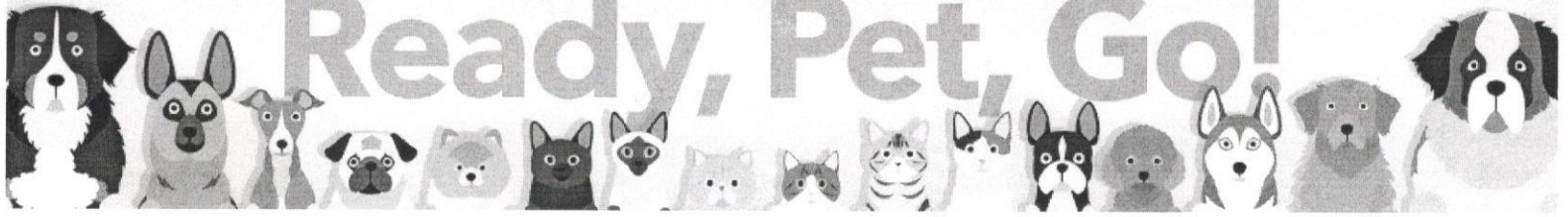


Ready, Pet, Go!



Pay attention to your dogs

Happy Monday!

I recently learned a lesson from a delightful Abbotsford, B.C., retiree — a sage pet owner who lost her precious pooch last month in Souris.

Seventy-something Shirley Klassen and her husband Ron have been breeding CKC-registered rough collies and Standardbred race horses for about 25 years on their 10-acre property they named Prairie Wynd Stables. In August, the hard-working pair took some time away from their busy farm life — the "one big happy family" consists of 28 dogs (23 puppies), seven horses (two yearlings and one weanling), three cats, six kittens and a few chickens — to visit family and friends in Souris, a small town located in southwest Manitoba. While there, however, their beautiful pregnant rough collie, Sienna, went missing.



When I reached Shirley late last week at her West Coast home, she began by describing how her one-year-old, long-haired pooch was behaving peculiarly the minute she and her husband arrived at her brother-in-law's home.

"We took Sienna with us because she's pregnant," explained Shirley, adding the pooch was ready to whelp at any time. "She's usually fine as long as she's with us. But this time she was poking me, barking and trying to get back inside the truck."

Distracted by greeting family members she hadn't seen for a very long time, Shirley turned a blind eye to the forewarnings until Sienna, spooked by passing transit vehicles, bolted for the bush.

"I think she got terrified of the No. 2 Highway with big gravel trucks and semis," said Shirley, adding the roadway is no more than 40 feet from her brother-in-law's home.

Nevertheless, with the help of local entrepreneur and dog lover, Judy Alfonso, word spread quickly around town that Sienna had gone astray.

"We put up posters and sent out messages on social media," said Judy, 61, who runs a popular Facebook page dedicated to the local dog day care, Doggy Drop Inn & Spaw. "Everyone was doing all they could to find poor Sienna."

The industrious search parties, which included hundreds of people from Souris and the surrounding areas as well as Shirley's nieces, Shelley and Joy Smith, from Saskatchewan, set about scouring nearby parks, creeks and trails. At one point, a group of children spotted a dog dragging a leash at Victoria Park and later, a clump of hair was discovered hanging from a tree on a nearby trail.

We finally divided the town into grids. And by the fourth day we figured out that she must be having her puppies so we instructed everyone to search underneath Caragana bushes and decks."

That's around the time Souris residents Corrine Hale and her husband Ken heard a strange sound coming from across the Souris River.

"We hopped in the truck and drove across the river," the retired teacher said. "And when we got there, we heard strange barking, whining and yelping."

The couple combed the bushes that were situated nearly 10 feet above the Souris Dam, whistling while they got nearer to the sounds.



Finally, they spotted her.

"Sienna was still tethered to her retractable leash, which was tangled in a shrub," said Corrine.

"She growled at first, but we assured her that everything would be okay."

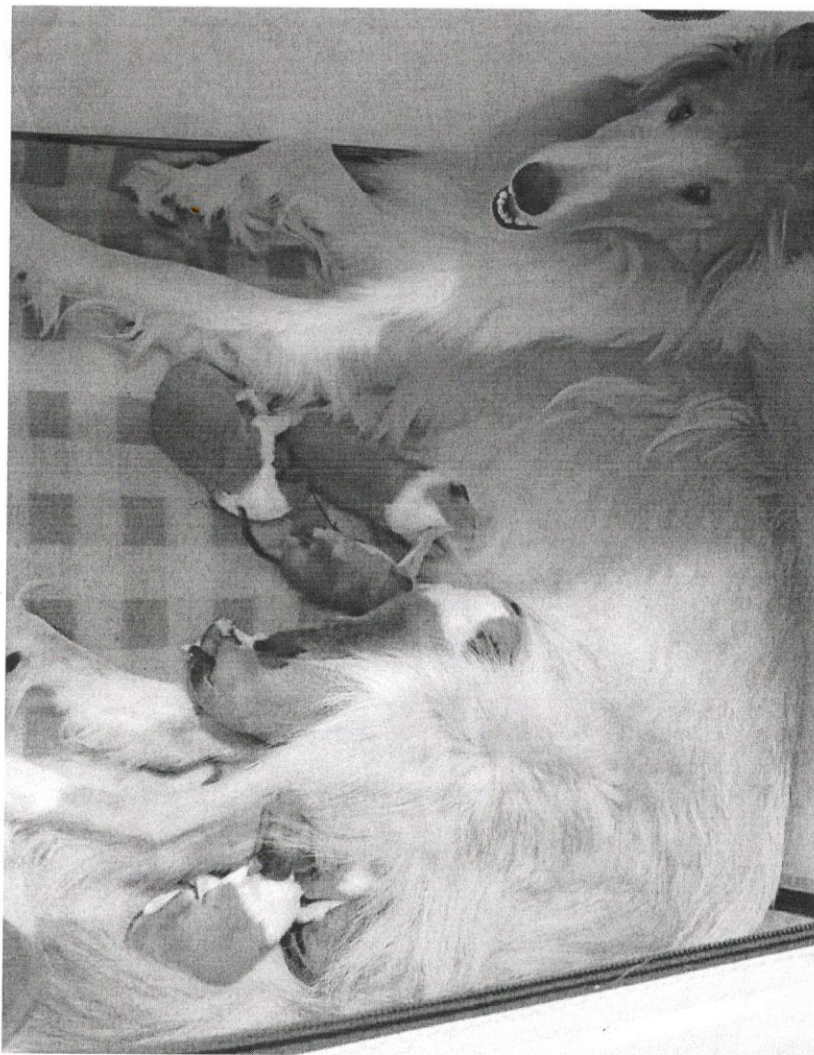
What they found next astounded the couple.

"She had one puppy at her side," said Corrine, whose husband cut the tangled leash before finding four more pups about five feet away.

They put them in their shirt and led Sienna to the truck.

But before they drove away, Ken went back one more time to check for more furry newborns and there, in a burrow, he found four more.

"I think they probably rolled down the incline," said Corrine.



SUPPLIED Sienna and her new litter.

Minutes later, when Shirley got a call that Sienna and her pups were out of harm's way, she was beside herself with joy.

"It was a miracle," she said. "The puppies were plump, dry, clean and their umbilical cords were mostly gone. But they were cold and hungry. I doubt if they could have survived the night."



SUPPLIED Sienna's sleeping pups.

"She's a fantastic first-time mom," said Shirley, who, after experiencing every pet owner's worst nightmare, offered up a few words of advice for dog owners everywhere.

"Pay attention to your dogs" she said.

Have a great week, everyone!

Leesa Dahl

