

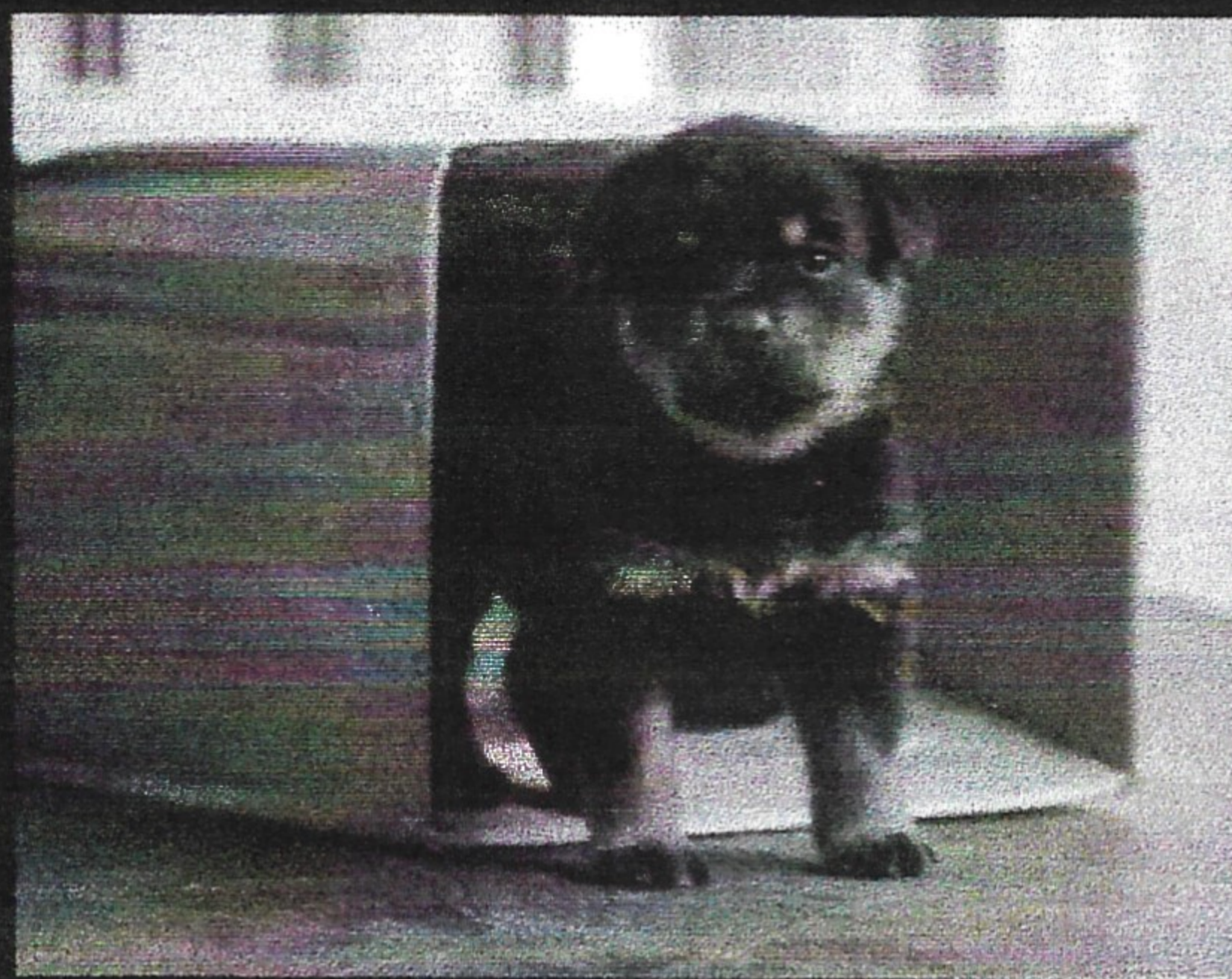
Socializing Puppies

BY BARBARA FAWVER

Welcome, puppy.

No matter whether you will be a show dog, a field trial competitor, a hunting companion, or a loving pet, your future should start with balls, squeaky toys, climbing obstacles, and games of hide-and-seek. Children and seniors, backyards and basements, carpet and concrete, you have much to experience and learn.

Puppy socialization focuses on that sliver of time to shape puppies toward becoming confident, well-mannered and cooperative adult dogs. "Puppies develop at a fast pace, so there is a small window of



Simple things like cardboard boxes, big metal spoons, empty plastic bottles, and soft little toys help acclimate a puppy to different textures and smells.

opportunity when they are from 5 to 16 weeks old to effect positive development," says Pat Hastings, co-editor of "Another Piece of the Puzzle: Puppy Development."

Hastings considers "bounce-back," the ability to recover from first being afraid, as one of the most valuable behavioral traits a puppy learns. Socialization reduces the number of things in the world that frighten a puppy by continually providing the experience of first being afraid and then recovering. The more things a puppy experiences during critical socialization periods, the

less bothered the puppy will be throughout life when confronted by new things.

"The 'bounce-back' is critical, which is why you must never feed into a puppy's insecurities," says Hastings, a prominent puppy evaluator and seminar presenter. "You have to ignore puppies' first fear reaction and let them figure it out for themselves without interference from you. If you ignore it, they usually will too. The next time, they likely will not give it a second thought. This is the bounce-back."