

Jay and I couldn't have been prouder Thursday evening as our little Ringo earned his first of what we hope are many diplomas.

He made it! He was a Puppy Kindergarten graduate.

Of course, we are graduates, too.

Puppy Kindergarten has been an adventure. When we started, we thought we'd have the most rotten, misbehaved puppy in the bunch. Turns out, most of them start that way. Diane whipped us and Ringo into shape in no time. We also had a few ah-ha moments. There is a lot you forget once your dog is mature.

There have been some mishaps. The first night we went through the agility course, there was a small tinkling incident in the tunnel. Seems Ringo has an over-excitabile bladder. Please don't ask Auntie Amanda about this. It's just too embarrassing. Don't ask his doggie daddy, either. He's been peed on more times than I have fingers on one hand.

We always are meanest to the ones we love, aren't we?

The first night we switched puppies I had to apologize in advance to lady who would take Ringo. She was sorry, too. See, they're all alike in the beginning.

Week 5 we were introduced to our first cat. When that conversation started I felt sweat popping out on my brow. Are you kidding?

But Ringo came through like trooper. He sniffed the rather large tabby from nose to tail and back. He didn't really have an opinion one way or the other. The other puppies thought the kitty was OK, too.

When we got in the car that night, Ringo asked me if kitties taste like chicken. Shame on you Ringo.

Then came graduation day. The last day of Puppy Kindergarten is a costume contest. We scoured the Internet for an appropriate costume. We found a white studded Elvis costume that was just too cute; also too pricey for one day. Then we found the Super Dog costume. It seemed like fate. When we got Ringo his ID tag, we chose the Superman emblem.

When the costume arrived in the mail, it was in three pieces. All said and done, Ringo had five string ties around his little body; a lot of work on a squirming puppy who isn't sure he wants to play the dress-up game.

We arrived at class and couldn't wait to see the other puppies all dressed up.

Max had on a Michigan jersey. Teahya was an Easter Bunny. Cajun was Simba from "The Lion King." The competition was stiff. Teahya ended up winning the costume contest and was presented a soft, plush oinking pig she didn't appreciate at all.

Then the Puppy Games began. First, we walked with our little friends. They have to stay by your left side. Yeah, right. Ringo makes it his job to veer off course every chance he gets. Max won that round.

Then we all lined up and the pups had to sit and stay until we released them. Ringo has sitting down; it's the staying he forgets about. Teahya won that.

Down and stay was next. Did I mention it's the staying he forgets? Cajun won that round.

Then it happened. Ringo hunkered up and dropped a load. While he is not the first nor I'm sure will he be the last, my face turned red and my husband had to turn around to keep from laughing. After I cleaned up his little mishap, it was time to move on.

Jay and I were little nervous by then. Three other puppies had stars beside their names by this time and poor little Ringo had none.

The come command was next. Ringo was up first. I took his lead off because I could imagine it getting caught in something and that star would never appear beside his name.

Jay and I walked to the other end of the training course. We took a deep breath, yelled his name and said, "Come." Our little guy flew all the way across the room and sat right down in front of us. Eight seconds flat. Impressive. At the end of this round, Ringo had his star.

With the competition tied with one star all, the agility course was next. Ringo has taken to this like, well, a star. He is fearless.

We were up first and we hit each station with near precision. Sixteen seconds! Wow. Again, impressive. What should have impressed everyone is that mom didn't fall over or pass out. I had just run the agility course, also.

At the end of the Puppy Games, Ringo had the most stars and took home a much deserved goodie bag.

It was hard to get (our bursting with pride swollen heads) through the door to leave because we were so proud. Ringo didn't have that problem. He hit a recent growth spurt and everything go a littler bigger — except his head. Poor Ringo.