



# I Won't Be Home for Christmas

*By Barbara Kahn*

The children were nestled all snug in their beds, while visions of puppy dogs danced in their heads.

Loving parents, dreamily imagine their youngsters playing joyfully with their new holiday gift: an adorable, cuddly puppy. Friends and family, who know someone who they're sure would love some holiday cheer, envision surprising their loved one with a puppy. Or seeing a cute puppy, reading a for sale ad in the paper, or visiting a shelter at the holidays may make us impulsively add a puppy to our homes.

We all imagine this idyllic scene: the lights glow on the tree, the gifts are beautifully wrapped, and the smell of home-cooked delights waft from the kitchen while the family is happily engaged playing with their new puppy.

What's wrong with this picture? It's a fantasy!

Here's the reality of the "new puppy for the holidays" idea.

The puppy has knocked down the tree while the family chases it around the room trying to get the ornaments, wrapping paper, bows and gifts away from it. If the pup is large enough, he's stealing food from the counters and tables which will soon be followed by a major digestive upset and messing all over the house. When he's not being pursued, he's pursuing, tackling the children who, once on the ground, switch from giggling to screeching while the puppy drags them by the hair across the room. Puppies tend to dart out open doors and escape when guests are arriving. They jump on people, knocking them down or ruining their clothing. They bark for attention.



Now that's the real picture of a holiday puppy whose owners haven't adequately planned for its arrival.





Puppies are not toys. They are living, sentient beings that have innate behaviors that don't often coincide with our pre-conceived notions. It takes an incredibly long time for the average puppy to learn to play nicely and that process must be taught by you. When adults are pre-occupied with decorating, preparing meals, purchasing and wrapping presents, entertaining family and friends, adding a puppy to the mix can often be a disaster ... for the puppy and its owners.

That said, it seems inevitable that many families want to welcome a puppy into their homes at this time of year. So how can we make this a wonderful experience instead of a potentially tragic one?

Rather than bringing the puppy home at such a busy time, why not just take a picture of him, frame and wrap it instead? That way, the children know that the puppy's on his way and that Santa will drop him off after delivering all the other gifts.



If that's not enough excitement, wrapping all the puppy paraphernalia may give the occasion an added boost. Wrap up the puppy's toys, bed, leash and collar and a note about when the puppy itself might arrive. Create a great game of choosing a name. Talk to your children about how the puppy will also have to go to school and discuss with them what their roles will be in the puppy's everyday care and management.

Remember that children under the age of 5 are not always ready for a young puppy. Selection of the best puppy for your family, the best age to bring a pup or dog into your home and techniques for making sure both your children and your puppy enjoy their relationship will follow in future columns.

Once the excitement and over-stimulation that generally occur with the holidays is over, once the decorations and gifts have been put away, once the household is back to a normal schedule and guests have gone, bringing your new puppy home will be a much easier and more pleasant experience.

