

# Lamb ADDICT



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There are all sorts of addictions—food, shopping, gambling and much worse. There are support groups to help deal with addictions. But what happens when you have a Border Collie addicted to lambs? Meg is a lamb addict—anything to do with lambs, Meg is *right there*. Newborns are the worst but she'll take them all: Bottle lambs, ewes with lambs, weaned lambs. She's obsessed and I seem to only enable her addiction.

I fear with each lambing the addiction will only grow.

In January 2014 I was lambing Katakhdin ewes. Meg and I headed to the barn at 5 a.m. for the first check. It had snowed several inches overnight; the wind continued out of the south, which is rare, but it meant snow had drifted inside the barn door, which was left open so the ewes could come and go as they pleased.

At first glance all seemed well in the drop pen, a couple ewes had lambs that were cleaned and dry, just the way I like to find them.

"Mist," my Great Pyrenees guardian dog, walked over to that drift of snow inside the door, putting her nose in the snow. At that moment I noticed a newborn lamb lying on its side, covered in snow. I thought for sure the lamb was dead, but it lifted its head slightly. So I hurried over to pick it up, grabbed a towel and began rubbing. Meg stood in front of me, nudging my leg with her nose, trying to get me to lower the lamb so she could see.

Time was running out for the lamb, so I ignored Meg. She was not going to let

the lamb out of her sight, so she "dogged" my heels as I hustled to the house with the lamb bundled up in my coat.

Stomping into the warm house with Meg right behind me, I laid the lamb down on the tile floor of the bathroom.

While I cranked up the heater to begin warming the lamb, Meg began licking it from stem to stern. I figured a little extra help getting it warm and dry sure couldn't hurt, so I towel-dried the lamb's other side; then we traded sides.

Meg was more than willing to step up and assist. Her mothering instinct for this slimy, wet, cold lamb was amazing. Even with Meg and me doing our best I knew that wasn't going to be nearly enough.

The lamb needed to be warmed up internally; she needed some calories quick if I were to save her. I had never given intra-peritoneal glucose before, but I knew that's what was needed to treat this lamb's hypothermia.

Leaving Meg tending the lamb, I figured out the dose, got the syringe and readied the disinfectant. After cleaning the injection site, I gave the lamb the glucose and left it swaddled by the heater. There was little else we could do for this lamb now; we'd just have to wait and see. I convinced Meg we had more work to do outside.

On finishing the rest of the chores, we came inside to find the lamb *standing*. Wonderful! I didn't expect her to live. When things work out well, I always pause and give thanks, because the outcome isn't always so pleasant.

Meg approached the lamb gently, her tail swishing from side to side, already working on polishing up "her" lamb. I made a bottle for the lamb which it drank heartily, while Meg stood anxiously by, waiting for clean-up detail.

She licked the lamb's face clean, no foamy milk residue on that lamb when she was done. I named the lamb Frosty (seemed appropriate). A ewe lamb, she stayed inside for about a week.

Though I was in charge of feeding her, my Border Collies did the rest, taking turns "lamb sitting."

Frosty's now part of the breeding flock. She survived the hypothermia without any lingering problems, though she might have a bit of an identity crisis: When the dogs are pushing all the other ewes in the flock, Frosty comes to stand by me sometimes, just watching the action. I wonder if she's thinking how silly the rest of the sheep are for moving away from the

dogs, after all, she'd slept on the dog bed in the kitchen with them.

## Other Signs Of Lamb Addiction

March came, bringing more lambs. Meg made me laugh as she brought a first-time mom, with lamb, from the pasture. On her own, Meg did a perfect "Army Crawl," where she moved smoothly and swiftly, belly three inches off the ground. A drill sergeant would've been pleased with her form. This "new skill" she simply invented—specifically to move young lambs!

Lambs normally don't respond by moving away from a dog until they're older, but Meg seems to have success with her method. By slinking along the ground, Meg takes some pressure off the ewe. At the same time, she keeps her body at eye-level with the lambs. It's remarkable to see the dogs making adjustment on their own to get a job done.

Once this pair was moved, I had Meg help with a ewe that needed assistance lambing. Meg helped me pen the ewe, then stood in front of her. Focused on the dog, the ewe stayed still, so I could come up and pull the lamb.

As soon as the lamb was out on the ground, Meg stepped up to clean it. If Meg could feed the lamb, that would be one thing; but I told her this one was staying in the barn—that cleaning job wasn't hers. We were done here; Meg left with me, very reluctantly. As she looked back, you could almost hear her questioning, "Are you sure the ewe can take care of the lamb as well as I can?"

We should all love our jobs this much.

Border Collies—when given the opportunity to work, the freedom to think on their feet and to adjust to the situation the way they see fit, can be truly worth their weight in gold on a livestock operation—even with a lamb addiction. ♪



Denice Rackley employs, raises, trains and sells cost effective canine farm hands. [www.clearfieldstockdogs.com](http://www.clearfieldstockdogs.com)