of stud dogs available and we want someone we can talk to about problems.

11-3-1999

Checked out some more males. One's eyes are too light. The American Kennel Club standard says eyes should be dark, though in England, lighter eyes are acceptable. Two of the males have less-than-perfect fronts (structure is extremely important to a dog bred to run) and another is too tightly wound mentally for our tastes. Sometimes the best showdogs aren't the best pets, and as I said earlier, we're looking at temperament above all. It's very tempting to just breed Ivy to a famous dog, as his name on the papers would help sell the puppies we don't plan to keep...but our puppies will go to people who will live with them in the house, so the sire, like Ivy, really has to be a good pet as well as a good dog structurally. Walt is actually beginning to talk about breeding Ivy to our own dog, Chase. I hadn't thought about that before.

11-20-1999
I went several states north to look at a candidate for breeding today and took Ivy with me. This dog is one of my absolute all-time favorites but both his breeder and I agreed that he's not for Ivy...they have a couple of faults in common, and we want to breed away from those. Very disappointing, as he is a lovely dog. Well, none of them are perfect, but we don't want to "double up" on faults. I appreciate the breeder's honesty. Not all breeders are so forthcoming about their own dogs' faults!

Expenses: Travel $150

12-3-99

Jodi and I both have corresponded by e-mail with owners of several males we're considering. The problem is we have no way of knowing what their temperaments are really like. Most breeders have been very honest with us about their dogs' faults but it's hard to determine whether a dog is hyper, laid back, noisy, a bit shy, or anything else via e-mail or phone.

Temperament is one of the hardest things for an owner to evaluate in her own dogs. After all, doesn't everyone think her own dog is the greatest, though he may be a little nervous, a little shy, whatever? Even trying to be objective, it's hard. For instance, I wouldn't call Ivy nervous or high-strung, but she is more...well, intense...than I would like to see in our puppies. So choosing a very relaxed dog for the father is more important than it might be if she were a really laid-back girl.

Meeting dogs at shows doesn't tell you a lot since they're not in a home environment. Complicating matters is that some of the big breeders keep most of their dogs kenneled, and it's hard to know what they would act like in the house.

12-10-99

We took Ivy to see her breeder, Cal Perry, Appraxin Whippets, in Bristol, Tennessee, who has
been breeding and showing whippets for 40 years or more. Cal is one of the most respected and knowledgable of the "old timer" whippet people, and he knows as much or more about the breed than anyone else we can think of. Our male Chase (Appraxin Kamikaze) went along for the ride—four hours one way. We looked at a couple of Cal's males and asked what he thought we should do about breeding Ivy. He looked hard at Chase and said, "Why not him? He's got everything she needs improvement on, plus it's a great linebreeding." Cal suggested one other dog, but insisted that he really thought breeding to Chase would be a good move.

**Expenses: Travel $50**

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**12-13-99**

The suggestion of using Chase for Ivy is very tempting. Walt, who suggested it first (even before Cal), is looking very smug these days. I'm still not sure. We ran their pedigrees through a program to determine inbreeding coefficient, and it's not a bad breeding at all. Chase's grandfather is Ivy's father, so we thought it might be too close a breeding. According to the formula for determining these things, it's well within the "safe" range. Very experienced breeders can inbreed successfully, but it's safer by far to stick with linebreeding, which is breeding dogs that are still relatives, but not as close relatives as in inbreeding. Inbreeding usually involves mother to son, father to daughter, etc. Breeding cousins is an example of linebreeding.

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**1-5-2000**

Still waiting for Ivy to come in season and still aren't completely decided on a male, but we're leaning towards Chase. The disadvantages are that he has not finished his championship (though he's certainly good enough to finish) and that he is an unproven stud. We don't know if he would even be able to sire puppies, and with Ivy being a virgin also, the breeding could be difficult. Chase has had prostate and urinary problems occasionally too.
3-1-2000

We took Chase up to a urinary/reproductive specialist in northern Virginia to get a sperm count and some other tests done. About $350 later, we were told that he is fertile, though his sperm count is a little low right now. We were instructed to put him on Glyco-Flex, MSM, and Vitamin E, plus some prescribed antibiotics.

Expenses: Vet $350; Travel $20

4-1-2000

Pre-breeding tests at the vet for both Chase and Ivy—brucellosis, thyroid, fecal check for worms, vaccinations updated, heartworm check, general checkup. About $250. We discussed x-raying for hip dysplasia, but it is practically unheard of in whippets, so we decided against it. Still not sure about that decision.

Expenses: Vet $250

6-3-2000

Another $40 for ophthalmology checks to be sure they are free of hereditary eye defects. We had to take them to an eye clinic held at a dog show about 100 miles away—there are not many certified canine ophthalmologists outside of vet schools, and there certainly aren't any around here.

Expenses: Vet $40; Travel $20

4-10-2000
Ivy is in season finally! Boy, it seems like they come in season like clockwork months when you don't want to breed, but once you make up your mind to breed, it takes forever! Chase seems eager enough but it will be a few days before she is ready to breed. When I had collies, I always sent my girls away to be bred, so I never had to worry about this part. We've gotten lots of conflicting advice: Keep them apart till breeding, let them play together as usual; breed them only once, breed them twice, breed them three times, breed them every other day, breed them every day. If they won't breed naturally, we're not going to artificially inseminate. Breeding problems can be hereditary, and we don't want to perpetuate them if either of these two has any.

4-15-2000

We aren't getting a lot of sleep. I had forgotten how obnoxious dogs can be when one is in season! Chase shrieks and cries all night trying to get to Ivy. We can't leave them together all the time because they might very well hurt each other trying to breed. She is not happy either.

4-17-2000

Okay, Chase is sleeping in the van in his crate. He tried to eat through the door to get to Ivy last night and he almost succeeded. He's always been pretty pathetic when she's in season, but he seems to know things are different this time and it makes him even worse. Hmm. Wonder if I have to include the hundred bucks or so to repair the door in my litter budget?

4-20-2000

A successful breeding! They seemed to know exactly what to do without any help from us, thank
you very much. After some of the stories I had heard about difficulty in breeding, I was a little surprised at how easy it was. Lots of folks have to deal with artificial insemination, bitches who don't want to be bred, stud dogs who are not cooperative... Just the simple act of breeding can be very expensive. After the business with the door, it's a good thing Chase caught on fast!

Total expenses planning stage $2880

5-21-2000

We don't know whether Ivy is pregnant, although she is acting a bit more lethargic than usual and has become irritable with Chase, who is usually her buddy. She's also very clingy, following me everywhere I go. We can't really tell if she's acting abnormally though or it's just wishful thinking!

5-25-2000

Morning sickness...and maybe it's my imagination, but she sure looks pregnant to me. Walt says definitely yes. It could also be a false pregnancy though. I'm trying not to get too excited
yet.

5-31-2000

Well, she's either headed for a serious weight-loss program or she's got babies in there. Somehow we thought that a pregnant whippet would lose her figure a bit more, but she looks sleek and fit from the side, and huge from above.

6-2-2000

Ivy is none too happy about this pregnancy business. She sulks all day and has nothing nice to say to anyone. I'm feeling a little guilty about putting her through all this and I worry about the birth. I keep hearing stories about bitches who died from complications. I'm not inexperienced at this...I've whelped a number of collie litters, but it's been several years. Am I more nervous because I know more than I did when I started in collies or because I've forgotten everything? Unfortunately I haven't forgotten everything that can go wrong. In my last litter of collies we lost all but one of the puppies and had to hand-raise him.

6-6-2000

So much for the svelte outline. Ivy looks like a watermelon on legs. She is doing very little except following me around and eating like a horse. We bought puppy supplies—bitch milk replacer and bottles in case she can't feed them. I'm brushing up on tube feeding procedure in case it's necessary. A friend loaned us a whelping box and we've turned the guest room into a nursery. Whelping pads for the bottom of the box, vitamin supplements, first aid supplies. We haven't changed Ivy's diet other than the quantity. She's always been in pretty good condition, but we do have to walk her about a mile a day to keep her toned.
6-15-2000

X-ray today ($90) showed seven little skulls! Ivy doesn't follow me everywhere like she used to - too much bulk to move around. We try to get her out for walks at least once a day, but she doesn't have much enthusiasm for them. Oh, the x-ray or an ultrasound is always a good idea to see how many puppies to expect. If one pup isn't delivered along with the others, there can be serious, even fatal, results.

Expenses: Xray $90

6-17-2000

I started sleeping in the "whelping suite," as Walt calls the guest room now. The puppies could come any time after the 57th day, and that's today if she got pregnant on the first breeding. She refuses to sleep in the whelping box, but stays in the bed with me. This could be interesting.

6-18-2000

Started taking her temperature twice a day now. It will drop to below 100 degrees 24 hours before whelping. Right now it's 101.1 to 101.9. She groans when she sees the thermometer.
6-20-2000

Still nothing. Ivy and I sit in the guest room and stare at each other. She wants to be with me all the time...I feel sorry for her hauling herself up and down the stairs, so I moved my computer into the guest room. I'm feeling guilty at putting her through all this. I know it's just cold feet on my part, but I keep thinking of all the things that can go wrong. I would never forgive myself if I lost her.

6-22-2000

Okay, her temperature has dropped below 100. I'm ready for some puppies. Ivy still is not sure what's going on, and she is very uncomfortable. She pants a lot and actually lies on her back to get comfortable...something she has never done. We go outside to walk a lot. She has to pee all the time, it seems. Our entire household has begun to revolve around her belly.

6-23-2000

(4:00 am)

I'm exhausted. Ivy and I were up nearly all night. At least I was. Every time she moved, I jumped. She crawled under the covers all the way to the bottom of the bed (her favorite sleeping position) and would not lie still. I remember from my collie litters that these final few days seem to go on forever, but at this rate I'm going to wind up sleeping through the whelping just because I've stayed up so long waiting for it!

(9:00 pm)
Well, this is just great...her last day or two of pregnancy and Miz Ivy decides to pull out her switchblade and start a rumble with Judy Street Dog. It was time for their bedtime biscuits, and everyone lined up in the kitchen, just as they have every single night for the past two years...ever since we moved here. I tossed the biscuits...just as I have every single night for the past two years. Everyone caught a biscuit, but Ivy dropped part of hers. It rolled underneath Judy, and I guess Ivy took that as... Who knows what she took it as, but she jumped Judy. They have never fought, but they really got into it. Walt pulled out the diet soda (our emergency dog-fight-stopper) shook it up and squirted them with it. That broke it up enough that I could grab Ivy by the hind legs and he could haul Judy into the living room and close the door. Excitement like this I could do without. Probably the puppies could do without it too.

(10:00 pm)

I think Ivy is in the first stages of labor. But then I've thought that more or less all day long. More panting, "nesting" on the bed. She's still not interested in the whelping box unless Isit in it with her. We sat there all afternoon today, me reading a book and her sleeping, but it gets pretty uncomfortable. Beginning to wonder if I will ever sleep again.

Total expenses during pregnancy $235

6-24-2000 (12:20 am)

Well, I gave up and went to sleep around 11. Ivy crawled under the covers and down to my feet again, but I was so exhausted that her squirming around didn't keep me awake this time. Around midnight, I woke up to a soaking wet bed. Instantly awake, I leaped out of bed into the whelping box. "We need to get you moved in here, honey," I told her. Amazingly, Ivy jumped right into the box and started nesting. With a few minutes, we had a puppy emerging. She seemed very confused, so I helped ease it on out and broke the sack for her. She took over immediately, thank goodness...I was having flashes of the Bad Mother Stories everyone has
been telling me. Some bitches more or less refuse to have anything to do with the puppies and the breeder winds up raising them herself! As soon as I could, I took a peek to see what we had...a brindle girl with just a spot of white in the middle of her neck. She seems fine. 14 ounces. That's a big puppy.

(1:10)

I'd forgotten how nervewracking it gets between puppies. Ivy seemed for awhile to have just stopped with the first one. She spent a great deal of time cleaning her. I'm letting her do as much as possible by herself, though it sure makes me nervous. A second puppy arrived at 1:00 am. Another dark brindle girl, this one with a white slash on her rear and half a thin white collar, 15 ounces. Ivy did better this time. I did help get the sack off...I just can't trust her to do that fast enough, even though I know she would.

(1:30 am)

Boy, by the time we got the last one cleaned up, the third got here. Yet another girl, this one a lighter brindle and white, 14 ounces. I don't actually know how much whippet puppies usually weigh when they're born, but I had collies who didn't weigh this much! They sure are healthy little girls, and all have caught on to nursing with no problem.

(2:15 am)

Girl number four. Another dark brindle with a white patch on her rear and a white patch on her neck. This one was 15 ounces! Ivy is very professional about this whole thing, and very happy for me to help. She does most of the work, but I do still get their little heads out of the sacks. I had planned to take some pictures of this process, but the camera is downstairs and I don't want to leave. Walt got up and checked in on us half an hour ago, but I forgot to ask him to go get the camera. How did he manage to arrange sleeping through this whole thing? He did ask if I needed him to boil some water. "Isn't that what people do?" Right. Thanks, honey.

(3:00 am)

I don't think she knows how to make boys. And they're getting bigger...this one was 16 ounces!
A dark brindle girl with a thin white collar. Ivy is getting tired, but still taking care of them. In between puppies I sit studying my Canine Reproduction book and trying to be sure everything is going right. Again I shudder at wht all can go wrong. Puppies born with their organs outside their bodies, mothers hemorrhaging to death... I try not to think about it. When Ivy starts laboring hard again, I put all the puppies who are already here in a little box with a heating pad to wait till the next one is born. Fortunately she trusts me. I have had moms who really just wanted to be left alone. Nine times out of ten they would do fine all by themselves, but it's that tenth time that keeps breeders sitting up with their girls all night.

(4:15 am)

Well, we lost one. She went a long time between puppies this time, and seemed to go in and out of contractions a few times. I think she is really tired. About the time I was thinking about calling the vet, she finally had this one, another little girl, born dead, the sack already gone. An hour between puppies is not usually considered an emergency...yet (I had a collie who went two hours once) but apparently it was too long this time. I cleaned out the pup's little mouth, gave her a few slings to clear the mucous, and massaged her vigorously, even blew into her mouth, but never got so much as a gasp. She'd been dead too long to bring her back. Geez, I hate that. I feel there was something more I could have done, but I don't know what. Ivy licked her a few times, but wasn't very interested.. She figured out immediately that the pup was beyond help and just started cleaning the others again. I didn't give up as soon, but finally had to admit the baby was gone. I put her on a heating pad though, in case there was a miracle. There wasn't.

(5:00 am)

Finally a boy! This is number seven, so if the x-ray was correct, we're done. This guy started nursing before he was all the way out of the sack! He's much lighter than the girls, maybe a blue brindle?, and weighs 16 ounces. I'd really hoped for a blue brindle boy. Maybe this will be my keeper!

(6:30 am)

Ivy says we are finished. She didn't want to leave them to go out and pee, but when I insisted, she came right along. She sure didn't fool around though. The minute she was through, she was straining on the leash to get back to the door. I let her in, took off the leash, and she was up the stairs and in her box in no time. Walt and I took the dead puppy out to bury her under the peach tree behind the barn. Gosh, that was tough. A little life that didn't have a chance...or maybe would have if I had known more or done more. I do know from my collie years that it's normal to feel that way, but it doesn't help the pain very much to know it. Should I have called a vet? How long can you wait between puppies? Was there something more I could have done to revive
her? And it's hard too, wondering what her little life would have been like. She just looked so normal, as if she could have started breathing any moment.

But I'm happy the others seem so healthy. Walt is making me waffles with strawberries and whipped cream for breakfast. Much more useful than boiling water...

This section coming soon.

This is a run-down of the money we spent to breed Ivy and raise the puppies until they went home with their new families. It illustrates pretty clearly the fact that small kennels breed for the love of the dogs, not for any kind of profit.

Pre-breeding expenses for Ivy:

- Eye exam & certification: $50

- Brucellosis test (a sexually transmitted disease): $35
- Thyroid panel: $52

- Pre-breeding exam: $30

- Heartworm & fecal exam: $30

- Long distance charges (stud research & consultation): $50

- DNA test for AKC: $40

Pre-breeding expenses for Chase:

- Eye exam & certification: $50

- Brucellosis test: $35

- Thyroid panel: $52

- Pre-breeding exam: $30

- Heartworm & fecal exam: $30

- Treatment for urinary problem (travel to repro vet in N. Virginia): $400

- Antibiotics for urinary problem @ $60/month for 4 months: $240
- DNA test for AKC: $40

Pre-whelping expenses:

- Whelping supplies (milk replacer, whelping pads, alcohol wipes, disinfectant, etc): $125
- X-ray and vet checkup for Ivy during last week: $130
- Worming protocol for Ivy for 25 days @ $2/day: $50

Litter expenses:

- Dewclaws removed & vet exam for pups: $100
- 1st shots & worming - DH-P (6 weeks) $12 per pup: $72*
- 2nd shots & worming - DHL-P + Bordatella (8 weeks) $16/pup: $96*
- Puppy food & extra for Ivy during nursing: $100
- First dose of heartworm preventative - $6 per puppy: $36
- Puppy pack (leash, collar, book, etc) - $25 per puppy: $120
- Litter registration: $20
- Long distance charges (puppy buyers): $50
- Extra laundry, electricity, paper towels, etc.: $25
- Advertising: $150
- Puppy vet check ups before going to new homes @ $30 each: $180
- Spay/neuter rebates as provided in sales contract: $150

*we gave vaccinations ourselves

TOTAL EXPENSES: $2568

INCOME

Four puppies sold at $500 each: $2000
TOTAL INCOME: $2000