

**A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE MEANING OF COMPANION ANIMALS  
THROUGHOUT THE LIVES OF NON-INSTITUTIONALIZED  
ELDERLY WIDOWS LIVING ALONE**

**by**

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of companion animals throughout the lives of non-institutionalized elderly widows living alone. Three widows ranging in age from 70 to 85 were recruited from friends and acquaintances for participation in this study. The meaning of companion animals in their lives was studied by using a narrative approach. The data was analyzed for emerging themes and integrated into a list of common themes of the meaning of companion animals. The results of this study will hopefully assist people in understanding the meaning and value of companion animals to non-institutionalized elderly widows living alone.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

#### Rationale

People 65 years old and over is the fastest growing age group in Canada. Currently this age group accounts for 11.5% of the total population. Provincially, in British Columbia this age group accounts for 13% of the population (Statistics Canada, 1991). Based on current projections, this group will account for greater than 20% of the population by 2030 (Health & Welfare Canada, 1989), people aged 75 years and older will increase from 19% in 1991 to an estimated 24% of the older population by 2001 (Health & Welfare Canada, 1983), and those under 20 years of age will account for less than 20% of the population (Novak, 1988).

These demographic changes mean that health care costs will increase to meet the needs of the elderly (ie. more institutional support, household maintenance, medical care, and community health care supports), while there are relatively fewer people to contribute. Cost saving strategies need to be developed. Bustad and Hines (1983) suggest that studies need to be conducted to determine if animal companions can contribute to reducing the costs of health care. Research has suggested that companion animals may permit the elderly to live independently in their own homes longer and to experience better health (Katcher, 1980) or reduce their dependence on drugs (Corson & Corson, 1980).

As well, it is estimated that almost 6% of men and 9% of women in Canada aged 65 and over reside in institutions (Novak, 1988). As the population ages the numbers and percentage of older people who spend time in an institution will increase, which may increase morbidity and mortality and decrease life satisfaction (Bustad & Hines, 1983; Gutman & Blackie, 1985). Bustad and Hines (1983) suggest that the degree and quality of animal association in each situation could modify this grim prediction.

Statistics also show that problems in old age are magnified for women. Due to a decrease in mortality rates, by the year 2001 there will likely be 134 women to 100 men aged 65 to 79, and women aged 80 and over will outnumber men 218 to 100 (Health & Welfare Canada, 1983).

This has a broad range of consequences, among them a greater likelihood of older women being widowed than older men. Current statistics show that for men 65 and over 76% are married and 14% are widowed, while only 40% of older women are married and 49% are widowed (Statistics Canada, 1991). Also, this difference increases with age. A major problem with being elderly, female, and alone is the high risk of poverty. As well, the loss of a spouse presents serious risks to the physical and psychological health and well-being of the survivor (Glick, Weiss, & Parkes, 1974; Morris, 1974; Parkes, 1972). Numerous studies document excess mortality and morbidity among widows and widowers when compared to their age and sex peers (Barkson, 1962; Cox & Ford, 1964; Helsing, Szklo, & Comstock, 1981; Maddison & Viola, 1968; Rees & Lutkins, 1967). Much of this excess mortality and morbidity has been attributed to the stress, anxiety, and loneliness frequently experienced by surviving spouses (Akiyama, Holtzman, & Britz, 1986). Increased use of medical care services and drug consumption were also reported (Parkes, 1964). Companion animals may be one way to reduce these problems.

Burnside (1979) provides valuable insight into the general needs of the elderly. She describes the basic characteristics of the elderly and some of their most important needs, needs that to some extent could be met through relationships with an animal companion. She suggests that companion animals might have a positive effect on the loneliness and emotional isolation that the elderly may experience, a feeling of being locked into oneself and unable to obtain warmth and comfort from others. Animals might also reduce the stress associated with moving from home to home. In addition, she posits that life review is an important aspect of working with the elderly, and encouraging reminiscence is an effective tool. Animals are helpful because they can trigger reminiscences. Therapeutic touch is also extremely important. Nonverbal communication can decrease the elderly's sensory deprivation. The sensory loss, immobility, living alone, and loss of significant others experienced by the elderly may increase the need for touching. Touching animals, as well as being touched, could be therapeutic.



Levinson (1969) focused specifically on the non-institutionalized elderly and their relationship to companion animals. He found that the elderly often suffer from a loss of relatives and withdraw from active participation in human affairs. Objects and animals that provided security in early life may assume greater importance in later life. The animals may serve as an anchor for good mental health. He also explains the fragile defense structures of the elderly and the reversal of roles they experience. In this reversal, companion animals can be important allies because the animals depend on the owner and offer them a measure of security. Companion animals can help the elderly adapt to their change in status and accept their new role. Companion animals do not offer competition and can lead the elderly to find new interests and move out into the environment to walk and to talk with others. Companion animals can also be important love objects and can be loved without fear of rejection. In this article he provided an excellent summary of the potential benefit of companion animals for the elderly:

A companion animal can provide, in boundless measure, love and unqualified approval. Many elderly and lonely people have discovered that pets satisfy vital emotional needs. They find that they can hold onto the world of reality, of cares, of human toil and sacrifice, and of intense emotional relationships by caring for an animal. Their concepts of themselves as worthwhile persons can be restored, even enhanced, by the assurance that the companion animals they care for love them in return. (p. 368)

### **Purpose of the Study**

There are a number of reasons why I believe this study is important. As I have previously discussed, the elderly experience a number of potential problems. There are many benefits associated with companion animals and my own belief is that everyone could benefit in one way or another from companion animals but because of negative aspects or current lifestyle it may not be appropriate or practical for everyone to own companion animals. This is why I wanted to explore if companion animals are actually beneficial, in

what ways, what widows might benefit from companion animals, and what are the negative aspects associated with companion animals.

Although these same questions could be asked in relation to widowers, because elderly widows greatly outnumber elderly widowers and this population is rapidly increasing, I have chosen to focus this study on elderly widows.

Wilson and Netting (1987) suggested that based on life course development an individual's personal history becomes a variable in determining the pattern of subsequent life events. Based on this statement, life course events (such as personal history with companion animals, previous attitudes toward and attachments to companion animals, childhood experiences, and so on) are all part of an individual's personal history. And it is these life course events that could be a determining factor as to the pattern of subsequent life events (such as current attitudes toward and attachments to companion animals, positive and negative aspects associated with companion animals, perceived role of companion animals, and the degree to which companion animals have an impact on an individual's sense of well-being). Bearing this in mind, the present study was designed to explore the meaning of companion animals in the lives of non-institutionalized elderly widows based on each participant's personal life experiences.

### Definition of Terms

In this study the meaning of companion animals refers to participants' perceptions of the influence or impact companion animals have had on their lives. This could include positive and negative aspects, their role, value, importance, and so on.

The term companion animal refers to any living non-human animal. The term companion animal is used rather than the term pet for a couple of reasons. As stated by Mugford (1980), companionship is undoubtedly the most commonly cited reason for "pet" ownership emerging from surveys of both owners and non-owners. Today domestic animals are valued for love, companionship, and other intrinsic qualities they provide, and not just owned and treated as an object or possession that the term pet infers.

**Attachment, and the term human/animal companion bonding, refers to a lasting affectional tie between a person and an animal (Poresky & Hendrix, 1988).**

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

Although much has been said about the potential health value of companion animals, most of the research relies heavily on anecdotal reports or on psychiatric case histories (Wilson & Netting, 1987). Studies have been conducted on the effects derived from companion animals and their ownership, and the value of companion animals to the institutionalized and non-institutionalized. Several studies and theories will be discussed below with an emphasis on the elderly. Because of the limited amount of research done in this area this study includes literature from a broader time framework.

#### Theories

In 1984 an invitational conference for research on the interactions of animals and people was held in Washington, DC. At that conference it was apparent that no conceptual framework dominated this area of study (Netting, Wilson, & New, 1987). Based on this conference and previously published literature on the topic, there are several theoretical frameworks which may be helpful in understanding the roles and relationships companion animals may play in a person's life.

Social role theory. A role has been defined as any set of behaviours that has some socially agreed upon function and for which there exists an accepted code of norms (Wilson & Netting, 1987). Four dimensions characterize the effect of social roles on the individual: (a) the number of roles, (b) the intensity of involvement, (c) the pattern of participation over time, and (d) the degree of structure the roles impose (Wilson & Netting, 1987). In our society, each stage of one's life may be characterized by varying roles that assume these four dimensions.

As a person ages multiple roles develop. Companion animal ownership may be one of many roles and depending on life circumstances it may remain very important or it may become less significant. However, when approaching an advanced age a person may experience role losses through widowhood, retirement, incapacitation, and so on. Some

persons rapidly replace lost roles with new ones, others may rejoice in their newfound freedom, and yet others may mourn their loss. Companion animal ownership may become a burden to the older person who wants to travel, but it may become a more significant role for the isolated elder. For the latter type of person, when creating roles with other persons may be less an option, companion animal ownership becomes a role that can be filled simply by buying a companion animal (Wilson & Netting, 1987).

Exchange theory. Exchange theory suggests that people continue to engage in relationships only as long as the benefits of their interactions outweigh the costs (Blau, 1964). For the elderly, pets may provide valuable relationships that serve functions such as companionship, tactile stimulation, safety, and nonjudgmental emotional support. These potential benefits may be especially important to persons who have limited interactional opportunities. Therefore, the benefits may greatly outweigh the cost in certain situations (Wilson & Netting, 1987).

Life span developmental theory. This theory focuses on the uniqueness of the individual as he or she progresses through the stages of life. Because each person's experience and perceptions vary, no one has the same personal history (Newman & Newman, 1984). Based on this theory, Netting et al. (1987) contend that a person's interactions and experiences early in life may affect later attitudes toward companion animals. If this is the case, each person will respond uniquely to companion animals. Some people will enjoy these relationships, and others will not.

Wilson & Netting (1987) contend that based on life course development an older person's personal history with companion animals (ownership, experience, attitudes, and attachments) may influence: companion animal ownership and potential benefits in later life, how he or she perceives the role of companion animals in his or her life, and the degree to which companion animals have an impact on an older person's sense of well-being. In addition, an older person who had a strong attachment to companion animals earlier in life may have a strong attachment to companion animals in later life. As well, companion

animals may mean different things to the same person over time; that is, the companion animal's value as a developmental asset will fluctuate, depending on individual needs, age, and sex of the owner. Therefore, theoretically, previous relationships with companion animals during other phases of one's life course may serve as indicators of potential future relationships.

Sociobiological perspective. This theory is based on the belief that caring for another person or thing may help preserve health (Katcher & Friedmann, 1982). It may be that caring for another facilitates a pattern of psychoendocrine organization which results in greater resistance to disease. An example given to support this theory is that depression is associated with an unwillingness both to take care of others and to form close social relationships. This lack of caring results in psychoendocrine responses which increase the probability of disease and death (Friedmann, Katcher, Thomas, & Lynch, 1984; Katcher & Friedmann, 1982).

Transitional objects. A transitional object is something that allows a person to transfer affections from one person or group of people to another. In later life a companion animal can act as a transitional object. Older people who have been depressed because of the loss of relatives and friends can learn to love others again through first learning to love and care for a companion animal.

Animals as a connection to nature. Contemporary society with its declining importance of nuclear families, high geographic mobility, and rapid changes can result in feelings of anomie and isolation (Feldmann, 1979). As our societies grow ever more technologized there will be an ever increasing need for more contacts and exchanges with other animals for this may help to lessen the potential psychic damage of our technologies (Drengson, 1987) and provide a link to the natural world. This contact with animals will help us to be in touch with our own feelings and hurt, and this it turn helps us to approach the world in a no-harm way by means of sympathy, love, and compassion (Drengson, 1987). Through a companion animal

we can relate to the non-human environment which can give us a sense of unity to all living things (Woloy, 1990).

Social interaction. According to this perspective, companion animals satisfy interactional needs of people by providing sustained companionship. Argyle (1969) found that a balanced personality ultimately depends on satisfaction of peoples' need for social interaction.

#### Positive and Negative Aspects Associated With Companion Animals

Companion animals help meet people's needs for affiliation, self-esteem, safety through physical and emotional security and protection, and a sense of belonging (Fox, 1975, Friedmann, Katcher, Thomas, & Lynch, 1984; Katcher & Friedmann, 1982; Mugford, 1980; Norman, 1980; Walster, 1982).

As well, companion animals also provide social, psychological, and physiological benefits. Taken from anecdotal evidence, case studies, and experimental studies the following table summarizes the positive and negative aspects associated with companion animals.

<u>Positive Aspects</u>	<u>Negative Aspects</u>
affection	responsibility
responsibility	housing limitations
ego satisfaction	transmit some diseases
power	creating nuisances
normality of the physical process	creating pollution
companionship	destructive habits
play and recreation	biting
attachment	overprotective nature
something to care for	needs attention and affection
something to touch and fondle	needs discipline
something to keep one busy	threatens people
exercise	animal's life span
purpose in life/reason to live	veterinary fees and care
sport	allergies
pride	dependence on the companion animal
facilitate social interaction with others	restricts mobility
pleasure	worry about animal's fate upon death of owner
beauty	
unconditional love	
something to love	
sense of being worthwhile	
sense of identity	
contact with nature	

sense of importance  
 feeling of being needed  
 extension of how you see yourself or an  
     extension of how you want to be seen  
 enhanced self confidence  
 positive emotional support  
 nonjudgmental  
 takes one's mind off their troubles  
 opportunity to give & receive affection  
 obviates loneliness  
 educational functions eg. nutrition  
 status  
 relaxing focus of attention  
 stimulus for a daily routine  
 increased survival rate after myocardial  
     infarctions or angina  
 decreased blood pressure  
 decreased heart rate & respiratory rate  
 attentiveness  
 welcoming  
 someone to talk to  
 few diseases transmitted to humans  
 sense of being needed  
 humour & entertainment  
 reduced alienation & social withdrawal  
 reinforce feelings of independence  
 solace in bereavement  
 attenuates the pain of social isolation  
 attenuates the pain of depression  
 improved physical health & longevity  
 reduced stress  
 improved mental well-being  
 increased verbalization  
 improved reality orientation  
 a means to help others

(Support for this information can be found in: Arehart-Treichel, 1982; Bossard, 1944; Brickel, 1980; Brodie, 1981; Bustad, 1980; Carbary, 1975; Corson, 1981; Faircloth, 1981; Feldmann, 1977; Friedmann, Katcher, Thomas, Lynch, & Messent, 1983; Grossberg & Alf, 1985; Jenkins, 1986; Katcher, 1981; Katz, Atlas, Walker, & Crossman, 1982; Kidd, 1982a; Kidd, 1982b; Lago, Kafer, Delaney, & Connell, 1988; Levinson, 1982; Montagu, 1978; Quigley, Vogel, & Anderson, 1983; Selby, Rhoades, Irvin, Carey, & Wade, 1980; Slovenko, 1983).

#### Attachment - The Human/Companion Animal Bond

As described in Rynearson (1978), the need to form close individualized attachment serves the ubiquitous function of nurturance, alliance, and parenthood. Although it is most intense and focused between mother and infant, with maturity the need for attachment



assumes equivalence with other developing needs and gradually diversifies to involve multiple attachment figures. In adulthood the need for attachment continues to be of primary psychobiological value. Rynearson suggests that humans and companion animals are significant attachment figures for one another.

Several studies (Lago, Connell, & Knight, 1985; Ory & Goldberg, 1983) have found significant associations between companion animal ownership status and various health and well-being measures after the affectionate character of the relationship with the companion animal was taken into account.

The importance of bonding was also reflected in a study that found different patterns of physiological responses to petting an unbonded dog and a dog in which a bond had been established (Baun, Bergstrom, Langston, & Thomas, 1984).

### The Elderly

Cusack and Smith (1984) and Levinson (1972) have found that for the elderly person who lives alone and is no longer a working and active member of the community, the world can seem to be a bleak place. They often have few visits from friends and family. Limited mobility, physical impairment, or poor health can make it difficult to go on even short outside excursions. Without meaningful activities there is little incentive or reason to keep spirit or morale high. Without companionship or purpose the lonely elder can easily sink into a morass of despair and depression that is as debilitating to health as the worst disease.

The aged not only face the problem of a loss of status on retirement from work or from managing an active household, but they begin to find that the greatest source of frustration is within themselves. They often have incorporated into their self-concepts the idea that once retired from previous occupations, whether voluntarily or not, they are no longer able to do many things that previously were very easily managed. Whether this is true or not does not matter because once they believe this is true they will act accordingly. Because their body no longer corresponds with the idealized self-image they have carried within for so many years they become convinced that their body is damaged or diseased. Because being

young is also equated with being desired, loved, and wanted, the aged feel like a superfluous commodity. Like any other human being they want to be needed, admired, and approved of. They wish to transmit their knowledge to others, to teach new things, to create, and be challenged. A companion animal such as a dog, which acts like a perpetual juvenile, may be just what the elderly need. A companion animal can provide a boundless measure of love, companionship, adoration, and unqualified approval. Many elderly and lonely individuals have discovered that companion animals satisfy their needs and enable them to hold on to the world of reality, of care, of human toil and sacrifice, and of intense emotional relationships. Interactions with companion animals promotes physical and emotional good health, and their self-concept as worthwhile individuals is restored and even enhanced when they find that the companion animal they have been caring for loves them in return.

### Widows

There are a limited number of studies that have focused on widows in particular. In a study investigating the impact of companion animal ownership on the health status of recently widowed urban middle-class women (Akiyama et al., 1986), analysis of the data indicated that non-owners experienced significantly more symptoms (especially those with psychogenic components), and a significantly higher use of medications.

### Summary

A review of the literature shows that many publications in this area rely heavily on anecdotal reports and psychiatric case histories. Although this type of information highlights the sociopsychological value of animal companionship for the elderly, they have been characterized by casual measurement and observation (Beck & Katcher, 1984; Robb & Stegman, 1983). Many studies did not take attachment into consideration. As previously discussed, when this variable was considered the results showed a significant difference (Lago et al., 1985; Ory & Goldberg, 1983). Many studies, even those that had taken attachment into account, used closed response questions. Although doing so made the information quantifiable, it also restricted the type of information that could be obtained. Because no

studies used open response questions, additional information may be unknown, such as other positive and negative aspects associated with companion animals, the significance of the companion animal in daily life, and so on. Therefore, in exploring the meaning of companion animals to non-institutionalized elderly widows living alone this study utilizes in-depth interviews with open-ended questions so as not to restrict the amount and type of information obtained.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

#### Methodological Approach

Because the fundamental purpose of this research was to explore the meaning of an experience, the influence of companion animals on the lives of non-institutionalized elderly widows living alone, a narrative methodology was used. The central value of narrative inquiry is its quality as subject matter. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state: "Narrative and life go together and so the principal attraction of narrative as method is its capacity to render the experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and meaningful ways" (p. 10).

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) define narrative as a way of characterizing the way humans experience the world. Narrative is both a phenomenon and research method. The phenomenon, or the experience to be studied, is called the story. The inquiry into the phenomenon is called the narrative. People by nature lead storied lives and tell stories about their lives. As Schon (1991) states, "Storytelling is a natural way we represent experiences" (p. 237), but people are not always aware of the meaning of their experiences. As Schon states, "Everyday experiences are continually imbued with meaning, rendered more coherent, more vivid, even more real through storytelling" (p. 237). Using narratives brings to light the meaning of these experiences.

The narrative approach was used in this research so as to capture the true essence of the phenomenon. As a research method narrative takes into account the emotions and behaviours elicited during the interview that enriched the story, gave it fullness and depth, and gave it life beyond being merely words on a page.

#### The Process of Narrative Inquiry

As Manning (1983) states in relation to qualitative research, "There is no single 'correct' reading of the 'external world,' no proper way in which facts must be selected and presented and no arrangement, emplotment or presentation, or encodation that is uncontrovertibly correct or valid" (p. 225). As a result, the narrative process used was chosen as the method

which would achieve the purpose of the study and would be consistent with the characteristics of a qualitative research framework and a narrative research methodology.

As described by Lancy (1993) the characteristics of qualitative research include: the investigator has chosen a topic or issue to study and the task is to discover and let hypotheses emerge; the topic governs the sites and individuals chosen for the study and these are relatively few in number; the investigator is the principal instrument for data collection; the research process is designed to intrude as little as possible in the natural, ongoing lives of those under study; the investigator is aware of his or her own biases and strives to capture the subjective reality of participants; the investigator uses a broad perspective to record context surrounding phenomena under study, but the focus may shift as analytical categories and theory emerge from the data; typically a study lasts for months or years; and the reporting of the results uses a narrative format of a story with episodes.

As Gergen and Gergen (1986) describe, "The narrative essentially structures events in such a way that they demonstrate first, a connectedness or coherence, and second, a sense of movement or direction through time" (pp. 174, 175).

Based on these characteristics and the purpose of this study, the research process used for this study involved three major stages or processes: 1) Pre-interview process, 2) Interview process, and 3) Data analysis and reporting of research findings in a written narrative form.

#### 1. Pre-Interview Process

This stage included reading research literature to become familiar with the topic and designing and verifying the research methodology with the researcher's academic advisor.

#### Procedure and Data Collection

In this study the participants were the primary source of data and the researcher was the primary instrument. Data was obtained by collecting verbal descriptions of the phenomena through the use of minimally structured in-depth interviewing and taking field notes.

These techniques were selected to elicit varying kinds of information such as attitudes, perceptions, behaviours, and positive and negative aspects associated with companion animals. The collection of different types of information from different sources at several time periods contributes to the validation of data by permitting ongoing corroboration, or correction, of information.

Two minimally structured in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant. A general theme was introduced at each interview which was intended to focus participants' thoughts but allow them freedom of expression; however, the substance and direction of each interview varied with the participants' responses. In the initial interview the researcher described the purpose of the study and established the theme for that interview by saying:

I am doing a study to understand the meaning of companion animals in the lives of non-institutionalized widows 65 years of age and older who are living alone. Because both past and current life events and experiences with animals contribute to the way you currently view companion animals, I will be asking questions about your life experiences. I would like to begin by getting some background information.

I then asked or clarified information in relation to each participant's family of origin and what it was like growing up and previous life experiences with companion animals. These life experiences included both companion animals they had owned or had only come into contact with. The life experiences were discussed to get information about when they occurred, what happened, what thoughts and feelings the participants experienced at the time, what these events meant to them today, how attached they were to each companion animal, and what these companion animals meant to them then and today.

As Seidman (1991) outlined, "In the first interview the interviewer's task is to put the participants' experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic up to the present time" (p. 11). I asked participants to describe previous life events because "people's behaviour becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them.

Without context there is little possibility of exploring the meaning of an experience" (Seidman, 1991, p. 10).

The second interview was focused on the present. In this interview data was obtained in relation to significant life experiences they had with their present companion animal(s) and the meanings of those experiences, their current lifestyle, in what ways their companion animal(s) positively or negatively affected or influenced their lifestyle, what their companion animal(s) meant to them, and how attached they were to their current companion animal(s). As Seidman (1991) described, the purpose of the second interview is to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants' present experience in the topic area of the study.

Different kinds of probes were used to direct the interview. These included probes to elicit information about the timing and details of events, and for further exploration and clarification (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). Silence was used as much as possible to allow the participants full expression before probes were used. Topics that required probing were tracked and participants were redirected to these only after they had finished expressing their thoughts. Tracking was used because it minimized the interviewer's interference with the natural flow of the participants' conversations. The interviews were more or less structured depending on the information that was previously collected and unsolicited information from the participants. More directed interviewing was used to validate data. Initially two, two to three hour interviews (allowing for time to establish rapport and explain the research topic and theme of the interview) were to be conducted with three to seven days between each interview. Given the population being studied and the depth of the interviews, more time was required to allow for establishment of rapport, memory lapses, reminiscence, interaction, the number of stories the topic generated, and clarification. Each interview lasted from two to five hours. The spacing of interviews allowed time for the participants to reflect on the preceding interview, but not enough time to lose the connection between the two. Also, the spacing allowed the interview process to continue over a week. This passage of

time reduced the impact of possible idiosyncratic interviews. Interviews were conducted in the participants' homes and were audio taped. The tapes were erased at the end of the study.

#### Rationale for Interview Questions

Rationale for the interview questions was based on a review of the literature. In particular, I had asked about family background, previous experiences and attachments to companion animals, ascribed characteristics, and achieved characteristics because a person's personal history becomes a variable in determining the pattern of subsequent life events (Newman & Newman, 1984). More specifically, I had asked about family of origin because child development theory and particularly Freudian psychoanalytic theory stressed the importance of the timing of critical events in a person's life on psychological development (Poresky et al., 1988). A person's current attitude toward companion animals may have been influenced by the presence of companion animals during previous critical events.

I had asked about previous experiences with companion animals for several reasons. Childhood companion animal experiences had been reported to be a predictor of adult pet ownership (Serpell, 1981), so early pet experiences were likely to influence the development of adults' attitude toward companion animals (Poresky et al., 1988). As well, a review of the literature by Wilson and Netting (1987) found that an older person's personal history with companion animals (ownership, experience, attitudes, and attachment) may have influenced: companion animal ownership and potential benefits in late life, how an older person perceived the role of companion animals in his or her life, and the degree to which companion animals had an impact on an older person's sense of well-being.

In a retrospective study of adults' pet attitudes as a result of childrens' companion animal bonding, Poresky et al. (1988) found that pet attitudes were more strongly related to and more predictive of childhood bonding scores than contemporary bonding scores, and current attitudes toward companion animals were positively correlated with childhood bonding scores. As well, current attitudes were most positive for those who had a first companion



animal when they were younger than 6 years old, and least positive for those who had a first companion animal when they were over 10 years old.

I had asked about the level of attachment to previous and current companion animals because Lago et al. (1985), Ory and Goldberg (1983), and Baun et al. (1984) had found significant associations between companion animal ownership and various health and well-being measures after the affectionate character of the relationship with the companion animal was taken into account.

As Wilson and Netting (1987) described, questionnaires had been developed that attempted to analyze current attachments to and attitudes toward companion animals, and how intense those attachments were, but no attempt had been made to ask if these feelings had developed over the life course and why they had or had not developed. As they stated, without knowing this, we did not know if these were lifelong patterns or only incidental relationships that become more important in the life course when the loss of human relationships occurred.

I had asked the question, "How attached are/were you to your companion animal(s)?" in this way because Ory and Goldberg (1983) had used this single-item attitude question in their prospective survey study of adjustment to widowhood in late life. While no reliability information was reported, "low attachment" owners reported significantly lower morale than "high attachment" owners.

I had determined ascribed characteristics such as age and gender because Davis and Juhasz (1985) found that the companion animal's value as a developmental asset fluctuated depending on individual needs, age, and sex of the owner. Ethnicity was important because the way animals are thought of and treated varies culture by culture. For example, Europeans and the British do not consider the dog as a source of food, while for the Chinese it is a delicacy (Fox, 1984).

I had asked about current lifestyle because this could influence the effects derived from companion animals. Several studies (Brim, 1974; Larson, 1978; Palmore & Luikart, 1972)

reported a positive association between measures of psychological well-being and life situation variables such as socio-economic status, health, physical activity, and social participation. House, Robbins, and Metzner (1982) discovered that individuals reporting a higher level of social relationships and activities (adjusting for age and a variety of risk factors) were significantly less likely to die in the follow-up period of their community health study involving a cohort of 2,754 adult men and women. These results were invariant across occupation, age, and health status groups. As well, the presence of supportive social interactions is thought to have a direct impact on psychological well-being as well as a mediating influence on negative life situations and role losses (Kahn, 1979; Linn, 1979). However, studies of survival rates of persons treated for myocardial infarction and angina pectoris had found that a one-year follow-up on mortality comparisons indicated that significantly more survivors owned companion animals, and this finding held true even when the researchers controlled for companion animals (dogs) with whom exercise might be a factor. A discriminant analysis of physiological severity and companion animal ownership on patient survival indicated that ownership was significant in predicting survival (Friedmann, Katcher, Lynch, & Thomas, 1980; Friedmann, Thomas, Noctor, and Katcher, 1978). These studies also found that none of the other variables, such as the number of people that were talked to each day, the amount of daily contact with neighbors, the participation in community activities, or living alone or being married explained as much of the variance in survival as did companion animal ownership.

I had asked how their current companion animal(s) affected or influenced their lifestyle because this provided information as to the positive and negative aspects derived from companion animals.

### Field Notes

Data from field notes included descriptive and reflective notes. Descriptive field notes attempt to capture a world-picture of the setting, people, actions, and conversations as observed. Field notes represent "the researcher's best effort to objectively record the details

of what has occurred in the field" (Bogden & Biklen, 1982, p. 84). Descriptive field notes include: portraits of the participants (such as physical appearance, dress, mannerisms, style of talking and acting); reconstruction of dialogue (verbatim notes of what was said); a description of the physical setting; accounts of particular events (such as getting a photo album); depiction of activities (such as patting their companion animal); and the observer's behaviour (such as the researcher's own behaviour, assumptions, and whatever else might affect the data that is gathered and analyzed) (Bogden & Biklen, 1982).

Reflective field notes captures more of the observer's frame of mind, ideas, and concerns. As Bogden & Biklen (1982) outlined, reflective "field notes contain sentences and paragraphs that reflect the observer's more personal account of the course of the inquiry. Here the more subjective side of the researcher's journey is recorded the emphasis is on speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices" (p. 86). Bogden & Biklen stated that reflective field notes included: reflections on analysis, reflections on method, reflections on ethical dilemmas and conflicts, reflections on the observer's frame of mind, and points of clarification.

Both types of field notes were used to add clarity and depth to the research study and are reflected in the written narratives.

## **2. Interview Process**

The interview process included a pilot study, obtaining participants, and conducting the interviews.

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted to assess the clarity and effectiveness of the interview questions, to determine the amount of time required to complete the interviews, and to allow the interviewer an opportunity to familiarize herself with the scope and flow of the interview responses. The pilot interview data was not included with the data analysis for this study.

First, two colleague researchers were asked how they would respond to the interview and pilot questions and then they were asked if these questions were clearly stated. Both had agreed they were and the answers they provided were consistent with the anticipated type of responses (ie. they had not misinterpreted the questions). Then, using the interview procedure and questions previously described, two interviews with a 65 year old widow who lived alone and had two budgies and three turtles was selected. The volunteer participant was obtained by word of mouth. At the end of each interview the participant was asked three questions: a) Were the questions I asked clearly worded so you knew how to respond to each question? b) Do you think that I understood what you were saying and feeling? c) Are there any other questions that I could have asked that would give me a greater understanding of the meaning of companion animals in your life? For both interviews the participant answered yes to the first two questions and no to the last question. Based on these responses no changes were made to the interview questions or format.

### Participants

Three voluntary participants were interviewed in this study. They were recruited by word of mouth (snowballing effect) through friends and acquaintances. Participants were selected on the basis that the person was a widow 65 years of age or older, had a companion animal, was living in rented or owned accommodation other than an institution, and was living in this residence without other people. As well, because each participant was required to describe and communicate life experiences in detail it was important they could articulate an understanding of their experiences in English.

After obtaining potential participant's names and telephone numbers they were contacted by telephone. After confirming their eligibility, each person was told the purpose and nature of the study and what would be required of them. They were also told that their participation in the study was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. Interviews were then scheduled with individuals who were willing to participate in this study. All

participants agreed to be audio-taped and the interviews were held in each of the participants' homes.

At the beginning of the first interview each participant was given a duplicate consent form (see Appendix A) which was read aloud outlining clearly that: the study involved two interviews of about two to three hours in length with brief (half hour) sessions to provide feedback and analysis. They were told the interviews would be audio-taped but all data would be confidential and tapes would be erased upon completion of the study. They were also told that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. All participants signed the consent form in duplicate and kept one copy for themselves.

### 3. Data Analysis and Reporting of Findings

The data obtained from the interviews was analyzed using the following process:

Transcribe. Each interview was transcribed verbatim.

Establish meaning units. Initially transcripts were read and reread to get a sense of the phenomena, in all its subtleties and nuances. This was largely accomplished by reading and reflecting upon what was read. The transcripts were then broken up into natural meaning units. These were statements which summed up or made known a particular idea, theme, concept, or description. Meaning units were attained through reading the transcripts and delineating each time a transition in meaning was perceived.

Establish categories. After reading the transcripts and identifying meaning units temporal meaning categories became quite evident. Lists were made of emerging categories and were refined as more categories were established. Meaning categories included: family of origin (personal description and childhood experiences up until marriage); description of previous companion animals (physical description, personality, and how she had obtained the companion animal); previous companion animals (experiences with previous companion animals, positive and negative aspects for animals in general, positive and negative aspects associated with their previous companion animals, and attachment); meaning of previous companion animals; widowhood (including the transition to widowhood and widowhood itself.

effect of having a companion animal during the transition and as a widow, and speculation on getting a companion animal if they did not have one during that time); old lifestyle (married lifestyle and influence of companion animal); current lifestyle (lifestyle since being widowed in relation to self and companion animal); description of current companion animal (physical description, personality, and how she had obtained the companion animal); current companion animal (general positive and negative aspects, specific positive and negative aspects, and attachment); meaning of current companion animal; societal factors (positive and negative factors affecting companion animal ownership); and general statements. Each meaning unit was then coded according to the category it represented.

Organizing meaning units into temporal sequence within categories. This involved organizing the meaning units in the categories according to the sequence of events which actually occurred.

Reflection. This step consisted of reading the statements and field notes within each category to get a sense of the experiences.

Prepare narratives. A narrative was written for each participant.

Summarization of narratives. A summary of each narrative was written.

Establish themes for each narrative. Themes were identified for each participant in relation to the phenomenon under study.

Validation. Narratives were read to each participant for corroboration and/or correction.

Revisions. Corrections were made and new data was incorporated into the narratives.

Prepare list of common themes. A list of common themes was written incorporating data from all of the participants.

### Interpretation in Narrative Inquiry

Human experience has a stored quality. The descriptions people give of their experiences are a way of telling a story of their experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991). In recounting an experience a person will communicate their interpretation of the experience.

A narrative researcher is concerned with description. He or she is concerned with recording events in field notes, recording participants' talk in interviews, and recording their stories. But contained within these descriptive records is the researcher's interpretation of the experiences. Interpretation is part of the field observations, interviews, and participants' stories. This interpretive quality also appears in the written narrative as ways of giving an adequate telling account (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991).

To verify his or her interpretation and to try and get as accurate an account of the phenomenon as possible requires a collaborative effort on the part of the researcher and research participants. One of the main functions of narrative research is to foster reflection and restorying on the part of participants. The interpretive relationship between the researcher and participants leads to a mutual, collective telling and retelling of the participants' stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991).

#### Beyond Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability

Like other qualitative methods, narrative relies on criteria other than reliability, validity, and generalizability. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state, "It is important not to squeeze the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research" (p. 7). Sieber (1976) concurs when he says:

The quantitative view of reliability (inter-observer, inter-rater, inter-instrumental, or intra-response over time) is in many respects inapplicable in qualitative data collection. Certain kinds of reliability must be intentionally violated in order to gain a depth of understanding about the situation (ie. the observers behaviour must change from subject to subject, unique questions must be asked of different subjects . . . there is an inherent conflict between validity and reliability -- the former is what fieldwork is specially qualified to gain, and increased emphasis on reliability will only undermine that unique function. (p. 126)

The language and criteria for the conduct of narrative inquiry are still under development. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state:

We think a variety of criteria, some appropriate to some circumstances and some to others, will eventually be the agreed upon norm. It is currently the case that each inquirer must search for, and defend, the criteria that best apply to his or her work.  
(p. 7)

Instead of reliability, validity, and generalizability Connelly and Clandinin (1990), Guba and Lincoln (1989), and Sieber (1976) suggest other criteria that could be used. It is suggested that appearance (something that is seemingly true) replace reliability, verisimilitude (an appearance of being true) replace validity, and transferability (results which could be conveyed or applied to someone else) replace generalizability (how much results apply to someone else). Other criteria they proposed that could be used include:

- 1) Intertwining of analysis and data collection. In narrative inquiry data is done throughout data collection rather than something that is done only after all the data is gathered.
- 2) Formulating classes of phenomena. This is a categorization process subsuming observations under progressively more abstract concepts.
- 3) Identify themes. This process involves making linkages between concepts.
- 4) The principle of time defeasibility rather than the illusion of causality. Instead of creating an illusion of causality whereby when a sequence of events is viewed backward it has the appearance of causal necessity, and when looked forward has the sense of a teleological intentional pull of the future, narrative writers frequently move back and forward several times in a single narrative as various experiences are narrated (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Instead of causality Clandinin and Connelly (1990) state that narrative exploration derives from the whole. "Narrative inquiry was driven by a sense of the whole and it is this sense which needs to drive the writing (and reading) of narrative. Narratives are not adequately written according to a model of cause and effect but according to the explanations gleaned from the overall narrative" (p. 7).



5) An invitation to participate. Narrative may be read, and lived, vicariously by others. As Peshkin (1985) wrote:

When I disclose what I have seen, my results invite other researchers to look where I did and see what I saw. My ideas are candidates for others to entertain, not necessarily as truth, let alone Truth, but as positions about the nature and meaning of a phenomenon that may fit their sensibility and shape their thinking about their own inquiries. (p. 280)

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggested the narrative writer has an available test by having another participant read and respond to the account. They said, "This allows a researcher to assess the invitational quality of a manuscript already established as logically sound" (p. 8).

6) Authenticity. "A reader of a story connects with it by recognizing particulars, by imagining the scenes in which particulars could occur, and by reconstructing them from remembered associations with similar particulars. It is the particular and not the general that triggers emotion and moves people and gives rise to authenticity" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 8).

7) Adequacy and plausibility. Narrative truth consists of continuity, closure, aesthetic finality, and a sense of conviction. As well, it is also plausible in that it "tends to ring true. It is an account of which one might say, I can see that happening to me" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 8).

In this research project each of the above suggested criteria was used as a measure of reliability, validity, and generalizability.

### Risks, Dangers, and Abuses of Narrative

As previously stated, "The central value of narrative inquiry is its quality as subject matter. Narrative and life go together and so the principal attraction of narrative as method is its capacity to render life experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and meaningful ways" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10). However, a danger or abuse would be to substitute falsehood for meaning and narrative truth. In addition to fake data, the data

could be used to tell a deception as easily as a truth. To try and safeguard against this and to ensure as accurate a representation as possible the narrative was a collaborative effort giving the participants the opportunity to corroborate or make corrections to the data.

Another danger is to portray the narrative as a "Hollywood Plot" where everything works out in the end (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This has also been referred to as narrative smoothing. A safeguard against this was to obtain data on positive and negative aspects of the phenomenon, and having the participants and a colleague read the narratives.

### Narrative Audience

As Connelly and Clandinin (1991) discuss:

One purpose of narrative research is to have other readers raise questions about their practices, their ways of knowing. Narrative inquiries are shared in ways that help readers question their own stories, raise their own questions about practices, and see in the narrative accounts stories of their own stories. The intent is to foster reflection, storying, and restorying for readers. (p. 277)

And in this particular case reflection and storying in relation to what companion animals mean in their own lives.

A reader of narrative is drawn into the story to find a place or way of seeing through participating in the story. To facilitate this researchers attempt to have the reader understand enough of the participants' experiences so that the reader can share something of what the experience might have been for the participants. As Connelly and Clandinin (1991) state, "In order to do this a reader must make a genuine effort to share in the experience of the participants" (p. 277). At best it allows a reader to share some qualities of the participants' experience.

## CHAPTER IV

### Results

In each of the following narratives all names have been changed to ensure the confidentiality of those mentioned.

#### Pam's Story

When I drove up in front of Pam's house I was immediately impressed with what I saw. The huge front lawn with its short length, neatly edged perimeter, and rich green color showed the care it had received. The house was older and was smaller than those surrounding it, yet it did not look out of place. It was a one level bungalow made of wood and beautiful hand laid masonry work.

In preparation for my visit Pam had closed Sammy, her nine year old Sheltie, in a front bedroom. When I rang the doorbell I could hear Sammy barking a welcome. I was greeted at the door by Pam, a recently widowed woman in her mid eighties. With her neatly styled grayish hair, upright posture and quick gait she could easily be thought of as much younger. As I entered the house there was a beautiful long-haired white fur rug laying in the corner of the front foyer where I thought the dog must like to lie. As we walked into the living room, which was located in the back of the house, I saw it was carpeted in a rusty brown color of a medium shade which would easily show dog hair. As I was being seated I noticed that there was not a trace of dog hair on the carpet. After Pam and I got to know each other for a few minutes she let Sammy a beautiful multi-colored (brown, tan, and white), medium-sized Sheltie out of the front bedroom. He was so happy to be free he came running up to me wagging his tail as if he was happy to see me. As I was patting him I noticed he had thick clean hair which had been brushed so his coat flowed down around him. I was impressed with how clean he was. Having allergies to cats and dogs I am very sensitive to their odor and I could not detect a "doggie" smell coming from Sammy or from being in the house in general.

Pam and I spent the first half an hour talking about the purpose of this research study, getting the consent form signed, and talking a bit about ourselves so we could get to know each other a little. After Pam made tea and brought in cookies we started our interview. I initially asked Pam to describe her family of origin and what it was like growing up. She grew up in an "average family situation" with six brothers and sisters. Pam was the middle child and said she was considered to be the peacemaker of the family. She had a close relationship with her brothers and sisters and particularly enjoyed playing and being with one of her younger sisters. When describing her family life Pam said, "Growing up in a large family you don't need a lot of friends."

When describing herself Pam said, "I'm of Scottish stock myself and I'm very independent." From her statement, "The way I feel about it I'm not a pessimist and I just keep going one day after another and make the best of each day," Pam seemed to be a strong willed and optimistic person.

Pam was born in Eastern Canada and before the age of 10 her family moved several times to Saskatchewan and Alberta before settling in Vancouver. During her childhood, and up until Sammy, Pam said she "never had a real pet." As a very young child her parents had cows, chickens, geese, and ducks when they lived on a farm in Saskatchewan but Pam said she was too young to remember them. Her parents liked companion animals and had a dog for a short time when Pam was eight years old but although she loved dogs Pam was too young to remember being that close to this dog. She said, "It was just there. I didn't feel that it was my dog because I do remember that my brother was the one who used to take it walking and all the rest of it." As well, Pam remembered having budgies and canaries when she was a young child. Although a budgie was fun Pam did not consider it to be a real pet. She said:

A bird is fine but it can't compare with a dog. Somehow or other you don't have the same feeling about it as a dog, you can't pet it. You can't pet a bird. I thought that a budgie was a lot of fun and they used to fly around the room. And even the canary would come park

on my shoulder. But this is what I call a good companion, a dog because I can go walking with him and I do every day unless the weather is so horrible.

When she was in her latter twenties Pam got married. They had a good happy marriage. "We talked a lot and enjoyed each other's company." They had "a fairly active social life" which included playing golf, belonging to a club and being quite involved in it, and playing cards with friends on a regular basis. They had one daughter who is now married and living in another part of the city.

Because of working, raising a family, travelling, and having an active social life Pam and her husband did not own any companion animals until nine years ago when they bought Sammy, which was three years before her husband died. Pam and her husband had talked about getting a dog because she loved dogs and would pat them all when they went out walking and he had high blood pressure. They had read an article that companion animals are noted to lower blood pressure and thought a dog might help. They did not, however, have any intentions of buying a dog on the day they went shopping.

We had been out to Richmond and we saw some dogs in a pet shop out there and one of them was a Sheltie and oh I just fell in love with this little thing. So we asked the girl if they had any. That one was taken. And she said no we won't have any until the spring but she said I had a friend who has some right now and she said if you want I will give you her phone number. So I said okay. And we phoned and it turned out to be way out on number seven road in Richmond and so my husband and I went out there and here there was these four or five little pups. And this was the mischievous one I tell you. And so she said now she wanted to keep the little female herself I guess for breeding purposes but she said of any of these others you can take your pick. So we could see that this little guy even as we were watching would grab hold of a tail of one of the others and we could see that he was the aggressive little guy. And she said if you want being older, my husband and I, if you want a quiet dog she said I wouldn't take this one. If you want a lively dog this is your dog. I said to my husband oh let's get the lively one. I have wished

on occasion that we hadn't because he can be very lively I tell you, bark bark bark. And barking when people come down the lane he runs down to the house to let me know. And the post man and the paper boy comes around five o'clock in the morning now and he barks regardless of how early it is in the morning. So he can be pretty lively. So that's what we did so we decided and brought the little thing home. He was only six weeks old. He had just been weaned.

From the beginning Sammy was thought of and treated as a member of the family. Pam said:

I just assumed naturally that when you get a dog you had a dog house. He never had a dog house. I wanted my husband when we bought him to build a little dog house and my husband said oh no he's got to be a part of the family, we don't want him out in a dog house. So he sleeps in the house.

When describing Sammy Pam said:

He is from the Shetland. His ancestors were from the Shetland Islands so he is Scottish, very independent. That's true. . . . Shelties are independent little creatures. He will come to me and put his head on the chair and I pat him and he lets me reach down and just for a minute or two and then if he could talk he would say okay that's enough now and away he would go.

She went on to describe him as being "feisty" and "a good little watch dog." She said, "He's better than any alarm system he really is because he has a sharp bark." To this she later added, "I really think that he gives me a good feeling of security having him in the house. I just feel safer." He also tries to be helpful by alerting Pam when the telephone rings by barking and running up to her. Also, Sammy is a dog who loves people and hates to be left alone.

Sammy loves them all. My dog is not a racist. He loves them all regardless of color or ethnic background or whatever. He loves everybody. He just loves company. He could have people over all of the time.

While we were talking before the interview Pam said Sammy would love to put up a sign saying Pam's Inn because when a group of women she has over every week go to move off the couch he barks because he doesn't want them to leave.

Although Sammy loved them both Pam felt that he was predominantly her husband's dog. She said:

Well that's what I thought but my husband didn't agree with me at all. No he said he loves both of us equally. Well I know he loved me too but some dogs I think just take to a man. I really do feel that. As soon as my husband came to sit in here [the living room] the dog was right beside him and he would stay there for the evening. He doesn't do that with me. Although he loves me and I know that. . . . I've always had the feeling that he was more partial to my husband. I just have that feeling you know. And I wasn't jealous or anything because I was delighted because my husband just dearly loved Sammy.

Only six years ago Pam was widowed after 50 years of marriage. Her husband had been in the hospital for several weeks before he passed away. Pam said the transition to widowhood was not only hard for herself but for Sammy as well. She said, "Sammy missed my husband when he died. When my husband went into the hospital my dog would be constantly walking around. He was wandering around wondering where my husband was." To help Sammy adjust Pam said:

I gave him an old sweater of my husband's and when he went to bed, when he bedded down at night I would put that up against him and he used to put that beside him. And then after a few months all of a sudden I guess the scent was gone and he just ignored it. He didn't want anything to do with it after that. That's the way they are they say.

Pam found the transition to widowhood difficult as well. Going from being a married person to being single Pam said:

It was all the difference in the world. I think you will talk to any woman who has lost her husband or any man who has lost his wife and your life changes unbelievably. You have lost your life's companion. And you just somehow have to get on with your life and

**make the best of it and make the most of it. It's hard and it takes quite a long time and you never forget the person, but you just carry on and do the best you can.**

**Pam found it difficult because they had had such a long and happy life together yet this was also a source of comfort as well. "If you've had a happy marriage you've got that to remember and it gives you that comfort that you did have a good life, a good marriage, a good relationship, and that's enough."**

**Pam found it very helpful having Sammy during this transition time:**

**It helped. I don't know if I would exactly say it made it easier but it did help. He was a source of comfort for me, definitely. And I could cry. I'm not one given to crying and making a big spectacle of myself in public but I could cry in private and there were never incriminations from my dog. He was definitely, put if this way, it would have been more difficult for me if I hadn't had him particularly the first year. It would have been much more difficult. I don't know what I would have done because he was a great comfort to me.**

**Even though Sammy had been a part of both of their lives Pam said having their dog was a source of comfort to her rather than being a painful reminder of the past. During this time Sammy was a source of comfort in a number of ways:**

**When I go out and come home he is there to greet me and he runs around the house . . . delighted to have me back. . . . It's wonderful just to have something live to come home to. It really is. It can't take the place of the one you lost of course but it's just great to have something, not just to come into a dead house without any life in it at all. For that reason I think it is wonderful.**

**A little later in our conversation Pam said that after her husband died she found petting Sammy was very comforting. She added, "If he had been a smaller dog it would have been comforting to have had him on my lap." When she was initially widowed and in the years following Pam said:**



I think patting a dog or even a cat it really has a kind of a relaxing effect. I really do think that. . . . I'm not a hyper person anyway really. I think it's more of a comforting feeling. I comfort him and he in turn gives me comfort. It's sort of a two way thing. Later Pam added that patting Sammy is "a pleasurable thing" and "it's an affectionate thing."

If she had not had a dog when she was first widowed Pam speculated on whether this would have been a good time to have gotten one:

No. If I hadn't had him and I had lost my husband then after awhile I would probably have gone on some trips and then if I felt I had had enough trips then I would have gotten a dog. But if I didn't have a dog I would probably have gotten maybe a canary, just something. I think it's important to have something else that is alive not just your television.

In discussing how much she missed her husband Pam said, "But now as years go by that eases up. I still miss him terribly. I miss a great companion. We talked a lot and enjoyed each other's company. Now I just feel I guess it's a need in me, I want to have something to hug." To satisfy this need Pam demonstrated as she said she will "every once in a while I just call Sammy over and I just reach over and give him a good hug and he licks my hand. I find it is a comforting thing."

Widowhood is not easy and from what Pam said it takes time to adjust. She said, "It's hard and it takes quite a long time and you never forget the person." Even though she has Sammy as a source of comfort Pam said, "It's taken six years to start to get my sense of humour back where I find myself laughing at things again."

In talking about her lifestyle as a widow for the last six years Pam immediately responded by saying "boring." On a personal basis Pam misses the companionship. She said, "We talked a lot and enjoyed each other's company." Now this is a major role Sammy plays in her life:

He is my little companion, he's all I've got to live for. I've got my family, my daughter and her husband and my two grand daughters, . . . but this is my all time companion day

and night he is here with me. So he means a lot to me in that way and that's really about the most important thing that I can tell you."

She went on to say that:

He means a lot to me because I can talk to him. Whether he understands me or not I'm not sure, sometimes he does because I think that what a dog does is they latch on to maybe one word and then his ears go up and he knows what that word is. Like I'll say, "Oh look at the rain" and he knows what that means and away he'll go and look out the window. And that's just the way he is. I do feel that you can communicate with a dog. And I read once that dogs are unlike some animals they make eye contact. And they look up at you intelligently and they appear to be either understanding or trying to understand what you are saying. Sometimes it's just like having another person. I really mean that. . . . I think that they are intelligent little creatures.

After getting up in the morning Pam said she starts her day by doing the household chores. Pam vacuums every day because Sammy sleeps in the house. When asked if this was a negative thing Pam said:

Actually that's no problem. I don't consider that, it's not really a negative thing like losing my dog or not being able to go on a trip. But it's just a fact of life because you would be absolutely amazed the hair doesn't show except for the white hairs but the others seem to be blending in with the carpeting. But when I empty the bag it is absolutely full of hairs. I could make a pillow. He is shedding all the time. And there is an awful lot of hair. I think that if I ever did get another dog I would probably get a short haired dog although they are not as palatable.

After the chores are done the two of them go out for their daily long walk:

My husband and I used to walk around the park up there. . . . When we first got the dog we would go around the golf course. . . . We used to walk around there but my dog being a feisty little guy every time another dog came along, we had him on a leash and people had their's on a leash, but he would kick up such a fuss that it got to be a nuisance so

then we started just going around the park. And at that time you could let your dog off the leash and let the dog have a good run. And he used to go absolutely crazy running around the football and soccer field up there. He just loved it. And now of course you are not allowed to do that. But I still take him with the leash and walk him around there and take my little plastic bag and pick up after him, and not everybody does that. . . . I'd love to be able to take my dog down there [Stanley Park] but I wouldn't dare. He'd be terrified of the bikes. I used to get terrified of the bikes too. Sammy doesn't get mad he gets terrified. He doesn't like anything with wheels. Sammy is a funny little guy. He is afraid of anything unusual like he doesn't like babies in strollers. He doesn't like anybody carrying a balloon or an umbrella. He is terrified of umbrellas. He is really weird. And skateboards are his mortal enemy, he is terrified of them.

The rest of the day is spent doing any number of things associated with the house, friends and family, or Sammy. As we talked about the house and the district with its beautiful trees and huge sized lots Pam said:

My husband built this little house in 1949 and I've lived here ever since. . . . When we moved here all east of Heather Street was all C.P. property. There were no houses there at all, it was bush and scraggly stuff and then about two or three years after we moved in here the C.P.R. sold that property to the city and then they subdivided it. And if they had done that in 1949 when we decided to buy this property we would have bought there because at that time it was all new homes. As it was we bought on this little street and there was an awfully old dumpy little house right next to us but we liked the property and we liked all the trees up there. This used to be like a big acreage. And somebody had planted all these ornamental trees and we loved that and we decided just so we could get the benefit of all that look out there we would have our living room at the back of the house which is what we did. This is a big lot and right now with the taxes I'm going to have to pay I wish it was smaller. It's not the house I'm paying taxes on it's this big old piece of property. However, if I didn't have Sammy I would probably sell and get into a

condominium and then I'd still have some money left over. . . . So if it wasn't for Sammy I think that's what I'd be tempted to do because it's gotten to be a bit of a burden with the garden and now I have to get somebody to come and mow the lawn at the front. I manage to do the back myself but I have a fellow come and do that and then there are other things. But the upkeep of a house, the maintenance and everything, and if I was in an apartment well that would all be looked after. I don't know so much about condos but I understand there are some townhouses that allow dogs. But then when you have a townhouse it's just almost the same as being in a house. I have a daughter and two granddaughters and she says mother why don't you just stay put. Because I like the district and I like my little house it means a lot to me. I'm sentimental about it because my husband built it after work and on weekends he built this little house. And I'd like to stay really but it's just getting to be a bit of a problem looking after it.

Activities associated with friends and family included a number of things, such as talking with the neighbor, volunteering at the church or having a church group over, occasionally going out with friends, and visiting relatives.

Pam's time is also spent doing a variety of activities with and for Sammy. In addition to their daily walks Pam grooms him at least once a week, goes and buys dog food, and:

Every year he gets his shots and every third year he gets his rabies shot. And I tell you he keeps me going. And I don't drive so I have to take him down. And when he has his teeth cleaned they knock him out and give him general anaesthetic so then I have to take a cab home. So he costs me money that little guy but he is worth it.

She did not, however, consider the costs of buying or keeping a dog to be a negative aspect:

Well that is just a fact of life. When my husband and I decided to get a dog we never gave the cost a thought. We never gave it a thought. And then all of a sudden we realized after we got him that we had to go take him for shots and we had to look after his health and we had to buy food regularly but we were prepared to do that. And I figure if you are going to have a pet you've got to be prepared to look after that pet and to put out money

to keep it healthy and to have a vet to go to and have the regular shots and whatever else is needed to keep that dog in good condition. And when you decide you want to have a pet I think that you should think of that before you get it. And realize that it is going to cost me every year for these shots and every say once a month you have to go and get a new supply of food, and it costs a fair amount. And then of course the teeth cleaning which runs into money and a licence. You have to get a licence every year and all that. So you should think about it carefully and if you feel well I don't think I can afford that then you better not get a pet. If you feel you can afford it then I think it is worth it, definitely.

When asked about negative aspects in general Pam had replied, "It is far more positive than negative. There are very few negatives in my opinion." However, being restricted from travelling is one negative aspect associated with owning a dog. Pam said:

They are like an albatross you know. I did get away in 1988 my daughter and I went over to Britain and France and one of my granddaughters came and stayed here and looked after him which was fine. We were away for three weeks. But now they live in North Vancouver and she works over there and she has a boyfriend and all the rest of it so it's not convenient for her to go way over here and then go way back over there. So a friend of mine wants me to go on a cruise with her and I said what about my dog. I can't take my dog. I'm going to think about it and if I can get somebody to come and stay and look after my house and look after him I'll go on another trip because I don't want to put him in a kennel. We had one experience when he was a year old. He hadn't been well looked after at all and he was very unhappy. They are wonderful but they can be a kind of a problem. They hold you back there is no doubt about it particularly if you do want to travel. I've got to think of him just as I would think of a child because he's that important to me.

After describing her lifestyle Pam said, "So all in all the time goes. . . . I just keep going one day after another and make the best of each day."

Throughout our conversation every once in a while Pam would turn to Sammy and talk to him or reach over and pat him as he walked by. It seemed like they had a strong attachment and they meant a lot to each other. When I asked her about her attachment to Sammy, Pam replied:

I am very attached to Sammy. Yes I am because he is really, as my only house companion, he is very important to me. I am very attached to Sammy. And if I am out I look forward to coming home and seeing him and being greeted by him. And sometimes I don't sleep too well at night and I'll go into the kitchen, like two o'clock in the morning I went into the kitchen and made myself some hot milk and a shredded wheat and some fruit on top of it and a cup of tea. So he trots in to see what I am doing. So he is my little pal. He means a lot to me. I am very attached to him no doubt about that. I am very attached to him. I love him.

Pam said she expresses her affection to him by hugging and patting him, telling him he is a good boy and a good little guy. She said, "I call him my little guy." She added, "And I look after him well. That's my way of showing him that I love him because I take good care of him." She said, "He is a good looking little dog." She laughed as she said, "Maybe I'm just biased. . . you get so attached to your own dog you look at others and say they are okay but they don't compare to my own dog."

Because she loves Sammy so much Pam said she would worry about Sammy if something happened to her. "I don't lie awake worrying about it but it would be a worry if that happened because I would want him to be well looked after." As well because of their strong attachment she said:

Now that he is getting older one thing is a bit of a worry. I keep my fingers crossed and hope that he doesn't become ill because I know that dogs do. I know that everybody I know who has a dog had to face that. And then they have to have their dog put down and I dread the thought of that. It's the ill health I worry about. And it would be terrible if I had to put him down. But if I found out that, God forbid, but if I found out that he had a

terminal illness I would just have the vet put him to sleep. I couldn't face having a dog suffer. No I couldn't do that.

After Pam said this I asked her if she would get another companion animal. We had an interesting dialogue for the next few minutes which illustrates an internal conflict between wanting another dog and doing what is practical:

I Would you get another one?

P I would go on a trip first and then probably get another one.

I You mentioned about wanting to move into a condo.

P I'm not just sure really because I'm old and I don't know if that would be a wise thing to do because unfortunately my daughter, she doesn't want a dog. She's got a cat. She likes cats better than dogs. Then I would have the worry of another dog. What if something happened to me, what's going to happen to my dog. It's just possible that I wouldn't.

I So you would like another one but it might not be possible?

P I would like another one but I would have to think it over very very carefully and I would have to make some arrangements just in case. And I'm not being pessimistic. I'm being realistic. And that's what I would just have to weigh one thing against another and decide well should I or shouldn't I and I think to be practical about it it would be better not to get another one. He's getting old too and he might live for another three, four, or five years.

If she did get another dog Pam had earlier said:

I would love a mongrel. In fact if I ever had another dog somebody told me that it's a shame so many of these dogs down at the pound or the SPCA if they are not picked up and if nobody wants them they are after a certain time they are just destroyed which is sad.

During our conversation Pam very eloquently made several statements that illustrated the importance and meaning of companion animals in her life. These included:

He's a great source of comfort to me because I'm alone. I love him dearly and he means a lot to me. He's a big part of my life, he really is. He is the main thing in my life now. He really is.

...

I am glad I've got him. He has been a great source of comfort and enjoyment for me and I can't imagine living without him really. He is my every day companion and I hate the very thought of anything happening to him.

When I asked Pam about companion animals and widowhood she replied: "It depends on what you want. It is a very individual thing I think."

### Summary

Pam is a recently widowed woman in her mid eighties who is independent, strong willed and optimistic. She likes to take care of things properly and actively takes care of her house and companion animal.

Pam comes from a large close knit family where there was always someone to play with. Although she never had a real pet as a child she always had a love for dogs. As a child she did have contact with budgies and farm animals, but she did not have much to do with them and was never really attracted to them as companion animals because a real pet is something that you could pat, was a good companion, you could go for walks with, and you had a certain feeling associated with it.

Pam did not have a companion animal from her twenties until her seventies due to working, getting married, raising a family, travelling, and having an active social life. Pam had a good happy 50 years of marriage.

Sammy was purchased as a puppy three years prior to her husband's death because of her love for dogs and as a health benefit. Right from the beginning he was thought of and treated as a family member. He has always been a very lively and mischievous dog who loves people and is a good watch dog.



The death of her spouse was difficult for Pam and Sammy. Having Sammy during this transition helped her to adjust and he was a source of comfort because she could cry without any incriminations, he was something to hold, hug, and cuddle to. He was also a comfort, especially during the first year, because he was something live to come home to and he welcomed and greeted her, happy to see her come home. Although she said she would not have known what to do during this transition time without him, she thought this would not have been a time to purchase a dog if she had not had him.

Widowhood dramatically changes a person's lifestyle. As Pam's social life decreased her time spent doing things with and for Sammy increased, and his role as a companion increased. Although Pam has family and friends Sammy is the main part in her life because he is with her all of the time.

Pam is very attached to Sammy and says she has got to think of him just as she would think of a child because he is that important to her. Pam spoke of many positive aspects associated with owning a dog in general and with Sammy in particular: having peace of mind and feeling safe and secure on walks and in the house because he is a good watch dog; he is comforting and relaxing; he is something live to come home to; she is uninhibited crying in front of him; he is something to pat, hold, and cuddle; he welcomes and greets her when she comes home; he is something to live for; he is a major part of her life; he is her day and night companion; he is something to talk to and communicate with; he is something to care for; and he is something to take for walks.

Pam also spoke of some negative aspects as well: Sammy restricts her from travelling, she is concerned over who will take care of him and what kind of care he would receive if she did go away, she is concerned about him if something should happen to her, she is concerned that something might happen to him and dreads the day he has to be put down, and housing would be a concern if she was not in her own home.

Although taking care of a dog can be considered costly and Pam vacuums her house daily because of dog hair, she considered these aspects as just a fact of life and not as negative aspects to owning a dog.

There are aspects or services which could make owning a dog easier or more enjoyable for Pam. These included: affordable help for yard work and other chores, an affordable and reliable house sitter, a pet taxi, places where you can let your dog run off leash, people picking up after their own companion animals, affordable pet insurance, having a veterinarian in the vicinity which is reasonably handy, and having a pleasant walking environment.

Although Pam loves Sammy and is very attached to him, she was of the opinion that having a companion animal is an individual thing that may not fit with every widow's lifestyle.

### Themes

When reflecting on our conversation about the meaning of companion animals in Pam's life I identified 23 major areas or themes:

- 1) Independence. Pam is an independent person. She thought this was in part due to her Scottish ancestry. Her independence is illustrated by her desire to do things for herself like taking care of her house and living on her own so she will not be a burden to others.
- 2) Compassion and caring. Pam is compassionate and caring for people and companion animals. This is seen in the way she takes care of Sammy and her concern that he is properly taken care of, how she talks to him as if he is another person while using names and words of endearment, her volunteer work associated with the church, and her willingness to voluntarily participate in this study.
- 3) Optimistic and positive attitude. This is evident during the transition to widowhood and in the years following. When Pam was going through the difficult time of adjusting to widowhood she would tell herself that you just some how have to get on with your life and make the best and most of it. You just carry on and do the best you can. As well, she was

positive and took comfort in having had a good life together, a good marriage, and a good relationship, rather than focussing on what she had lost. As a widow she takes one day at a time and tries to make the best of each day.

- 4) Previous love of dogs. For as long as Pam can remember she has always had a fondness and love of dogs.
- 5) Family of origin. Pam grew up in a close-knit family with six siblings. Because of the size of her family Pam said there was always somebody to play with.
- 6) Parents' love of companion animals. Pam said that her parents had also loved companion animals.
- 7) Absence of companion animals during childhood. Pam's childhood was spent playing with her large close-knit family. They moved a lot and during these years Pam never had a "real pet".
- 8) Type of companion animal. A dog, rather than budgies and canaries, were considered to be a "real pet" because they could be petted, taken for walks, they gave companionship, they were intelligent, they could be communicated with, and they gave her a certain feeling. Pam loved any type of dog and would own a purebred or a mixed breed.
- 9) Absence of companion animals during her middle years. Due to working, getting married, raising a family, travelling, and having an active social life it was not possible or practical to own a companion animal until her seventies.
- 10) Reason for getting her current companion animal. Pam and her husband wanted to get a dog because of her love of dogs and for health reasons. They had read an article that said companion animals are noted to lower blood pressure so they thought it might help Pam's husband.
- 11) Help and comfort during transition to widowhood. An existing companion animal is a source of comfort when initially widowed in that it provides companionship and comfort in many different ways.

12) Acquiring a new companion animal during the transition to widowhood. Pam thought it was not a good time to get a new companion animal when a woman is recently widowed. She did think that it would be appropriate after about a year after being widowed so that there was something live to come home to.

13) Increasing importance during widowhood. Companion animals take on a greater role in widowhood. Not only is Sammy her main source of companionship but Pam spends more time doing things with and for Sammy than before when more time was spent in social activities with others.

14) Current lifestyle. As a widow Pam's lifestyle consists of taking care of herself, her house, and her companion animal. In addition to household chores Pam talks to and visits her family, goes for walks with Sammy, volunteers at a local church, and watches television.

15) Widowhood. When a person is widowed their lifestyle changes dramatically. Because there is nobody else to do things with, to talk to, and to take care of, Pam has more time to spend doing things with a companion animal. They are a source of comfort and companionship and they become a major part of your life.

16) Importance of current companion animal. Having Sammy means very much to Pam. She said he is the main part of her life and she couldn't imagine living without him. This did not mean, however, that Sammy replaced her husband because she still missed him but Sammy became more important to her and his role as a companion increased.

17) A strong attachment to current companion animal. This was illustrated both verbally and nonverbally. Pam discussed how she worries if anything would happen to him, she would worry about him if anything happened to her, she said she loved him and was very attached to him, and how she considers and treats him as a member of the family, when she goes out she looks forward to coming home and seeing him, she considers him to be her day and night companion, and she talks to him using endearing names and words. Nonverbal indicators include the cleanliness and care Sammy receives through grooming, feeding, and

veterinary care; cuddling him and giving him hugs; and many times during our conversation Pam would reach over and pat Sammy.

18) Positive aspects associated with companion animals. Pam spoke of many positive aspects associated with companion animals. For owning a dog in general positive aspects included: you feel closer to a dog than a bird, you can pat it, a dog is a good companion, you can go walking together, patting a dog is relaxing and it lowers your blood pressure, it is something live to come home to, they are intelligent, they make eye contact with you, you can communicate with a dog, and they appear to understand what you are saying.

Associated with Sammy in particular, Pam identified: that he was a great source of comfort especially when she was recently widowed; she has a feeling of security or safety because he is a good watch dog; she looks forward to coming home because she likes the way he greets and welcomes her; it is relaxing, comforting, pleasurable, and affectionate patting him; he is affectionate; he provides her with companionship; he is with her day and night; he is something to talk to and have two way communication with; taking him for walks provides her with exercise; he is active; he is something to care for in relation to feeding, weekly grooming, shots, and teeth cleanings; you get very attached to your own companion animal; he is something to love; he is something to hug; he makes her feel better when she is sad or physically ailing; he alerts her when the telephone rings; he is more palatable than a short haired dog; he is a source of enjoyment; there were no incriminations from him when she cried; and he made the transition to widowhood less difficult.

19) Few negative aspects associated with current companion animal. There are very few negative aspects and factors that are typically considered negative are not thought of as such. She did not consider having to vacuum every day or the cost of keeping a dog to be negative factors. She said that it is just a fact of life and you know that before you buy a dog. Pam did consider being restricted from travelling to be a negative aspect. As well, she thought "losing her dog," as when he passes away, would be a negative thing.

20) Societal aspects or services. There are aspects or services which could make owning a dog easier or more enjoyable for Pam. These would include: affordable help for yard work and other chores, an affordable and reliable house sitter, a pet taxi, places where you can let your dog run off leash, people picking up after their own companion animals, affordable pet insurance, having a veterinarian in the vicinity which is reasonably handy, and having a pleasant walking environment.

21) Age. As she gets older Pam is concerned if she can remain independent and take care of herself and her house. Also because of her age Pam said if something were to happen to Sammy it would be a tough decision whether she would get another companion animal. Although she would love to have another one she would be concerned that she would be able to take care of it properly, and she would need to make arrangements should something happen to her. She said she would need to be practical when making that decision.

22) Companion animals and widows. Pam was of the opinion that this is an individual thing. She felt some people may need the companionship, love, and so on that a companion animal provides but other's may enjoy their freedom to travel when and where they want without the worry and responsibility of a companion animal.

23) Socio-economic status. Financially Pam is able to properly take care of Sammy in her own home.

### Martha's Story

When I arrived at Martha's condominium complex for our first interview she released the security doors and I took the stairs instead of the elevator to the second floor. The complex was huge and as I walked down the many corridors it seemed like I was walking through the halls of a hotel. The plush carpeting was medium grey in color, the walls were cream colored, and the halls were lit with brass wall lights. Because of the many hallways there were directional room number signs on the walls. As I walked to Martha's suite I was

impressed with how quiet it was in the hallways. Nearing her suite I noticed that the suites themselves were labelled with brass numbers.

As I rounded the last corner Martha was standing in the hallway outside of her suite. All of a sudden a small black dog with a diamond shaped white patch on her chest came running out of the door to greet me. After she greeted me she ran back into the suite and was running around as if she was very happy and excited to have company. Martha, a widow of 25 years in her later seventies, warmly greeted me and showed me into her suite. Martha had neatly set grayish hair and walked leaning slightly forward. As I made my way to the living room I noticed the condominium was spotless. There was no sign of black hair on the beige colored carpeting or any "doggie" odor. The living room was very clean with blankets covering the furniture and a few squeaky dog toys laying on the floor.

After I had been seated we spent the first half hour or so talking and getting to know each other. We discussed what would be involved in the study and Martha agreed to participate saying she would do whatever she could to help me and make it worthwhile for me. As we talked I was patting Mandy who was a black 18 month old Lhasa Apso who had big beautiful bulgy brown eyes. She had a short little tail and her coat, which had been clipped very short, was quite soft to the touch. As she jumped up on me and wanted to play I could tell she had been bathed recently because the smell of shampoo still lingered in her hair. I could tell right away that Mandy was a very energetic and happy dog who just loved people. She did not make strange to me at all and like a little child she wanted her share of attention. If I ignored her for longer than she liked she made her presence known by running up to me or jumping on the couch beside me so she could either climb on my lap or paw at my hand.

I began the interview by asking Martha to describe her family of origin and what it was like growing up. Martha was born in Ireland and spent the first three years of her life there. Her mother, eldest brother, and herself were visiting relatives in Ireland when she was born. They did not return to Canada as soon as Martha was born because her brother had an illness and the boat customs people would not give them permission to travel until they

had a doctor's approval. After they had returned to Canada Martha only lived in Eastern Canada for a year and a half before her mother became ill and "couldn't cope." Martha said her father "didn't know anything about little girls and what you do to do things for them." As a result Martha was sent over to Ireland to live with an Aunt. During the 18 months Martha was living at home she remembers her mother having yellow canaries. Martha "found them dumb and very dull," they were "messy" and "noisy." Martha said, "They just went on and on for no reason," and they would "bounce around in their cage and screech and squeak at you." Martha had not been attached to the canaries. She said, "I like them. I wouldn't do any harm to them, but I wasn't that interested in them and I still don't find them interesting."

Martha went to a boarding school for girls in Ireland until she graduated from high school at age 18. Martha would visit her Aunt on weekends and return home to Montreal every summer. Martha had two older brothers and they were "basically good to me" but when she was home she "didn't spend a lot of time with them because I had a lot of friends." Growing up Martha said she was "always a busy person" and "always bad." She said:

I was brought up in a boarding school and half the time I didn't get home because I was bad. I'd keep doing those sorts of things and I'd get into trouble. I was a little devil. I went for months on end where I didn't get home to my Aunt. Sometimes I went three months at a stretch without getting near anybody's home. My Aunt would come to get me and I wasn't allowed out. But it didn't matter I had a good time. It was a lot of fun. I enjoyed it.

When Martha was about 3 years of age until 17 years of age her parents owned a German Shepherd. Because Martha lived at a boarding school in Ireland after the age of four she only saw the dog when she returned home every year for summer holidays. Martha said because this was her mother's dog she "wouldn't listen to anybody else but my mother. My mother was crazy about her and she was crazy about my mom and she wouldn't let anyone touch my mother or she would go for them. She wouldn't bite them but she would show leave her alone." Martha added that both of her parents loved this dog and they had always had a



love for dogs. When Martha was home in the summer she used to play with her and "take her to the vet." In return the dog "was very good with me."

Martha described this dog as being "very good and smart. My mother used to talk to her as if she was a child and she never did anything wrong in the house. She never piddled or pooped anywhere." She was a very good dog and Martha said there was nothing negative about her. Because this dog meant so much to her and because she had been very attached to this dog Martha "wouldn't have another one for a long time after that because nothing would match her. She was so good."

Martha "always loved dogs" but her fondness for dogs grew because of this dog. "She was one of the first ones [a German Shepherd] that I remember seeing." Because Martha had been informed of her death by a letter sent to her in Ireland from her parents Martha said, "She never died as far as I was concerned. She is still alive in my head." Although Martha loved a German Shepherd she never had another one "because where we moved and everything it wasn't always convenient for that type of dog."

Martha's Aunt in Ireland always had four or five dogs and whenever Martha was at her home she loved to play with them and take them for walks. There was one dog in particular, Jerry, that Martha had been very attached to. Because of Jerry and the other dogs Martha said her fondness for dogs grew because of them.

At 18 years of age when Martha returned to Montreal she took a few courses to see what she wanted to do. "I went and learned typewriting." After graduating she "tried a few places then went to an English firm." Martha liked it at this firm and over the course of several years was promoted to a "well paying job as secretary of the company." The job involved a lot of travelling and at times Martha would "go down and work in new York for six months." Martha did not have companion animals during this time because:

I was working and I was so busy. I was getting calls from New York. I was having to get on a plane the next day and go there. I couldn't have animals then. I missed them but it

wasn't fair to the animals. I could understand why I couldn't have them but they couldn't understand why I couldn't have them.

When Martha was in her twenties her mother became very ill so Martha told her boss "I'm going to have to go home to see about my mother." For the next six years Martha stayed home and looked after her father and her mother, who was paralyzed from a severe stroke. Her father was in his eighties and he died a few years after she went home. During this time Martha worked very hard.

I did all the paying. I had to work in order to make the money to pay it out. And the expenses for my mother were terrible. But my brothers never gave anything to it. I paid for every damn thing, I didn't let my mother and father want for anything. And I did everything for them. I don't regret it. I'm glad I did it because they were good parents. My parents were good parents to all of us and my brothers basically did nothing. And as a woman in those days you didn't make as much as they do today. I did do well because I had a good position with them, mind you I worked hard for it.

Martha could not keep doing everything herself. So, as she explained:

I used to pay people to come in to look after them because my doctor said to me you cannot stay at this level, you're going to drive yourself crazy, and you're not going to do your parents any good. And he was right. So I had people who came in.

During this time Martha also paid for one brother's university education. "I put my brother through university and he graduated and he never did a thing with it." She added, "I don't talk to him. I don't even know where he is today. And you know what, I don't care."

Soon after Martha started taking care of her mother she bought her blue, yellow, and green budgies. Martha bought them so they would take her mother's mind off herself. Martha liked the budgies better than the canaries she had as a child because, "They were bigger. They were more substantial looking," and "they had more pep than any other bird that I've ever seen." Although the budgies "did a lot of squeaking too" this did not bother Martha as much as it did with the canaries because she "felt as if they were trying to talk and

tell me something unlike the canaries who seemed to screech for no reason at all." Martha also preferred them better because she could let them out of the cage whereas she could not do this with the canaries. Martha liked the budgies because "their colors were beautiful, . . . they were quite smart in their own way," and they were "something to talk to." She disliked them because "they were messy." She said:

I liked to keep them very clean and I couldn't stand the mess in the cage and I'd clean it out and it was more work than I had expected because I was tired. And I don't think you should have anything and not keep it clean.

They were "a bit of a nuisance" because she was tired from all the work she did taking care of her mother. As well, Martha said, "Although they are clever they were not clever enough for my liking." Although they were company for Martha and she enjoyed them while they had them and she "missed them when I didn't have them" Martha did not buy any more and would not want to get one now. As well, she said that if it had not been for her mother she "would not have bought one for herself."

Martha got rid of the budgies before they moved to Calgary with the intention of buying more for her mother once they had settled in. Martha's mother died three weeks after they had moved to Calgary. It was shortly after this that her eldest brother was killed suddenly in an automobile accident.

Several years after this when Martha was in her mid forties she got married to a man almost two decades older. She said, "I had been engaged three times before that to other people but I said I'm not going to get married until I am alone now because I had my mother and father still living and both sick."

Martha and her husband lived in his "big, beautiful home" with Martha's sister-in-law "who was very demanding." Because of his position as a lawyer they had "a lot of people come into the house for one reason or another." They were quite active socially because her "husband was also a city councillor and when the Queen was coming and anybody else in the Royal family was coming they always got him to do the honors." There were always dances

and functions they would attend associated with this. They also did a lot of travelling either alone or with good friends of theirs who lived in Toronto. Martha said, "I used to go to the Bahamas a lot with my husband." If they went on any long trips or did any driving around Montreal Martha used to do it because her husband "used to drive a car and then he stopped and he didn't go back to it and I was doing all the driving." During their marriage together Martha and her husband never had any children. Although she wanted a companion animal Martha did not have one while they were married "because my sister-in-law didn't like them. She didn't want one. It didn't matter that I wanted one."

After only six years Martha was widowed when her husband suddenly passed away on their vacation. He had not been feeling well before they left. "He saw a doctor before we left and the doctor said there was nothing wrong he would be all right." After a week into their vacation he passed away in his sleep the first night they were in the United States. Martha said, "It was difficult to deal with when you are away from home." Martha flew back to Montreal and had to make all the arrangements. "It was dreadful. I was upset. God I was upset."

When discussing the adjustment to widowhood Martha said, "It was terrible. My husband was a good husband and I'd just been married six years. It was a good marriage. It was just as if my world had been torn apart again." Martha said it took "at least three years" before she reached a point "where you could handle it, where you felt you could handle it."

When asked what helped her to adjust during the transition to widowhood Martha replied:

Getting out and doing things helped to take my mind off the hurt. I was busy. I always kept busy. I always did things. I was busy with this and that and the other thing because my husband died suddenly and I went to his office and cleared up things and got things on the go. I got things going. I was there three years simply because we wanted to get it all straightened out.

**When asked about getting a companion animal during that transition time Martha said:**

**I would not have wanted to get one at that particular time simply because you have so many things to think of, so many things to do. I was running all the time. It would have been something else to worry about. And it wasn't my idea of consoling myself. And it wasn't my idea of wanting to hurt any animal that I had because they might have thought God this is a terrible place, she isn't a nice person. And I couldn't just cope with it. My husband died suddenly in California so that didn't make things easier. I had a lot to take care of and there was no point in getting a new pet and being missing most of the day. It's not fair to the pet and it's not fair to you.**

**Martha also felt that "it would have been hard if I had had an existing pet." She said it took her three years before she could start to think about getting a pet. She added that "well it all depends on the person maybe."**

**Martha was quite busy doing a number of things in those three years:**

**Once my husband died I was doing other things that I had to get done because we had lived in a big house and all this kind of stuff and I had to get this all attended to. I thought that ends that I'm going to go out to live in Vancouver. I didn't want to stay in Montreal any longer.**

**Martha bought a six month old brown female toy poodle shortly after she moved to Vancouver when she was in her latter fifties because she wanted a dog. Martha got her "because the household split up, a marriage had split up or something, and he advertised her in the paper and I went down with my friend." Lady was a "beautiful dog" who had "a lot of sauve woi faire." She was a "well mannered" dog and was "so precise."**

**Within the same year Martha bought another dog. Trixie was a two month old grey female standard poodle. Being just a puppy she was "naughty" and very "young and foolish." She was a good natured dog who loved people and "she had a sense of humour."**

**Within a short time after moving to Vancouver Martha started working again part-time at various places. "My girlfriend she knew people in the jewelry business and she was**

always getting me to go to work someplace. I went to work at UBC for awhile. And I went to work in a jewelry store." The job started out as being part-time, and it "got to become full-time." Martha worked there "about two years or something because she was giving up the jewelry business because she was going to retire." Martha said it was not a problem working and having dogs. As well, for the entire time she had Lady and Trixie Martha lived in apartments. She said, "It was not a problem at all."

From our discussion it sounded like there was never a dull moment, especially with Trixie around. Whereas Lady was "a real lady" and she was "well mannered" Trixie on the other hand was something else.

She was a terrorist and she knows she was. For instance she seemed as if she had no brains at all at times. She would look at you if you chastised her. . . . Lady was so precise. When she was out with you she stood up and would go along. Trixie, one night I took her out it was 10 o'clock . . . and I took her out this night and she got off the leash. Now I don't know how it ever happened. She got in the middle of the road and I said to her Trixie come on but she knew that she had done something wrong so she wasn't going to come to me in case I told her off. She didn't like if I told her off but she was as cute as a button. Everybody loved that little wench. She sat there and if I made a move, just one step, she would go the other way. And I thought God it's bad enough I don't want her to go over to Granville. So I said alright goodnight, goodnight and I turned around to go and she would come back to her starting point. When that happened it was getting on my nerves and I thought I'm going to kill you you little bitch.

Whereas Lady was obedient and "never went off the track," Trixie did as she pleased. Martha laughingly recalled an example:

Well we'd go up the street and there was a park there and there was a bowling place and I'd go up there with her and she would dash around and she wouldn't come back to me. So that day she ran along West 13th to this street and she'd run there and she would go down and then she would come along. And I thought I'm going out of my mind with this

kid. I was out of my mind to buy the little bitch but I'm going out further. So she ran along the street, she went up one street and came down the other. And there used to be a house on the corner there and you used to have to go up stairs to it. So she went up the stairs to avoid me. And I'd chase her because I knew she couldn't go anywhere else. I'd go up and when she found me it was just as if she was laughing at me. And I'd say oh God I can't stand this, this is ridiculous. And I think she was six months old at that time.

Martha did not like this mischievous, terrorist side of her. Her good friend used to get annoyed because she thought Martha was favoring Lady more. "It wasn't that I favored her more, I enjoyed her better I must say because she was well behaved. Whatever mommy said was the word and she did it." It was not that Martha was more attached to or loved one dog more than the other as she said, "I loved them both on their levels. . . . I was attached in different ways."

The two dogs "were great friends" and they "got along very well together." It seems that Trixie was not able to draw Lady into her bad deeds:

Trixie got into a great big pot I had and it was all over the carpet and everywhere. I came home and said oh God don't tell me and Lady looked at me as much to say it wasn't me. And Lady didn't have a thing to do with it. Trixie had it in her hair and everything. She was young and foolish. I couldn't help but laugh. And I said what the hell have you been into again Trixie. And she looked at me like this and then she came over and gave me a kiss on the hand. I said I tell you that's not exactly what I'm thinking right now. I don't love you right at this moment I'll tell you that. And she looked at me as if to say well I don't care and raised her head high in the air. I thought if I had a camera and took those shots of her it would have been priceless. But dear old Trixie was a doll. I loved her dearly but she was so nonchalant about everything that she did. I tell you people who say that dogs are all the same are crazy because they all have their own ideas. Even the same breed. It's they as a person that I like because they are like people.

While recounting this story Martha was laughing at Trixie's antics. She said, "There was no harm done because I put it all back again." Trixie outgrew this at about six months of age and then she just did "the odd little thing once in a while. Even if she wasn't going to do it she was testing me." Other than this incident Lady and Trixie never did any damage.

I'd buy my dogs young enough and I'm usually with them and they don't do certain things and it's a no no if they do and I tell them so. I'd say mommy doesn't like you for that, that is rude. Not that they understand me but it'd get through to them. It's the way you say it, it's not what you say altogether. No I've never had too many problems.

Martha only had Lady for seven years when she was killed in an automobile accident:

I was walking with Lady and Trixie . . . and we were going past a laneway and this woman came out with her car in the morning and hit her right on the head. And I said to her you don't see well. I didn't see it she said and she was so nasty about it. I said look don't get your high horse up at me because I'm going to get mine at you if you start this. You killed my dog I didn't put her in your spot to kill her. You came down and you should have stopped. You don't come out of the lane into a street without stopping. Where did you learn to drive. I was so mad at her. So that's how I lost her.

After this Martha "had a terrible time of Trixie for quite a while after that." Trixie cried for "at least eight weeks" before she got over it. Even though Martha still had Trixie it took her a lot longer. "I would say seven or eight months at least and I still think of it." It was difficult because of the way it had happened and because Martha had been so attached to Lady. After reflecting on it for a moment Martha said, "I never really got over it. . . . I was sick for months after. I still see it. I'll never forget about it. It's just the worse thing to get over and there is nothing you can do about it when she is dead. . . . I feel as sad as I did the first day it happened."

In the latter part of the 1980's, or about four years ago, Martha was still living in an apartment with Trixie when she went out one morning and collapsed on the street from a



stroke. Since then her life has changed dramatically. Before the stroke Martha was used to doing many things on her own:

I did all the painting in my home when I was well. I've always done things on my own.

I've got tools in there I tell you that nobody else has. And I could fix this and fix that and do this and do that. That came about because I was always a busy person.

As a result of the stroke Martha was put on medication, she got a hearing aid, she required an eye operation, and she has a painful back. As well, she said:

I can't remember things. That is why I keep this here and mark everything down on it because if I don't I get all fouled up. It's affected a part of my brain and there's nothing in it as far as I am concerned because I don't remember. And another time I'll be sitting here on my own and it will all come back to me.

It had restricted her life in other ways as well:

I had driven a car for 50 years. I stopped driving after I had the stroke because I was afraid I could have another one at any time. . . . The doctor said no don't vacuum. I'm not allowed many things. I'm not supposed to lift my arms up that high so I have someone who comes here every week to do it.

When this happened Martha was kept in the hospital for a month. Although Martha's friend and a neighbor looked after Trixie, Martha said, "It was a big concern. Who's going to take care of my dog." Martha also worried if she would be able to properly take care of Trixie when she was released from the hospital. At the time she thought, "I'm silly I shouldn't have animals it's not fair to them." Martha worried about this and said she recovered better and faster than her doctor had expected. When Martha was released from the hospital she was able to take care of Trixie herself. Even though Martha has had a stroke she does not worry about something happening to herself. She said, "I hope it doesn't happen but I have no control over it."

It was about a year later when Martha had to have Trixie put down at the age of 13 or 14 due to cancer. "God the day she died I cried my eyes out. Nancy took her in and came out and said she has to be put to sleep. And I said I'm not going in. I just couldn't take it."

Martha really missed Trixie. It was just as bad as when Lady died because Martha was left without a dog. She said:

Well I missed not having a dog and especially now. It wouldn't have been so bad if I was younger but now that I am older and I don't get out as much to go anywhere I liked to have a dog. It was company. I don't feel as if I am talking to myself.

As well, Martha missed having a dog because "it was something to love" and in return "they loved me." They were also "something to take care of." It took Martha at least seven or eight months to get over her death. "Sometimes Nancy would talk about her and I would say don't talk about it tonight I don't want to hear about it. And I was never like that."

When asked about negative aspects associated with Lady and Trixie Martha said there were none. Martha did not consider the costs associated with keeping two dogs to be a negative aspect. She had replied, "No. I've had dogs long enough to know that it costs to keep them."

Within a year after Trixie died Martha bought Mandy, her current companion animal, because she was lonely, to help her get over grieving the loss of Trixie, and because she missed having a dog:

When I bought her I didn't think that something was going to happen to me any more but these are things you have to plan for at any age. I gave it a lot of thought before I bought her. And Nancy said you should have her, you miss Trixie, and you are alone. I think you are going the right way, don't worry about it. So that's the way I got this one. . . I figured that I was miserable up where I lived because I didn't like it. And as you get older you are not about to go here there and everywhere like you used to do but I've had a dog when it was possible. I enjoy them because I feel I'm not talking to myself. . . . And I think it helps you with your sanity because I find this is a bore to just live here.

**Martha bought Mandy with the help of her good friend:**

Nancy chose this dog for me. I would never have chosen this type of dog because she does, not greatly, but she does shed and that's why I keep her hair short. I would never have chosen this dog but Nancy has been good to me in her helping me make decisions and that so I didn't want to turn her down. She took me though to see it but it never occurred to me about that [shedding]. . . . She was \$200 or something. I got all the stuff from them but I wasn't interested in keeping papers or anything. I just wanted to make sure I had a good dog. I have no intentions of showing her or anything like that. All I wanted was something that was decent. I've always had that type of dog but she is good natured really.

Martha bought a female puppy because, "I always buy puppies. I only had females. I'm used to the females." Martha wanted to get a poodle rather than a Lhasa Apso for a couple of reasons. One reason is because of allergies:

Well the only reason I say poodles is because they don't shed. . . . My doctor said I could have a dog but don't get one that sheds. I bought this one . . . and they said she didn't shed but I beg to differ. The hair makes me weep and my nose runs. I'm just allergic to it. It's not as bad now as it used to be. It's still there, it exists but some nights it's worse than others, or some days it's worse than others. That is why I try to keep her clean. I can't over wash her. That's not fair to her either. But I brush her two to three times a day.

The other reason is that she is just more familiar with poodles:

It wouldn't matter what type of dog it is as long as I have a good animal. I love them all but now at my age I'm not used to the others. I've only been used to these other kind I had.

Because Martha never had a Lhasa Apso before she went and bought a book about the breed:

I've never had one of these breeds before and I don't know if this is what I'm supposed to do. I bought a book about her breed. I looked and saw my God their skirts go down to the

ground and I said no no unless you are showing them but that's not for me. I just want a nice little doggie, a nice little girl that I can keep clean. I find it hard enough keeping her clean like this and I don't like smelling dogs or dirty dogs. Whether they are human or otherwise.

Her allergies to hair is also one reason why Martha never had a cat. "I was never allowed to have cats because of the hair. I was only allowed dogs. I don't dislike cats, but they are very independent." Independence is part of the second reason she never had a cat. "I don't care for cats they are too independent number one, and I don't trust them. . . . I've always liked dogs more."

Even though Mandy is not a poodle Martha said, "I've never had one of these dogs. I've always had poodles but I certainly don't dislike her. I love her dearly and I'm not sorry I got her but she is different than my poodles." Martha said she would, however, get another Lhasa Apso. When Martha was describing Mandy she laughed as she said to Mandy, "Those eyes are so funny. . . . And she has an overbite." Martha went on to say that "her eyes water and I don't like that because I wipe them 55 times a day. I can't stand dirty wet eyes. Thank God she's black."

Martha went on to describe Mandy as a dog who is "young and foolish, she loves everybody, she is independent, and she knows how to get what she wants." She is a good dog who "never complains," and she has "never made a mess in the house." She is affectionately referred to as "my love bird."

Within a year after getting Mandy, Martha moved to another location. Martha had moved so she would have greater access to stores and services:

That's why I moved down here. I lived up there and God there wasn't a store within a mile at least and I didn't know where they were. I hated it over there. . . . I don't like to rely on people too often. I insisted on coming here and the reason was because I can walk down the street to the grocery store. I don't want to be carried around.

Because of restrictions Martha had a hard time finding a condominium that would allow Mandy. The strata committee at her current complex required her to submit a written statement requesting permission. "I had to wait three days and I finally said to them look you either let me know at twelve o'clock today or I'm not going." And Martha is not allowed to get another one if anything happens to Mandy. Martha was still mad about this as she related it to me. She didn't like these housing restrictions "simply because I do not let my dog bark. And when she is alone she is quiet. I think she is a good dog." In fact Martha was quite annoyed because as we were talking about this a dog across the street was barking continuously. Martha said:

I think that is vile. There is nothing worse than a dog that barks and you don't know what in the hell it wants. I think it is dreadful. . . . She [Mandy] doesn't bark ordinarily. I don't let her bark because I don't want that.

Because Martha is quite restricted in what she is allowed to do Mandy plays a big part in her life. "I enjoy her . . . it is a long day and I can do so little now." Their day together begins at seven a.m. "I start at seven in the morning and I go out with her. I was never a long sleeper. . . . Then we come back and I give her some breakfast." Then Martha goes into her bedroom and makes the bed:

I bring her in with me. Sometimes I allow her to sit on the bottom of the bed for a while. She loves the bed. She would be in there every night with me but no no she stays in the kitchen and I put the gate up and she is as good as gold. I never hear from her.

After that Martha's day is unplanned. "I get up in the morning most times without planning what I'm going to do this or that because I have nothing but time in my hands." The rest of the day is spent doing activities associated with the house, friends, or with Mandy. Even though for health reasons Martha is not allowed to do very much around the house she will dust once in a while:

Well I'm not allowed to vacuum. I'm not allowed to do many things so I have somebody who comes here every week to do it. . . . The people you get in aren't very good though.

I'm sure they never wiped that television screen off. I do that. I don't like to do it but I do it. I don't have much in this place. I've gotten rid of all my good stuff more or less because I haven't got room for it any more. But I don't know what in the hell she does. . . . They don't move furniture or anything. I'm not supposed to lift my arms up that high. A person could dust every day, and especially when you have a dog. But there is plenty to keep me going.

She then went on to say that she does her own grocery shopping "a couple of times a week." Martha said because she is limited in what she is allowed to do around the house that is why Mandy is such good companionship.

Martha does a number of activities associated with friends. At least once a day Martha will talk to her very close friend Nancy. "Once in a while" Martha will go with Nancy to keep her company when they visit Nancy's father in a nursing home. Also, once in a while neighbors from the apartment Martha used to live in will come and visit her. As well, once a month or so Martha goes into Vancouver for a doctor's appointment or goes to her bank. On these occasions Nancy drives her into Vancouver and Martha goes out for breakfast before her appointment and then returns home by bus. Martha said:

As you get older you are not about to go here there and everywhere like you used to do. But it is just a relief. I can't sit here seven days a week especially when I am able to go out. It might come a day when I won't be able to go out. I don't like to be running for the sake of running because when I'm in my own place I'm happy. I like to go out though.

Even when she does go out Mandy is on her mind. Before she goes out she makes sure Mandy has fresh water:

I leave her in there and I put the gate up here and I always make sure to leave her fresh water. If I change her water even in the morning when I get up, which I do, I change it when I leave. I go out I lock the door I put her in there [the kitchen], I put the gate up there and I say I have to go out. I say mommy has to go out now. . . . I'm going out and it won't be long before I'm back sweetie and I say you are going to kiss mommy and I kiss

her. I always kiss her before I go out. And I'm usually not more than two hours . . . because I don't believe that I should. I think if you are going to have an animal it's not to stay alone every day of the week and all day long by themselves and then you come home at night at 9 or 10 o'clock at night they don't bother with it.

When Martha does not feel like going out she will watch television for something to do or just to have some voices on in the background to listen to. "I put it on and I hear the odd thing but I'm not concentrating on it half the time." Martha laughed when she recalled what happens when she falls asleep watching television:

Sometimes I sit here and maybe the tv is on and sometimes I fall asleep and she'll be over there or over here and the next thing you know she comes up to me and very gently on me [paws her arm], and I'll open my eyes and there it is standing so glad that you woke up.

Martha's time is also spent doing a variety of activities with and for Mandy in addition to their morning walk together. Throughout the day Martha will talk to Mandy:

I speak to her I just don't let her lay all day doing nothing. I talk to her because I think it makes her happy. I say you're mommy's best blossom. She doesn't know what the hell that is but it's not what you say altogether it's how you say it I think. . . . I'm not sitting here with my mouth closed all day and saying I didn't talk to a soul today because she is a soul. I can talk to her and I don't feel as if I'm going mad. . . . She looks at me and she seems to know what I'm saying. I'm sure she doesn't but she looks at me and say's that's alright, that's okay. She sort of looks at me and shakes her head at me. But I don't think there is anything better than an animal for a friend.

As well, Martha said talking to her makes her "feel alive. It makes me feel as if I am living. I could sit here and read but I get bored with that." But in talking to her Martha felt she shouldn't burden her with her troubles:

I talk to her and it changes my mind. It takes my mind off of what I was thinking. I'm not very often upset. I thank God for that. And if I get upset she would be the last one

that I would want to let know because she is still just a little dog and I love her dearly and she is a good little guy.

Many times during the day Martha will pat Mandy. "I pet her because I want her to think and know that I love her so it is a sign of affection for her." She said that although she enjoys doing it she does it for Mandy. "I enjoy doing it because I think I'm doing something for her that she likes. . . . I want her to know that I love her." Then with much emotion Martha extended this by saying:

I think a dog or an animal, maybe you shouldn't compare them to grownups or kids, but I think it's like when you have your kids. If you don't pay attention to them they soon tire of you, and I think because I pay attention to her she loves me. And I'm glad that she loves me because I wouldn't want to do anything to hurt her. She didn't ask me to buy her. And she has done a lot for me. Just being a friend to you.

As well, they will often play together. "I play with her. I kick her toys around like this." Although this is fun Martha said:

God I hate those squeaky toys. They drive you crazy. . . . They are so terribly noisy. I hate them with a passion. And what can you buy, even the dog stores here don't have too many things for dogs. They have things but I can't see any common sense to it. And those things are over \$5 and they last not very long. And I've been trying when I go out anywhere to look to see if I can get something that's different and more substantial and it's just the same old garbage one after the other that you find. . . . I'm so afraid that she'll get it [the metal noise maker] and swallow it and I don't like that. It worries me because if she swallowed that it's bigger than it should be. She plays every afternoon. She's got a lot of energy you know. But when she collapses she goes. And she goes in the kitchen and goes in her bed. She will sleep. I don't tell her it's time you went to sleep or anything but she does that on her own. And if it's raining she will come up and sits up here. I think she is quite happy and satisfied with things. This one is active but if she wants to run around and jump around she does her thing.



As we were talking about this Mandy had jumped up on Martha's lap and appeared to be sniffing beside her. The next thing we knew Mandy had pulled a \$5 bill out of Martha's pocket and was wagging her tail as fast as she could. It was so comical we both laughed for several minutes. Mandy thought being a show off and the center of attention was great and she did not want to give up her hard sought for prize. She eventually was willing to trade for one of her squeaky toys. This little episode clearly illustrated Martha's point that Mandy is very entertaining and she makes Martha laugh.

Every day Martha brushes Mandy at last once but usually two or three times. "When I like something I like it and I like to show it. I take care of it. I take care of her. I do the best I can at all times with her." Martha also sends her to a dog groomer. "I get her washed and clipped every month and supposedly taken care of." Although she is professionally done Martha is not very pleased with the level of care she receives or the cost of the service:

They didn't take care of her ears. I shouldn't have to do those. All the dogs I've ever had I'd taken them. Now I paid thirty something to get her done. Now I think that is enough. And I think they should do her ears but they didn't touch them. And I had to pay \$100 and something to get them done by the vet. So I wasn't very happy. I don't mind spending the money.

There are a number of reasons Martha would like to go someplace else but she has other factors to take into consideration:

It seemed to me they used to complain about her. Well they put her in a little hole like this and she goes there for nine o'clock in the morning and doesn't get out for three or four hours later. I think that's abominable frankly. Nancy takes her in the car and then she goes and picks her up and she is so glad when she gets home. She is exhausted when she gets home. I got the picture for a while that she was a bit of a pest to them. And I said to Nancy I'm going to change because I said I don't like them anyway and maybe she's justified in being a pest. I don't know what in the hell they are doing to her, I'm not there. And I have to be careful because Nancy takes her in the car. . . . I'm not

hung up on these people as far as I am concerned. I'm not too happy with them. I think I'll be glad to get her moved but I have to be careful like I say because I don't drive a car any more after 50 years.

Another activity Martha and Mandy do is go for four walks a day. As with petting, the reason for the walks is to benefit Mandy and in the process Martha benefits as well. She said:

I go out rain or shine, snow or blow with her. Many days I would shrink and say to hell with it. I would, I may as well be honest with you because I would. And don't get the idea I just go out for my benefit. I have no feelings about it. I got her and I love her and I want to do what is right by her and I don't think that I should get lazy and say I don't feel like going out today because it is helping me to go out too.

After she said, "She goes along and does her piddle and her poops and I clean them up and put them down in the garbage here," she became quite annoyed because "not everyone cleans up after their dogs."

Every once in a while during the day Martha will give Mandy a treat. "Not too large or anything because I don't want her to get too fat it's not fair she can't help it."

Martha laughing said that at the end of the day:

I put her down and say come on lovey you're going to bed now and she gets down and she curls up on her bed. I say goodnight baby I love you and she looks up at me as much to say I wonder if you do. And I leave it at that.

Other activities associated with Mandy include giving her a bath herself once in a while, buying pet food, and taking her for yearly shots. Martha did not consider the cost of keeping a dog to be a negative thing. She said:

I've had dogs long enough to know that it costs money to keep them. . . . I think it is a lot more than I ever used to pay before but I don't care because I love her. I like my dog.

Money is nothing if you are not happy.

Martha did not consider a restriction from travelling to be negative either:

I have my dog in a year every day of the year. Now my friend is going up on a cruise and she says I wish you could come. . . . I said no I'm not putting her away in a place where she has never been and expect to come back and find my dog is nice. I said she is a dog it's true but I don't believe in mistreating them. And I think I would be mistreating her. . . . I don't know enough about the people who look after the dogs if they are kind to them. I've heard so many complaints.

When asked if she would get someone she knew or trusted to come in and take care of her she replied:

Yeah but that isn't easy to do any more. I'm not sure because I don't know anybody who does that and I would just be going away because I want to go away. I have to think of her. I don't say they should run your life. I'm not thinking that way but you must be kind to them and you can't be kind part of the time and then say well to hell I'm going whether you like it or not. And I knew that before I bought her.

In this regard she also said:

I just figured I was responsible for the dog and all the while I keep her. If I was going to involve anybody else I would not have had the dog simply because she can't have two and three and four masters or different people coming and telling her what to do because I'm not sure that they know what they want her to do.

Martha said she had felt this way with all of the dogs she has had.

Martha responded to my question asking in what ways does Mandy negatively influence her lifestyle by saying, "Nothing. She doesn't negate my lifestyle at all in any way, shape, or form. She is as good as gold."

By watching Martha interact with Mandy while we were talking it was obvious that they were very attached to each other. Martha would pet her, throw her toys, hug her, kiss her, talk to her using endearing words and nicknames, and tell her she loved her. Martha said she loved and enjoyed all the animals she ever had. And she added that they all made her life

happier and that she was "happier having her" referring to Mandy. Her affection and attachment to Mandy is expressed in a number of ways:

You have to do what's right by them. . . . I think you must treat them well. You must feed them well, not over feed them. You must make sure they are bathed and kept clean. . . . And I think you have to be kind to them. I don't let her just run around and not bother with her. I talk to her as if I am talking to you. I know she doesn't understand half of it but at least she knows she is brought into the conversation.

Later in our conversation Martha elaborated:

This is a little dog and she has feelings and you must do what is right by her. And needs, needs that she can't do anything about herself. She can't wash herself so to speak. And if I am going to have an animal I like a clean animal. I don't want one all knotted up and everything else. I don't think it is fair to them again. If you are going to have an animal you must treat it properly or else. It's like a child, you shouldn't mistreat a child either.

This does not mean, however, that Mandy is allowed to do anything she wants:

I think that these little guys have feelings the same as we do and just because they don't speak to you they do the next best thing really. They can tell you when they are happy or unhappy. And I didn't buy her to make her an unhappy little guy. I want her to be happy. I like her to be happy. She doesn't always do everything that is right. And I'm not going to take it out on her but I tell her. I talk to her and I say that's not nice you're a naughty girl for doing that. I don't know if it goes in or not but it makes me feel better I told her off, and she looks at me as if she knows what I'm saying. . . . It's amazing she must understand because she doesn't do it again when I say it is a no no. The odd time she might repeat it but not once after the other.

Later she added:

They are like a kid . . . you train them properly. You have to start young with these guys the same as you do with kids. . . . You have to correct them at the right time. There is no

use constantly don't do this, don't do that because it gets too used to it and it goes over their heads.

But when disciplining her Martha said she never shouts. "I never shout at her. I don't shout at her. I don't believe in shouting at her." Because Mandy knows right from wrong except at night she is allowed to go where she pleases including on the furniture:

I'm not going to have a dog and say you can't go here and you can't do this, you can't do that. It is alright to say certain things are that's a no no. . . . But I don't want to keep her off here or off there. To hell it is my furniture and she is not ruining it. She is not chewing it. She is not piddling on it. I wouldn't stand for it.

Taking proper care of her also meant never beating her or mistreating her. Martha said:

I would never beat mine. . . . I despise it when I hear someone is mistreating them or maltreating them in any way, shape, or form because if you don't want it get rid of it somewhere where someone is going to enjoy it but don't tantalize it. People are not nice to animals. I don't like that. I like her. I like all animals but I don't believe in being terrible to them just because they are animals doesn't make it any different. . . . I hate people who buy pets and mistreat them. And if you're going to enjoy your pet you have to do what is right by your pet. Some people don't and I don't understand. You can't expect them to take care of themselves. You've got to be kind to them.

Even though Martha is very attached to Mandy she does not worry about something happening to her. "I wouldn't want anything to happen to her but I don't dwell on it. I don't believe in dwelling on it because if I dwell on it it might make it happen to her."

Although Mandy means a lot to her Martha said if something happened to her she would not get another one. "I am getting too old myself to get another one." She didn't think she would get another type of companion animal either:

I doubt it simply because I don't think I could do it justice. I don't think I would be fair to it. I think I'm fair to her, I take her out four times a day, I play with her now. . . . But you are not taking it on just for a couple of weeks. And it is not fair to the animal.

Martha also did not think she would want to get an older dog:

Sometimes all people aren't fussy the way you bring up your dogs. See I check her when I don't like something. If they are older dogs you aren't going to be able to train them unless you go to someone who knows what the hell they are doing. It would be my misfortune to get the wrong dog and then I would be very mad at myself. Not at the dog but I would be annoyed with myself for doing that. So that's the only think I would worry but we must take into consideration that we are not the only one's who count.

### Summary

Martha is a woman in her latter seventies who has been widowed for 25 years. She is an independent, caring and compassionate woman.

Martha comes from a small family but spent most of her first 18 years living in a boarding school abroad and spent her summers with her family in Eastern Canada. Whereever she was she always had a lot of friends to play with. As a child she did not particularly like the canaries and budgies her mother had because she thought they were messy and noisy. Like her parents she loved dogs and especially the German Shepherd her mother had. It was because of this dog and a dog her Aunt owned that her fondness for dogs grew.

Other than having the budgies she had bought for her mother Martha did not have a companion animal of her own until her latter fifties. Until this time she had been busy with a career, taking care of her parents, getting married, having an active social life while she was married, and then straightening up her husband's estate.

The death of her spouse was difficult for Martha because it had happened suddenly and unexpectedly. Because she was so busy and had so much to take care of Martha felt that this would not have been a good time to have gotten a companion animal. She said that this would all depend on the person though.

Three years after her husband's death Martha moved to Vancouver, got a part-time job, and purchased two female puppy poodles within a year apart. Lady was well mannered and

very obedient. Trixie was mischievous, naughty, young and foolish, and had a good sense of humour. Martha and Trixie had a hard time getting over Lady's loss when she was killed suddenly at seven years of age by a car.

When Martha still owned Trixie she had a stroke and was hospitalized for several months. Martha was doubtful whether she would recover well enough to be able to properly take care of Trixie. Martha recovered better and faster than her doctor had expected and was able to properly take care of Trixie by herself.

Martha found it very hard getting over the loss of Trixie when at 13 or 14 she had to be put to sleep due to cancer. Martha missed having a dog, she missed the companionship, and she missed having something to talk to.

Within the next year Martha bought Mandy, her current companion animal. She is a purebred female Lhasa Apso puppy. She is a dog who is young and foolish, she loves everybody, she is independent, she knows how to get what she wants, and she is well behaved.

Martha is very attached to Mandy, as she was with Lady and Trixie. She spoke of many positive aspects associated with these dogs and dogs in general: companionship, entertainment, enjoyment, something to talk to, something to love, something to receive affection and love from, something to take care of, a way to keep your sanity, something to take your mind off your troubles, something to pet, something to play with, a way of getting exercise, they make her feel happy, they make her feel alive, and they are a good friend.

Martha did not identify any negative aspects associated with owning these companion animals. She said she knew she would be restricted from travelling before she bought a dog, and she had dogs long enough to know what they would cost to take care of.

Because of her age Martha did not think she would get another one if something happened to Mandy because she would want to be sure she could take care of it properly.

Having a companion animal means a lot to Martha and she said, "I don't think there is anything better than an animal for a friend."

## **Themes**

**When reflecting on our conversation about the meaning of companion animals in Martha's life I identified 22 major areas or themes:**

- 1) Independence. Martha has always been an independent person. Before having a stroke she used to do all of her own house painting, fix many things with her own tools, and take care of herself. Since her stroke she does as much as she can by doing her own grocery shopping, house cleaning as much as she can, and taking care of herself and Mandy while living on her own.**
- 2) Compassion and caring. Martha is compassionate and caring for people and companion animals. This compassion and care for people was illustrated in many different ways. She stayed at home and physically and financially took care of her aging and ill parents. She financially helped other family members. Several times she postponed getting married while she was still taking care of her parents. She keeps a friend company when they go to visit her friend's father in a nursing home. And it was seen in her willingness to voluntarily participate in this study and to do whatever she could to help me so it would be worthwhile for me. Her compassion and care for companion animals was also illustrated in many different ways. This was seen in her concern for taking care of Mandy properly. She is kept clean and well groomed, always having fresh water, never being left for more than two hours at a time, getting four walks a day, never burdened with her troubles, and always doing the best she can at all times with her. As well, Martha would talk to her, pet her, and exercise her for Mandy's benefit. Martha did this so Mandy would feel loved, well taken care of, and so she would be happy.**
- 3) Previous love of dogs. For as long as Martha can remember she has always loved dogs.**
- 4) Family of origin. After spending the first three years of her life with her parents she was sent to Ireland to live with an Aunt until she was 18. Martha only saw her family when she returned to Canada every summer. Growing up Dora had a lot of friends and she was always busy.**



5) Parents' love of companion animals. Martha said both of her parents loved companion animals and particularly dogs.

6) Companion animals and childhood. Until 18 most of her life was spent living in a boarding school abroad and she only came home for the summer time. During these years she was happy and had a lot of fun being mischievous and playing with a lot of friends. Martha's mother had canaries and budgies before she went to boarding school. Although she liked them Martha considered them to be messy, noisy dumb, and very dull. As a result, she did not become attached to them. As companion animals were not allowed at the boarding school her only companion animals during this time were her mother's German Shepherd in the summers and her Aunts dogs. Martha loved these dog very much and her love of dogs grew because of them. The German Shepherd was very intelligent and never did anything wrong. Martha had only been informed of her death by a letter so she was still alive in Martha's head.

7) Type of companion animal. Martha has always preferred dogs over other types of companion animals. Budgies and canaries were messy, noisy, and dumb. Cats are too independent, Martha doesn't trust them, and she is allergic to them. Martha loves all dogs. Since the dogs she had previously owned had been poodles she liked them because she was more used to them. Even though her current companion animal is not a poodle she still loves her and would get another Lhasa Apso. Martha is restricted as to the type of dog and type of pet she can have because of allergies. Martha has always had, and therefore prefers, females and puppies. She believes in properly training a dog and would therefore not get an older dog because it might not have been trained properly.

8) Companion animals during middle years. In her early twenties Martha had budgies she had bought for her mother. Although Martha enjoyed them they were messy and too much work because she was busy working and taking care of her mother. Martha would not have bought them if it had not been for her mother and she did not want any budgies after that. From her mid twenties until her latter fifties Martha did not have any companion animals

because she was working and taking care of sick parents. Then she got married, had an active social life, did a lot of travelling, and her sister-in-law who was living with them did not like or want any companion animals in the house. In her latter fifties Martha bought two dogs within a year apart of each other. For the first few years Martha was working while she had the dogs and she said this was not a problem. As well, the cost of keeping two dogs was not a negative aspect. Martha said there were no negative aspects associated with these dogs.

9) Grieving and companion animals. Martha found it very difficult dealing with the loss of her dog companion animals. It was difficult getting over the loss of lady because she died suddenly and accidentally, she was a good dog, and because Martha was very attached to her. Even today this loss was difficult to talk about and it brought up painful feelings. Martha found it difficult getting over the loss of Trixie because she was older, she had had Trixie for a long time, she had been very attached to her, and now she was left without a dog. There were times when it was too painful to even talk about with her close friend.

10) Acquiring a companion animal during the transition to widowhood. Martha did not think it would be a good idea to get a companion animal when recently widowed. In her case she was very busy handling funeral arrangements, closing her husband's business, selling their house, and other estate related matters that she was too busy to devote any time to a new companion animal or to an existing one if she had had one. It took her three years before she felt she could handle things and was ready to get a companion animal. Martha did feel that this maybe depends on the person.

11) Reason for getting current companion animal. Martha got Mandy because she was lonely, she missed having a dog, and it would help her to get over the loss of her previous companion animal.

12) Influence of previous companion animals. Because of allergies and because she loved her previous companion animals Martha always had female poodles until her current

companion animal. As well, Martha said her fondness for dogs grew because of a childhood dog they had.

13) Current lifestyle. Because of her stroke Martha's lifestyle has been restricted. However, she still does her own grocery shopping, a bit of house cleaning, she talks to and visits friends, she takes Mandy for several walks a day, she talks to and plays with Mandy, and she watches television.

14) Increasing importance during widowhood. Martha said companion animals in widowhood take on a greater role because as she gets older she is not about to go out as much as she used to. As a result, the companion animal takes on a greater companionship role with something to love, care for, and talk to. Also, Mandy is good company for Martha because she has no family and few friends she communicates with.

15) Importance of current companion animal. Having Mandy means very much to Martha. She said she does not think there is anything better than an animal for a friend. She loves Mandy because she has done a lot for her and she is a good friend. She loves Mandy and although it costs to take care of her Martha said money is nothing if you are not happy, and Mandy makes her happy.

16) Companion animals and health. In the hospital after her stroke Martha worried about being able to recover so she could properly take care of Trixie. She recovered better and faster than her doctor had expected and was able to go home and properly take care of Trixie on her own. Martha believes her health benefits from having Mandy because of all of the positive aspects associated with her especially the love, exercise, keeping her sanity, and making her feel alive and happy. Mandy is especially important to Martha because since her stroke she is limited in what she is allowed to do around the house.

17) A strong attachment to previous and current companion animals. This was illustrated both verbally and non-verbally. Martha always kisses her goodnight and tells her she loves her. She always kisses her before she goes out and makes sure she is not gone more than two hours. She always does her best to try and take care of Mandy properly which included: four

walks a day, grooming, patting, talking to her, veterinarian care, playing with her, feeding her the right food in the right amount at the right time, telling her she loves her, trying to make her happy, and not burdening her with her own troubles. When Martha would talk to Mandy she would use endearing words and names. Many times during our conversation Martha would hug her, pat her, play with her, and tell her she loved her.

18) Positive aspects associated with companion animals. Martha spoke of many positive aspects associated with all of the companion animals she has had, especially Mandy. These included: companionship, entertainment, enjoyment, something to talk to, something to love, something to receive affection and love from, something to take care of, a way of keeping your sanity, something to take your mind off your troubles, something to play with, a way of getting exercise, something to pat, feeling happy and alive, and having a good friend.

19) Few negative aspects associated with previous and current companion animals. When she had owned the budgies for her mother she found them messy and too much work because Martha was busy working and taking care of her mother at the same time. Martha did not identify any negative aspects associated with Lady and Trixie. Martha said Mandy did not negate her lifestyle in any way, shape, or form. She said she was as good as gold. Aspects that others might consider negative are: not being away from her dogs for more than two hours at a time, being restricted from travelling, the cost of keeping a dog, and trying to find a condominium that would allow Mandy. Martha did not consider these to be negative. She thought they were part of having a dog and taking care of it properly and people should not buy one if they are not going to take care of it properly.

20) Societal aspects or services. There are aspects or services which could make owning a dog easier or more enjoyable for Martha. These would include: an affordable and reliable house cleaner; less housing restrictions; an affordable, reliable, and trustworthy dog sitter although Martha may still not use the service; people picking up after their companion animals; people properly training their companion animals so they do not constantly bark

and annoy people; affordable, non-harmful dog toys; and affordable and reliable dog groomers.

21) Age. As she gets older Martha is concerned that she will be able to properly take care of a companion animal. Mandy's importance increases as Martha gets older because she does not go out as much as she used to so Mandy is company and helps to keep her sanity. Also because of her age Martha did not think she would be able to get another dog or another type of companion animal if something happened to Mandy because she did not think she would be able to properly take care of it so as to be fair to the animal.

22) Socio-economic status. Financially Martha is able to properly take care of Mandy in her own condominium.

### Dora's Story

It was a bright, sunny, hot day when I drove up in front of Dora's house. There was no answer at the front door so I decided to go around to the back. As I approached the rear of the house I heard a dog barking and then a big, beautiful, black and white Dalmatian was standing and barking at the gate. Since she didn't look or sound vicious I gave her a dog cookie I had brought and then I entered the big back yard. As I petted the dog and fed her cookies I saw tall fruit trees, a fenced garden, flowers, and a small plastic swimming pool near the back porch. I made my way to the back door and my knock was quickly greeted by a recently widowed woman in her early seventies. Dora apologized for not hearing my knock at the front door but she had been busy doing something down stairs. As I followed Dora's quick pace through the kitchen into the living room Shasta a six year old purebred female Dalmatian followed me not taking her eyes off me hoping she would get more cookies. As I sat down I gave her the last of the dog cookies I had brought and she seemed delighted as she wagged her tail. As I looked around the living room I noticed the light green carpet was spotless and there was not trace of dog hair or doggie odor in the room. After Dora and I were seated we talked about ourselves and then I explained the purpose of my research study, what

her participation would involve, and I had Dora sign the participant consent form. To begin the interview I asked Dora how she would describe herself. Dora immediately responded by saying:

I'm tender hearted. Really I'm quite quiet and shy. . . . But since I have lived in this country I'm not as shy as I used to be. But as a child I was very shy. And though things do upset me at times I get over them quickly. I can sort of blow my stack and get over them. But I am inside very tender hearted. Rather superstitious because I believe that if you are unkind to people or things or animals it all comes back to you in some other form. That type of thing. . . . I suppose I'm athletic. I like to walk. Although I have a lot of friends and I talk a lot I'm also a loner on the other side.

Being a loner to Dora meant that she liked to be alone and she liked to do things on her own. Dora said she was not very good with people helping her. She said although she tries "to be different and be patient" she does not like people's help because she likes doing things a certain way. This pertains to all areas of her life including Shasta. "People want to take her [for a walk] but I don't want them to because I think of all the things behind it that could happen. I'm sort of a loner in that way."

Dora also felt she was independent and she dreads:

the day when I can't do things for myself. . . . What am I going to do if I can't dig my own garden or do things for myself. I know you keep gearing yourself that that's going to happen one day but you don't want it to.

Dora also considered herself to be easy going and she does not like arguments. She said, "I'm sort of easy going. As I get older I get disturbed easier but really I think I am quite easy going. I don't think you get anywhere by panicking."

Although financially Dora said, "I don't have any worries" she considered herself to be economical. "I went through the war . . . so there is so many impressions when you have shortages and you still think of it that way."

Talking about living through the war as a teenager lead into a discussion of Dora's family of origin and what it was like growing up. Although Dora had a brother she considered herself to be an only child because her brother was nine years older. They did not play together and Dora said, "He gave me the discipline. He would say the things like mom she hasn't done her homework." This did not, however, mean she was lonely:

I always had friends. I never thought of it that way but my mother used to tell me that if she took me to the beach I'd be playing for a while and then I would come back with somebody and say to my mother I want you to meet my friend.

During her childhood Dora also had the companionship of dogs. When Dora was born her family had a black and white male bull terrier crossed with a fox terrier named Kipper. Kipper was very protective and possessive of Dora. "He was always beside the pram or on the pram. If anybody put their fingers on it he would push them off." Kipper was a source of protection more than a dog to be played with. Dora was never one to play with dogs anyway. She said, "When I was little I just used to cuddle them." Kipper was also a constant source of companionship because "he went everywhere" with Dora. He was, however, a dog that "was the boss" and "had a mind of his own."

Although Kipper was her mother's dog and Dora was too young to take care of him she was very fond of him. Talking about Kipper she added as she started to cry, "And I'm still very fond of him." She went on to say that, "I'm more fond of him than I probably would of humans even that I remember then." She also cried as she said, "I was very attached to him. I cry now when I think about it."

Kipper was put to sleep when Dora was about five or six years old:

I just remember then I was just heartbroken because I didn't have a dog. I guess I didn't have any brothers and sisters either. My brother was like a father to me but I didn't have anybody close like that. I felt more alone then.

Because of her love of dogs she said:

After that I used to go and visit people that had dogs. I was always walking people's dogs all through my life. I used to go and have dinner at somebody's house that had a dog. But no end to dogs. We used to look after dogs for holidays and I used to walk them. So I've always been a dog lover. I like cats but I put up with cats.

Dora remembered other dogs and cats from her early years. Before age five Dora remembered the neighbor's cat had kittens in their house and Kipper would look after the kittens when the cat went out. "He would just sit there." Dora said, "There was a cat at one time I'm trying to think of it that we had. I wasn't much for cats that's probably what it was. They are an animal so I wouldn't hurt it."

Also before Dora was four years old her mother had roller canaries. Dora remembered: only the tales my mother used to tell because it's only their singing. And when we went on holiday my mother used to take him to the butcher and when he sharpened his knives the birds used to sing and they rolled, so my mother used to tell me. And when we came home she brought the bird home and it wouldn't sing any more so she took him back to the butcher and said here you may as well keep it. And he sang there.

Dora said, "Really I didn't have much to do with them."

As a child whenever she went to visit people she used to be with the dog. "There was a dog happy once that somebody else had when I was little before I was five. The owner taught him tricks and when I used to go stay there they used to get happy doing these tricks." Dora did not particularly like this because, "I'm not very keen on performing animals. I don't like circuses. I don't like watching that on tv." Dora just liked the companionship and it bothered her to think "what they must go through to do these things."

At the age of six Dora's childhood was affected by the depression when her family moved and Dora's father lost his job. As a result Dora's mother had to go to work and was out until eight o'clock in the evening. This meant that at the age of seven Dora was responsible for getting the meals ready and doing other things. Although Dora said, "I was quite young



seven you know to be alone," she added, "I never thought it was bad. I think I had an extremely happy childhood. . . . I never knew any unhappiness at all."

Although Dora wanted another dog they could not get another one because her mother "was away all the time so it wouldn't have been fair to have a dog." Even though she did not have a dog of her own Dora fondly remembered a number of dogs. For a couple of summers around the age of five to seven years of age Dora remembered a Dalmatian called Shasta on a farm she spent her summer holidays at:

She used to exhaust me. I couldn't catch her. I can remember almost crying because I wanted to catch her and hold her and she was only a puppy then. She was so full of life, that's what I remember most. I can remember just being out of breath chasing her and falling over her.

Dora never knew of Dalmatians before seeing this one and since that time she said, "I've always wanted one, always." But she "never dreamed I would have a Dalmatian." Dora remembered:

My mom used to talk about them because when she was a girl you see if you had horses you always had a pack of Dalmatians. They always lived with the horses. And they say that a Dalmatian can walk in amongst the feet of a horse and not get trampled. So wealthy people who had horses in those days my mother remembers before cars when she was a girl. She remembers going in a horse and carriage places. And that impressed her that wealthy people had a pack of Dalmatians because they are a pack dog and they are scavengers. That's why they live on the junk that was thrown to them or they eat the oats and all the type of thing. But I would say really that was the thing that impressed me, they walked behind the carriage of wealthy people. And all my life I wanted one and I didn't see many.

Dora did not think she would ever have a Dalmatian because in those days Dora said, "You were lucky if you got a Heinz dog."

Even though Dora only saw Shasta for two or three summers she knew she wanted a Dalmatian and also "the type of personality Shasta was as well." Reflecting back on this dog Dora said, "I can still go back to that in my feelings for that dog. It was Shasta that lives in me. I can see her as though it was yesterday."

Dora remembered a friend's dog called Nickie when she was between the ages of about 7 to 10 years old:

I used to go there at lunch time. I remember he always used to play with me because my mother was working this lady used to give me a dinner meal. And she was very good to me actually. And oh yes I just loved this little dog. Nickie was a bit like Kipper. He was always waiting and all wiggly when I came. I just I did love him. I was very fond of him.

The next dog Dora fondly remembered was Chi Chi an aristocratic Chow Chow that Dora "used to look after at Christmas time and I used to walk." This was when Dora was between 7 and 12 years old. Because of this dog Dora said, "I have a great love for a Chow because of Chi Chi. I guess if you asked me the second dog I would like I might say a Chow."

It wasn't until Dora was 11 or 12 years old before her family got another dog. The man who had owned Chi Chi bred Spaniels.

They had four of them and oh I used to make a fuss over them. My mother was the same as me anyway, and my father. One day Mr. Camps came up with the dog Del and said we've decided you can have Del. And my father said we liked Diana best and so he came back half an hour later with Diana and took Del away. So my parents had Diana. That was our dog from then on.

Diana was a female black and white spaniel. "She was the family dog. I was very fond of her, well like all dogs. Yeah I was very fond of her. She was more my mother's dog." Reflecting back on Kipper and Diana, Dora said, "I was more attached to Kipper than I was Diana because Kipper was a male dog and he had a mind of his own. He was a dear little thing." Dora said her parents had been great dog lovers. Because her father had grown up in an orphanage without companion animals he had always wanted one. Although both of her parents had

loved dogs her father was very tender hearted with them and her mother was more sensible with them.

During her teenage years Dora "was very keen on sports" and "used to go to the football games" and other activities. She laughingly recalled that a teacher had called her "the Queen of the kids or something." At this age as well Dora's love of dogs and especially Dalmatians was quite evident:

This boy had a Dalmatian his name was John. He was two years younger than me and we used to call it going out with him. I didn't really like him but I went with him because he would let me walk his dog on a leash. Vista her name was. I always think of her now. I would have been 15 then. But I was very fond of Vista, but I used to have Diana at home. Dora was in school longer than most people in those days in England:

Our schooling was different in England because we were expected to work really when we were 14. I went to a commercial school actually but it was a bit higher than the basic school's education. And so I went until 16 whereas other kids only went to 14. The school leaving age was 14 when I went to school. So I went for the two extra years and then I went to work. I took the civil service exam and went to the Air Ministry.

Dora worked with the civil service doing clerical work until they were evacuated due to the war. Dora got married at the age of 19 to Ben, a Canadian soldier. She continued doing office work and was a bus conductress for a short time until her son was born a year after her marriage. Dora stayed home with her son and three years later they moved to Canada.

During these years Dora did not have a companion animal of her own although Diana, her mother's dog, was still part of her life. Dora also remembered that "when I came to Canada my mother had a budgie." Dora said the budgie did not mean anything to her. "It was just that I was amused when I went home and the things it did."

Dora also remembered a friend's Dalmatian during those years:

I have another friend and her husband had a Dalmatian. This was during the war.

Crystal was her name. And Pat wasn't a dog lover but I used to love Crystal. Pat used to bring her over to me during the war when Tom was overseas.

Dora left Diana behind when she moved with her family to Canada. Diana died soon after when Dora was about 23 or 24 years old. Dora said, "She was pretty old I think when she died, but I have pictures of her with Dick."

When they first moved to Canada Dora and her family lived on an orchard farm and Dora did not start working again until her son, Dick, was six years old.

Four months after they moved to Canada Dora got her first dog. "That spring Ben knew I wanted a dog. He brought home this dog and I named her Diana because of the Diana at home." Diana was a female puppy, a black and white Scotch Border Collie. Dora said:

Oh she meant the world to us. She just went everywhere. . . . We were on the farm and she was like Kipper was to me she was like that with Dick. She went everywhere with him. Everybody knew us because of the dog.

Several times during our interview when talking about her own childhood and her son's childhood Dora said, "I figure every child should have an animal, I sort of feel that you become more considerate of other species and races and things like this. I had a very happy life because of those things." In relation to her son and dogs Dora said:

Well I would say it makes it easier because the child had a companion. I had one child and I had a child who had my feelings about a dog. Dick was as fond of the dog as what I was. . . . I think all children should have a dog. I really think it made it easier because I only had one child it made it easier with the dog because there was always companionship and Diana went everywhere with Dick.

Dora went back to work when Dick was eight years old. She worked in a local store for a while but because she was good in bookkeeping in school she picked it up and ended up working in an office doing bookkeeping. Dora continued working after they moved into town and again after they moved to Dora's current house in Vancouver when Dora was about

32 years old. Both Dora and her husband worked very hard. Sometimes Dora would work "12 hours a day just depending. It was all to do with the work. . . . I worked what hours were needed." Dora's husband worked long hours trying to establish his own business. Reflecting back on those years together Dora said:

We had a very happy life, a happy lifestyle. We worked that era when you lived in a neighborhood like this with a little house and your time, when we came back to Vancouver to live of course, and you spent your weekends keeping it looking nice, painting and doing the lawns. And it was the pride of your life to own a house and keep it nice. We've always grown a vegetable garden. . . . And we did on the farm and so we canned and froze vegetables and did everything like that. My husband wasn't much for going to the beach or camping. Well he was six years in the army and he said I camped and I lived without a fridge or stove and I'm never going back to that again. After six years in the trenches, he was in the infantry, he said no we've got a home and we're going to make the most of our home.

Dora said they had always lived in a house because her husband had "lived in an apartment as a child so he never wanted to live in an apartment again."

During their early years together Dora and her husband did not take any holidays. "When we were younger we were too busy basically keeping the wolf from the door. It was necessary to work. . . . We had a contented life, always building for the future." To Dora's husband "relaxation was his home."

In those days their lifestyle consisted of working hard, raising their son, and spending time together with Diana, taking her wherever they went. When Dora was about 37 years old she had to put Diana to sleep. Dora cried as she said she had been very attached to her. Recalling her death Dora said:

Well we had to have her put to sleep because she had cancer at the end but she was pretty old. She was about 13. And you know what crumpets are, English Crumpets the things with the little holes in the top. We used to have them for breakfast and we'd taken her in

to this vet and we were eating breakfast the next day and I can see us now we were all crying and the tears were falling on the crumpets. And I don't think we ever ate crumpets again.

Dora did not have to wait very long before getting another dog. "In a couple of weeks my husband picked me up from work. Well he said go and look out the window. And he had been to the pound and got a puppy." Dora was delighted but her husband "didn't understand it. He thought it was going to be just like Diana."

Diana did everything we said. We would say be an Indian dog and she would crawl. She would crawl across the floor and oh dear my husband thought this new dog was going to be exactly the same. She was eventually but not as an eight week old puppy.

Dora said getting another dog so quickly after Diana helped her get over her loss easier. She said, "I was okay, but it was my husband that could never, he never had the love for Sara that he had for Diana." That was because:

Diana knew things. She knew the sound of his truck. She knew when he was coming and everything. She knew so much. I can remember somebody coming to visit and sitting in a chair and they were cold there and I gave her my cardigan to wear and Diana sat beside her the whole evening because she knew it was my coat.

Part of this was because:

Diana went with us more. We got wise when we got Sara. The thing is too we were on the farm and then we went from the farm up to a place called Bralorne to live so whenever we got in the car Diana got in too. She used to lay on the floor by my feet and I knew she used to edge over to Ben. And eventually she used to get on the foot that was near the brake and he used to tell her to move while he was putting on the brake but she used to try to get closer to him. But she went everywhere with us. So we decided that when we got another dog we weren't going to do this because we couldn't go out without Diana you see. So Sara got left at home more. So she didn't go in the car the same way.

Even though she had another dog Dora said, "I still missed Diana because she had been older."

Sara was a light brown, short-haired, female boxer. Sara did not get taken out very much for walks because they lived in town and both Dora and her husband worked. As a result Sara "was always fat." Reflecting on this Dora said, "I feel a bit guilty that I never walked Sara. But then by the time I'd worked and got home, and then I had meals to get and all that type of thing. But I was always busy that is why she got fat." Because they lived on the farm when they had Diana "she didn't need the walks. She got all the exercise she needed."

Dora had Sara for about 12 years when she had to be put to sleep. Dora said it was harder losing Sara because "Sara was more my dog. Ben never took to her the same way. They were both very much my dog but Diana was much more his than Sara was. He took more interest in Diana." Reflecting back on her loss Dora cried as she said, "It was terrible for me when Sara went because we never got another dog." When Diana died they "used to talk about things she did" because they had Sara "to keep us busy and to love. But when Sara went it was a lonely house and nobody there to greet you."

Initially Dora said she had been more attached to Sara than to Diana but then she said that she was just attached to them "in different ways" because they had different personalities and she had them at different times in her life. She loved them both because "of the companionship" and "just because they were dogs." Other positive aspects associated with them included, "They were always there when you came home and pleased to see you, jumping up. To me a home is not a home without a dog."

Dora said, "Having a dog was always positive." She added, "Dogs don't answer you back and a dog is always faithful to you whatever happens." As well, Dora felt "you get a lot of pleasure out of them." She also felt that all of these companion animals:

made me more considerate of other people, unselfish because you have to consider them. And I feel that with other people. . . . If a kid came to the door selling something I would have to buy it not because I wanted it but because I think that poor kid if I say no that will disillusion him for the rest of his life, that style, that's the thought. I feel it all comes from being considerate towards animals.

Dora did not consider the cost of keeping Diana or Sara to be a negative thing because "in the past we didn't go to the vet or have shots. There was just the dog food to buy." As well, because they always lived in their own home Dora said, "Housing and having a dog wasn't a problem."

Dora did consider working and having a dog to be a bit of a worry:

Oh really it wasn't very good because they had to be shut in. I don't like dogs annoying other people. I couldn't leave a dog out barking. I couldn't leave a dog tied up or that type of thing. You thought of getting home to them when they had been shut in the house. It was a tie. It was a worry.

The dogs did not hold them up from travelling because her husband could not leave his business so he would look after them when Dora went to England. They did, however, "stop us from doing things unless we could take the dog with us. But then we didn't really want to go or we couldn't afford to go that style."

In talking about Diana and Sara, Dora said, "I remember the dogs I had in Canada more really than those early ones because there was a lot more going on in my life in those days." But in relation to those early years Dora said, "I can see there were a lot more dogs I never mentioned but you know even when I think of people in the past I see their dog."

Dora did not get another companion animal until Shasta her current companion animal. Dora said part of this was because "we were so upset when Sara died and we didn't want to go through that again." Dora said it took "a long while" to get over her loss "because she used to do things." She added, "Well did we ever get over it. We didn't really. I would say that's it, we didn't really. We still used to miss her." There were other reasons why they did not get another dog. "We got house proud that everything was perfect. Nothing was out of place. So we didn't get involved. We were selfish." As well, Dora worked and her "husband's business was very demanding and also my parents lived in England and they died around 1980 and I knew my brother had died and I knew that I had to go over and look after things you see. And it was difficult for him looking after the dog." They also "wanted to travel and a dog was



always going to be a tie." And, "There were other things in our lives." So although they, and especially Dora, wanted another dog it was too impractical to have one. "But we grew away. It wasn't that I didn't want a dog or anything. Life was easier. I just thought of the extra work it would be but of course really I was wrong as I found out." Dora said:

I always used to say I wish we had a dog again but it was all the work involved really.

Keeping the dog hairs and all that and walking them. And it was because of business and me working we just weren't able to have an animal.

Dora said that her husband was a man who liked to have a perfect house:

There wasn't a mark anywhere and I guess this is because my husband was Canadian and had these ideas you see. He didn't like dogs peeing on the lawn or anything to make patches. That's I think one of the things Ben was happiest about when Sara died because there were no more brown patches on the lawn.

Dora said she had not considered this to be a problem.

Dora missed having an animal. "It was horrible coming home and there was no dog to meet you. . . . Coming home to an empty house is dreadful." Later she added, "The dog always greeted you. They were never mad at you. They were always pleased to see you and they never beret you for anything."

In the years after Sara died except for "a little dog next door" that Dora and Ben used to "make a fuss of" their lifestyle did not include very many companion animals. After Sara died their lifestyle changed to include more travelling. Dora's husband liked gambling:

He liked Las Vegas. So three times a year, and in later years, we would go for a long weekend to Las Vegas things like that. And we have had driving holidays down to California where we always ended up in Reno and Las Vegas and that. We dreamed of travelling when we were older.

Dora also went on holidays on her own. "I actually have done a lot of travelling. But my husband was very much involved with his business and you couldn't leave it for more than a week." Dora "went home to England every year or two to see my parents" where she

generally stayed for a month. She also went on "longer holidays when I went to Australia and things like that for three months."

One reason for not doing a lot of travelling was that they were both economical:

We had a very contented life, always building for the future. We were economical. I'm still economical. I still can't buy for the sake of buying them. And we were saving for our old age and that's why today I don't have any worries about old age or buying things.

That is what we aimed for and this is what we got.

Dora also described her marriage as a close, happy marriage. Dora said, "Ben and I discussed everything. . . . I knew his views and accepted them . . . because Ben and I had grown up together our views on sports or politics were the same."

As a young couple they "used to go to the beer parlour and dance." They also "were great hockey fans at one time we had tickets for eight or nine years." Also, "We used to go out for supper a lot to restaurants and different things." Although they knew a lot of people they did not go out very much with other people.

He was never one to mix with other people very much. He was his own man and he didn't mix with people after work. He had different theories that if somebody did something for you then the next thing you knew they were asking you to do something for them.

Dora added, "We did everything together. I didn't go out with the girls or go to shows with other people or things like that."

When Dora was about 57 years old her father passed away. Because her "mother was semi-crippled and she couldn't get around" Dora stayed in England for two months to settle matters and help her mother. The following year Dora went back to England to help her mother move into a nursing home but shortly after she passed away so Dora stayed for six months. "I had to sell the house and get rid of everything so I was there six months."

Before she had gone to England she said:

My idea was that I had quit work but when I went back I found that they had been keeping things going ready for me to come back and put it all right again. That was in 1980 so I worked until 1982.

After she retired Dora "quit and went to Australia for three months."

Then in 1986 after 43 years of marriage Dora's husband started getting strokes and Dora took care of him at home. The process of getting another dog started about a year later because of her husband's condition and because some friends came over with their dog:

I've got a friend, she is a Japanese girl and she is married to a fellow and Ben and he were friends and Beth and I were friends. But Gord died years ago and they have a son named John. Well this Christmas, my husband had had strokes and people really didn't know too much about what was wrong they didn't understand it too much. Anyway this Christmas Beth phoned could we come over to see you and so Beth and Tim her boyfriend, and John and his brother Jake and Dee and the two kids came. And when they came they had gotten this Dalmatian Isy, and he must have been a year and a half old. Well he came to Ben. Ben had lost the use . . . of his fingers. His brain was damaged. When he had this attack thing he had lung failure, his heart stopped five times so his brain was damaged you see. . . . And this dog went to him and Ben was stroking like this so John and Dee thought this is just what Ben needs is a dog. You know he could stroke it and it could sit by him and all this. So going home they talked of this so Beth phoned the next day. They were living in Lillouet then. So they talked about it and Beth phoned me and told me this and they knew when it was a Dalmatian. They didn't know that I loved Dalmatians but they saw it when they came here. I said to Beth I need a dog like a hole in the head but I can never say no. I wanted a Dalmatian all my life. So John said well there is a litter due in May and we will go to see this Mrs. King. And then I never heard any more until the end of June, well the first week in July. And there was a phone call. And as soon as I heard it was Beth, heard Beth's voice I said you got it. She said we'll keep her do you want a girl and all this. I said oh no I've always wanted a Dalmatian. But really in some ways it

was the biggest mistake of my life because the dog was completely different to Isy with all this energy she had she was too much for my husband really. But this is how we got her. They came one day and I can see this little face looking out now. And we had a home that didn't have a mark anywhere and she just piddled all the way across the floor when she came in. Anyway that's how we got her. I paid for her and I gave them extra money.

So after being without a dog for 17 years Dora got Shasta. She was an eight week old female purebred registered Dalmatian. Beth had called her Dally but Dora wanted to call her Shasta because of the Dalmatian Shasta on the farm that she had fallen in love with in her childhood.

In talking about first getting Shasta, Dora said, "If John hadn't have brought Shasta I don't suppose I would have had another animal as much as I'd wanted one." Dora also said that:

At the beginning it was a terrific adjustment getting used to a dog in the house. And I think had my husband not had the brain damage he had that I don't think he wouldn't have even considered them bringing Shasta here. No it was just the circumstances that his mind didn't work too well. He wanted her too yes but before he had the trouble he would never I don't think condescended to have a dog again. He would say all the work and walking it. Shasta has been a completely different dog to all the other dogs. . . . But you've got to change your lifestyle completely, that is what I say now. I've got to take the better of the two evils, what do I want. Do I want a clean house with nothing out of place or do I want the companionship of a dog. I can't have both.

Although they had gotten Shasta thinking she would be good for Ben, she was too energetic for him and "she used to scratch him. She didn't mean it. Well he had very thin skin. And she'd just go like that and it would tear his skin." Dora added, "At the beginning it was a terrific adjustment getting used to a dog in the house." Because she was so energetic Dora

would take her out for a walk three times a day for "an hour or something" each time so "it tired her out."

But getting Shasta was, as it turned out, a good thing for Dora. "In lots of ways it made life easier for the walking because you were sort of sharing your affection." It also helped ease the strain of caring for her husband. "I used to go for a walk with the dog when the pressures got a bit great." Dora added, "But it was having her there the company and the affection." Having her companionship was particularly appreciated because "Ben had been sick for quite a while" and they "got away from" people.

Dora said Shasta was more her dog:

He was very fond of her but no she was my dog because I had to look after her. I think that's how it works, the one that feeds her and walks her I think that's how. No she was definitely my dog. But she was very fond of him too. She used to get up in the bed and nuzzle up to him.

Dora only had Shasta for a year before her husband died after 45 years of marriage:

He really just drifted away sort of like an old soldier he just got weaker and weaker. It wasn't a shock, I expected it, I knew it. . . . Although I mean he wasn't bedridden or sick or anything and really I had nursed him say for two and a half years.

Even though Dora had expected it and because her husband "had been sick for a little while" and a lot of things "had been adjusted," it was still a big adjustment. Dora said:

When you lose your dog the other things are all running smoothly and so you just get another dog to replace the old one, it's only the loss. But with losing a husband it's much more involved than his companionship. Everything changes. Because this is what I've really said to people, until you've decided this is a whole new lifestyle I've got to start afresh it's no good to keep harping back if Ben was happy if this hadn't happened. You've got to settle your mind with the idea that you've got to start afresh on a new life by yourself.

Shasta did not seem to be affected by his loss. "She didn't really notice that he was missing. She was too young I think for that." In Dora's case though because her husband had been sick, "he had been a trial in a way for a good year and a half and so it was almost a bit of a relaxation." Afterwards her friends said:

You were so patient but how much longer could you go on. You can only be patient for so many years and then you start getting bitter because you are burdened with this. And I knew what they meant. I could understand that because it was a great strain.

In speaking about the transition to widowhood Dora said:

I just felt I was lucky the way things turned out. We both worked hard but he worked hard and he was generous and yet he saved for our old age. I know now he had a great attitude towards life. I may not have thought so at the time. But I don't know we were always happy and we were content with very little and I suppose we weren't greedy and we didn't want for a lot of things. No I had a very happy life. That's why I can't grieve now I mean I find the women that complain are the ones that weren't happy because I think they can't make it up any more. I don't have any regrets. This is what when different people talked to me after Ben died I said I don't have any regrets. He lived his life and we were happy. He did what he wanted to do and he achieved what he wanted to achieve. I mean you can't turn back the clock. You can't bring them back again so why do a lot of moaning and groaning.

Dora added:

At the time it happened Ben was sick but underneath it this is what I kept telling myself just the same as all adjustments even when Ben died you had to think of this that you couldn't keep looking back you got to decide it's a new life and I've got to look forward.

During this transition Dora believed it was important not to make any rash decisions:

At the time when Ben died I knew that it's important to stay in your house for about a year and I was always against all these people that sold up and moved and they have had

nothing but trouble. Looking back now it would have been a very silly move to move into an apartment.

This transition time was made easier by friends and other widows:

But you find when you become a widow that nearly everybody you knew is a widow sort of thing and so you compare. People sort of gather around you in that way. Now that's perhaps that's not the right way to put it. The people you can talk with are widows because they know what you are talking about. You can't talk to a woman who's still got her husband because she says I understand but she doesn't understand, she can't understand. . . . Not that I don't still have the same affections for my friends and all that but it is easier . . . with widows, you have more in common. . . . And I think that was it I got to know a lot of people and a lot of people gather around you sort of to try and advise you how it's going to be and things like this. But I really felt myself with all these people that I got over it easier than they did. And I always felt I got over it because I had Shasta.

Because of Shasta and taking her for walks Dora said:

Because of Shasta I mean it might of been very different had I not had Shasta but because I had got Shasta I had made all these young friends like all these people I know around here that have dogs they are all sort of the fortyish age group, they are not old people with dogs. And they all took an interest in me and they all popped in to see me and to make sure I was alright and anything they could do and company and sit and talk. And perhaps I don't mean this is so, but perhaps had I not had them I would have been lonely.

Shasta helped to make this transition easier in other ways as well. Dora said having Shasta was a source of companionship. "Really it was the most fortunate thing in my life that I did have Shasta because she has been such a companion." And she was also a source of comfort:

I just know that she was such a comfort to me. I just know I was so glad I had Shasta. I had to write and tell everybody in England. I had to write to a lot of people, it would be

up around 70 to 80 letters beyond the thank you's and things but everybody I know I wrote to all the dog lover people and said I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't of had Shasta.

Shasta was a source of comfort in that, "I wasn't lonely. There was somebody else in the house. Somebody to do something for. To go out for a walk and to feed her and to care about and to think about and to consider." It was also comforting to be able to "cuddle and stroke her." And Dora found their walks together comforting. "I did more with my dog because that was my comfort in a sense. I sort of walked further. . . . I went out with her more and I mixed with people with dogs more."

Because of these things Dora said, "With me the attachment grew stronger. She almost replaced Ben the affection that I showed Ben I showed to her." Several comments Dora made illustrated how much it meant to her having Shasta during this transition. Dora felt that she got over the loss "easier and faster" because of Shasta. Later she added that she had said at the time:

I need a dog like I need a hole in the head but well then my views have changed now. You see like we were without a dog for so long. As I said we didn't want the mess in the house and that again we didn't want the problems. But as it turns out it was the best thing that ever happened to me. Having Shasta when Ben died I couldn't have asked for anything better. It's funny how things work out.

With tears in her eyes Dora said, "I had a very happy life that's why Shasta means so much to me. I don't know how I would have gotten on without Shasta because she took Ben's place."

Speculating on whether or not a person should get a dog when they are initially widowed required much reflection. Dora said if you did not have a dog "it was easier when you want to go away. And had I not had a dog I would have done a lot of travelling. And it is not easy to keep leaving the house." But having Shasta during that time was good because it helped to make the transition easier and "Shasta has been a big excuse because I have been able to say to people no I can't come I've got the dog. . . . I am much better for not going."



In general Dora felt that a person should "wait a little while" before getting a dog: No I don't think it would be a good idea, not right at that time. It might when the initial sort of mourning period was over, maybe a few months when you've adjusted, when you've accepted it. I mean I believe firmly it takes five years to get over a loss whichever way it is, a child, or a divorce, or a husband. It takes a long time and will often come back and hit you when you don't expect it at all, but and everybody is different. I found that by my experience a lot of people who weren't very happily married make a lot more fuss about it than people who were happy. So no I don't really think personally it would be a good time to get a dog because I think a little while afterwards. While even to start with you are not lonely for a long while. At first you've got all the arrangements to look after, while this depends upon who you are I mean some people their kids come and do everything, but most people have things to do like the funeral to arrange and letters to write and thank you notes and all that type of thing. That takes a lot of time and it's not until that is all over and then gradually it hits you I am here all alone. And I would think then, I mean some people it takes longer than others but I would think then would be the time to get a dog, when you start to feel lonely and need something to occupy your time, of course some people find other things to occupy their time like part time jobs or something.

Dora thought that after you "settle your mind with the idea that you've got to start afresh on a new life by yourself" that "this is the time when I would think if you didn't have a dog would be the time to get one because that's the way I look at time. It was a whole new lifestyle for me."

Dora also thought "a lot depends on the person maybe." And "that would all depend on whether you were a dog lover or not. . . . I wouldn't advise people who weren't dog lovers to have a dog."

Dora also felt strongly about people not getting a dog for you because "then after a few months they might not want it." In this situation, "It is the dog you are hurting." She added:

Maybe the children could help in that way and say notice how things were going and say mom I think we should get you a dog or something like that. And the mother might say no. But a lot depends upon the age of a person and what they want to do with the time and their financial situation. Not I wouldn't think right away. I must admit that. And for dog lovers sooner than people who never had dogs.

Dora had quite a bit to say about widowhood as well:

When you are left alone the first thing you've got to learn really is that you've got to stand up for yourself, stand on your own two feet and do what you want. And I know with my husband's estate I asked Dick things what he wanted and oh goodness one day he would say one thing and another day he would say another so I thought to heck with that I'm just doing what I want to do if you can't make up your mind. But you do you become independent. You have to otherwise I guess you get unhappy. You have to make your own decisions whereas before you've never made your own decisions, you've talked them over . . . unless you marry again or something like that it's different or if there are other people involved with your life if your family lives with you or if you've got more children, but if you're alone you've got to make your own decisions and until you do I don't think you're happy. Although sometimes it gets testy because you've got to make your own decisions but you do. Well I think you are a better person for it. You get used to it. You've got to be able to stand on your own feet. And as you get older too your mind doesn't move so quickly the decisions don't come to you so quickly. It's your reaction to things. But they're the things I would say about widowhood.

There were other things a widow had to learn to decide about as well:

Even to buy things, your own clothes or your furniture or anything like that. You have to decide it all by yourself. . . . The finances too. I mean they might say well we can't afford that but when you are alone you've got to make your own decisions to start with can I afford it.

Dora said she found it important to have people she could rely on in a number of areas:

Another thing I found was very important to me was to have a plumber, a painter, an electrician, and somebody to cut my lawns, people you could rely on . . . otherwise like a painter could come and fleece you. That's all something you've got to learn on your own. . . . I tend to be trustworthy but you've got to think of people coming in your home. These days you think are people sizing up what you've got here and later are they going to break in. . . . But you are more dubious of people, you have to be if you are alone in the house.

Dora also found that:

In all those ways your work doubles because your mental work doubles too. In my case I needed a good accountant and a good lawyer too. . . . So there is all these things about being widowed that make a difference like that.

Dora did not experience some of the negative things that other widows had experienced:

People told me that married couples ignored them and that I didn't experience that. And the other thing I didn't experience I didn't have people making passes at me which was another thing they warn you about that other people's husband figure you must need a man. Maybe I was too old or maybe I put them off but I never had any problem like that.

Her friends continued to invite her to visit and "to go to supper. People had been very very good to me in that way. . . . I get a lot of invites, lots of things like that. People bring me things and do things for me that they didn't have to do when Ben was alive and working."

Dora did experience other things though. "The thing I experienced was a loneliness for conversation . . . that's what I miss the most. Ben and I discussed everything." Although Dora talks to Shasta she said it was not the same because "Ben had views." Now there was nobody to ask about the things she could not remember. She missed talking to her husband because they had the same views on issues and she felt "I can't say things to other people" because of differing views on things.

Widowhood is also difficult because:

You are more busy from the point of view that you have to do everything. This is what I find. I mean I use this as an example but my husband always took the garbage out. The first thing I had to get used to was I had to take the garbage out, that's an extra job. And a lot of jobs aren't woman's work, they are heavier. They are heavy going sort of thing. And a lot depends upon, my husband didn't fix things in the house, but you think if your husband fixed electrical things and did that you can't do it that means you have to pay somebody to do it. And your workload doubles . . . of course everybody is different, lots of men they say never do anything but my husband we worked together all our lives.

It was also more difficult because:

with my case too I didn't drive which means extra. But then does it I mean if you've got a car to look after it is the same sort of thing it's double the work there too. But this is what I found that all the jobs around the house you've got to do all of them.

Dora did not find widowhood to be all negative though:

I don't have to eat anything I don't like, and if I feel I want a shrimp sandwich I have a shrimp sandwich it doesn't cost much. I don't eat a lot anyway. Of course this is part of my nature when I was young my mother was great for buying me I loved Brazil nuts when they first came in she would buy me four, or the first tomatoes just one. That was the way we lived over things. And this was something my husband didn't understand when I first came to Canada we were together. But he grew to be exactly the same because that's the way I like things. I can have one of something I like.

Other positive aspects included, "You only have to consider yourself what you watch on tv is what I want to watch, . . . you can do whatever you want to do." Dora said when you are married:

you lived for your husband so you did what he wanted. But now it's all different you don't have to do these. When Ben was alive he was the boss and we always considered each other. We did everything together anyway but he was still the boss. But now I have to make my own decisions and do my own things sort of thing. If you want to go on a

holiday you go where you want to go and when you want to go, you go to bed when you want to and get up when you want to, everything is just for you alone unless you marry again or something like that it's different.

Later Dora added, "Really you are your own person really for the first time in your life because even when you were young before you were married your parents were in control." Dora felt that widowhood was like childhood:

I went back to my childhood I figured because of Shasta I made all these new friends all with dogs. And that's like when I was young you see and I was my own boss again, I did what I wanted to do. . . . I have a dog and lots of friends and I only have to please myself what I do and that type of thing.

Dora said, "To me getting the dog was just a whole new lifestyle especially when I was alone. And this is why to me it is so important to have an animal." Dora said in widowhood her attachment for Shasta grew stronger "because it was all I had. And I had more time for her."

Companionship was also important:

because when you had a husband to look after too they were just more work. Another person to be considered. But it is somebody to do things for, to me anyway. A reason for living because I find a lot of widows get very depressed and complain about not having their husband. But when you've got a dog I don't know it fills your life. There is somebody else to consider.

Dora said she was so glad to have the house and have everything the way it was and to have Shasta's company. "I don't know how I would have reacted otherwise." Dora cried as she said, "I used to say that after Ben died my home is my sanctuary and my dog Shasta is my salvation."

Because her husband had been sick for a while they had gotten away from a lot of social activities:

We had grown away from all those things so they weren't things I missed very much.

And because of his health situation even driving, we didn't go for drives and things. All

those things sort of died in the past. So there was nothing like that that I missed.

Although I've heard of other women whose husband's had a heart attack and gone quickly and they were people who went out and did a lot of partying and then they were sort of left high and dry because if you are a party person and you are alone nobody wants you. I never experienced that.

In talking about her current lifestyle Dora said:

I do grow a garden. I've very interested in my vegetable garden. I'm not much for flowers but I put a few things in. . . . And I am a bit of a mathematician there everything has got to be equal and even and all that type of thing.

Dora grows tomatoes, pole beans like the ones that grow in England, peas, and corn. Because she is economical Dora said, "We were economical like I was never very interested in flowers. I'm interested in vegetables but I'm not so much on flowers. I put a bit in because you have to." Also because she is economical Dora said:

Because I lived with people here who baked and everybody made their own cakes and pies and did their own canning. That was a way of life and it's stayed the same today. I still couldn't go to the store and buy a jar of spaghetti sauce. I've got to make it from scratch because that's the way it's done otherwise I don't want it.

Another activity Dora enjoys is watching television:

I do like tv. Tv is a companionship just like the dog is. I sort of almost talk to the tv. . . . I watch a lot of these programs on tv. Well I tell you I am one of those people that if it is a crummy day I would turn the tv on. I mean I don't worry I'm not one of those people that say you mustn't watch tv in the day time. . . . But I like those education and nature programs on tv. And there are a lot of things that you can enjoy and people say to me where did you hear that and I say oh I must have heard it on the tv.

But Dora does not enjoy watching all nature programs about animals. "I get upset about movies if I think a dog is being, or an animal is being ill treated, a horse or a cat or a dog. I don't want to watch those things. Even though I am a dog lover I don't want to watch those

things." Dora said, I didn't want to see things where animals are going to get hurt." Like her father, Dora had always been sensitive to the well-being of animals. She recalled several incidence from her childhood:

When I was eight or nine when I came out of school I used to get the bus. . . . I used to have to wait for her [mother] outside this store. Actually they sold grains but they often had puppies. . . . And this one time my mother always used to tell people that I was crying and crying and as soon as she got there, she was always a bit late I guess she had met somebody, and I would cry don't you leave me here again I've had to look at those puppies all this time in that window. . . . I was just so upset I wanted to buy them all. . . . And also there was a film. . . . I was probably eight or nine too. We went to see this movie with Clark Gable. . . . And he looked in and this little dog jumped up and he walked away and then he came back and he looked at it and I was yelling buy it, please buy it, please buy it, and my mother was saying quiet. Oh he must buy it I said. And of course he did. I'm sure he did. But oh I was in an awful state. And even now there is a pet store down on West Broadway and I sort of peer in hoping I don't see any puppies in there.

Dora said she also likes hearing about the way other people live. Dora enjoys getting together with her next door neighbor who is from Sri Lanka, "She tells me so much about other countries and I find it all so interesting." After telling about this Dora said:

The one thing I have found without a husband I can be friendly like with Betty next door and neighbors. I couldn't do that not when Ben was sick it was different, but when he was normal he would want me home and us together. He never liked this going out. And so Betty will phone and say have you eaten supper come over and eat supper with us. . . . But when you have a husband you are home with him and I think of that when I pop over next door well I wouldn't be able to do this if Ben was alive.

Dora is also busy with other activities. "But then there is housework to do and shopping. Because I don't have a car things take longer." Dora wished she did drive a car. "I learned to

drive and I got my licence but I was scared to drive." Because she doesn't have a car Dora said:

To get places if it is in the evening, sometimes I see things I've forgotten what I saw the other day and I thought I'd love to go to that but then it's seven to nine o'clock at night and I'm too scared of coming home on my own. And I'm too cheap to take a taxi sort of thing.

Dora said she writes a lot of letters. She said she still writes to the friends she had at school. Also "we lived in a mining camp and you always know those people, you never lose them." And she also writes to "people from my old early days in Canada when you were young and your children were young and you made a lot of friends."

Although Dora does quite a bit of travelling like visiting relatives down East, going to Las Vegas for a week, going back to England every five years, or going on a big trip for three weeks to a month every year, Dora said, "I'm a bit of a loner. I like to be on my own." And she liked to go on a holiday on her own. "The best time I ever had was when I went to Austria. . . . I went off on my own on the train and with a suitcase and I loved that, oh yes I just loved it getting off one train and organizing my way around."

Even though Dora is a loner it seems like a fair amount of her time is spent with others. Many of her friends from her early days in Canada "come and stay with me for a few days," as well as people she knows from England. "I've quite a few people come and visit." In fact Dora said, "In the summer Cindy down the road kids me she says is the Henry Hotel open yet. I have quite a few visitors in the summer time."

Going on her holidays is the one thing Dora said she does without Shasta. "I don't really do too much without Shasta unless I go on a holiday and put her in the kennel." In relation to putting her in the kennel Dora said:

Lots of people say to me that they think I am wrong about putting Shasta in the kennel. They say it is much nicer for the dog to be in its own home. I think they are probably right but I feel more confident when Shasta is in the kennel. I know she is safe and



she's got people who would know what to do if there was anything wrong with her, and she can't sort of get out and get on the street. . . . I say too that they know her there and she knows them and I think that is the kindest way. . . . I know nothing can happen to her. She is quite happy there. She goes to a place where they exercise and they love her. They make a lot of fuss. My mind is at ease when I know she is in the kennel. And if you have somebody in the house you also have to worry about things on the house going wrong like the washing machine and all that. So I think at least the house is closed up and I can forget about it if I go away.

But even though she said her mind is at ease Dora added, "But I feel that I have to brainwash myself of the thought that she has to go once or twice a year she has to go into the kennel because otherwise I can't go away anywhere." As well she said, "But I must admit part way through the holiday I sort of miss her and I wish I was with her. It's so nice to have her to come home to. I can't get over there quick enough to get her."

In our interview Dora had a lot to say about Shasta and their life together. Dora said Shasta has always been an active dog and like Kipper she is "demanding" and "is the boss." Because Shasta is active Dora says she still continues to take her for two or three walks a day for about an hour each time. "I always go first thing in the morning when I first get up. And you gear your whole life around this. If I've got an appointment well I've got to get up early so the dog can go first." For their evening walk Dora likes to take Shasta to the park:

I like to go out later when it is light. Late because if you go early all the people are in the park playing. If you go a bit later then it's clear and there is not so many dogs around. This is one of the things that amazes me. I go out in summer or winter say about 8 o'clock . . . or I can go out later 9 or 10 o'clock at night and I'm never afraid when Shasta is with me. I go there and I walk all around the park. It's not that she would defend me I don't know what it is. But if I was to go on my own and walk around the park I would be scared silly. But I go, I never think of it.

Dora likes to go to the park with Shasta but gets annoyed when people are inconsiderate of others:

It annoys me when I go to the park and somebody takes up the whole park throwing the ball and then all the dogs get aggravated. . . . I've often said what a pity there's not a fenced in area in the park that you could go with the dogs and not be worried by these other things.

When the park is full, "It means you've got to keep the dog on the leash all the time. I do for my own protection and that but I like her to have a run too. A dog needs to run."

Dora makes sure Shasta gets her walks rain or shine:

If it is pouring rain you've still got to go. So the only thing to do is to buy a lot of rain gear. I know she's got to go out. And if you are sick, and fortunately I'm not sick very much, but you know you've still got to go. And they've got to do their jobs and this is all part of the walk. You know even if you are half dead you've got to go. And often this is the best thing to do.

Dora considered the walks to be a positive thing:

Health wise it is the best thing that could happen. I mean it keeps you active. They keep you young because you have to walk. I mean I wouldn't go out and walk around the park two or three times a day if I didn't have Shasta. I might, say anything happened to Shasta, I might say at the beginning well I'm still going to walk and this would go on for a little while and then I would think oh I don't want to go out tonight because there is a show on tv or its raining or it's cold or it's hot or something. And the same thing in the morning. I don't consider it, I get out of bed and get dressed and then I take her. I don't shower or do anything until she has had her walk you see.

Walking is also positive in that:

When I am out with Shasta I meet so many people. I'm always meeting people so there are lots of people around. Most of the people I've got to know are young. That is what

has made life so good for me because it has brought young people into my life, whereas instead of mixing with a lot of elderly people all the time.

Dora said these people "are people I can talk to and it takes the loneliness out of life." She feels people are more approachable when they are with a dog. As well, the conversations she has with these people are happy.

Because you've got a dog every time you go out people talk to you. If you are alone they don't know you. But I mean I really never go out without somebody has a little dog conversation. Now if you go to visit friends you get politics and that sort of thing. And I don't want to talk about it because I don't agree with what they say to start with. But when you go out with a dog you get dog talk, what does your dog do and all this. You never get politics. . . . You don't talk about those things to people with dogs. You talk about dogs and that type of conversation. You very seldom talk about politics or religions or races that upset, everybody gets upset about one way or another because you can never solve them. . . . It is always a happy conversation. These other things just get you down, they make you miserable.

Dora also feels safer when she's out with Shasta:

I know in the middle of the night, 10 o'clock and it's jet black and people will say hi and how is your dog tonight or something like that whereas if you were alone nobody, you'd cross the street so you couldn't be near them or something. I feel safer and I'm scared to go on my own.

Later Dora added:

The actual walking is a big job. Lots of people hardly bother with that they just go up the lane or put them out the back. . . . I know that if I go out with somebody for the evening, go out for supper, well then I have to walk her first. These are all things that other people don't really understand that. But to me it is important. The walking is very important because I started her off that way.

Dora thought that "lots of dogs don't need the exercise Shasta gets. Lots of little dogs the yard would be plenty of exercise." Dora has arthritis in her legs and because she can not drive she can not take Shasta up to UBC any more:

She loves to go to the forest as I call it up to UBC oh she loves it up there. We used to go there quite a bit . . . but with my legs now they've got weaker and I can't walk that far. I would like to it grieves me that I can't. You've got to walk up there first and then walk in. But my legs have got better again anyway. But I like the exercise. The exercise is good for me. I mean if I didn't have Shasta I wouldn't walk. I wouldn't have the friends that I've got.

It was a great concern to Dora when her legs were really bad:

I had a great problem this year because I had a very painful knee, arthritis they said. Eventually I went to the physiotherapist and I got treatment and exercises and it is a lot better now. But I still had to walk Shasta and it was very hard because she is so strong and she pulls and every time I put pressure on my knee it was so painful. The pain would shoot up and down my leg but I decided well what had to come first. I had to leave the housework. I had to leave everything else, Shasta had to have her walks. And that is why I got very depressed because I felt if it didn't get better I had to make a decision. I either had to get rid of Shasta because I couldn't walk. . . . I'd have to have her put to sleep I couldn't stand to think that somebody else had her and I think they might be cruel to her or something like that. . . . But one thing the physiotherapist told me although it is painful, walking with the dog is probably the best thing you could do to get your leg better. . . . She said she advises people to get a little dog because you've got to walk them and this is what makes you go out.

Dora thought a dog walker is a good idea but "not with her because well I guess if it was a dog walker that understood her but she's so naughty sometimes." Dora laughed as she said, "In some ways I wouldn't mind having a puppy again so I could bring it up properly." Shasta is a strong dog and:

She pulls all the time. And if she sees something food wise she can nearly pull you over. That's why I feel I couldn't have a walker now. I wouldn't with Shasta but I think if your dog was well behaved then I would. But I can see I think that would be a very wise idea from my point of view. People are much happier with an animal. Life would be dreadful without an animal.

Dora thought the cost would also be a consideration for some people:

I mean if somebody is a pensioner they are too expensive. Unfortunately when people get older they get very sort of scroogy about money too because when you don't earn any more it is very difficult to accept the fact that you've got to spend your savings.

Shasta has though "in the last year and a half really changed completely because she was always running away. If I took her to the park and let her off she would run away." Now, except if she smells food, "she only goes a certain distance away and then she'll look back and she comes racing back again which is a boom." Dora said a friend who has a trained Dalmatian "he didn't think I'd ever keep her. But then I would never part with a dog. I couldn't give a dog to anybody I don't think." One characteristic of the Dalmatian is their difficulty in being trained:

According to the dog books this is the Dalmatian that you can teach them what you like and think that you've got them trained but when it comes to it they are the boss. They are still the boss and they do what they want. And I met a lady when she was a puppy . . . and this lady said they had two. . . . This lady was saying well we had two and my daughter took one and I took the other one to obedience classes and they were just perfect, they were the best students in the class. But when they had the test they didn't do a thing, they both failed because they weren't going to be told what to do.

Another daily activity is feeding Shasta twice a day. Because Shasta had a bladder problem since she was a puppy she has been on a special diet:

She went on this special food and she's not to have meat and all that. Mind you she gets it. . . . There again you can't convince people. Like this Joan she will bring her bits of

meat you see. Well I just give her a little bit and when she's gone I throw it all away. But you see Shasta knows that she brings it. But really I don't give her meat. She's happy with spaghetti and vegetables and all that type of thing.

Dora gives her vegetables and cookies as treats. There are several reasons why Shasta is spoiled. "Part of the reason she got so spoiled and got bad habits is because . . . my husband he used to feed her or give her things, and to keep the peace I used to give in to her sort of thing. And really feeding, this sitting by you when you eat, it is such a nuisance and now I can't break her. I find it really hard to be unkind, what I think is cruel. It isn't I've been cruel giving her things." And Dora was the other reason, "I should never have started this either, giving her a bit of what I eat later on. . . . It's gotten to be a bad habit. These are all things where I was wrong." Because of getting too many treats Dora said she is "too heavy" and "I'm just weak as far as saying no to them."

Because by nature Dalmatians are scavengers Dora has a hard time with Shasta around food. On their walks she pulls very hard if she sees or smells food. Dora finds it annoying when people put food out on the boulevard or throw leftover food out at construction sites:

There is a house down here and it is a very neat tidy house and they do a beautiful job but they put all there old food out on the boulevard you know back bits and ham rind and things like that for the birds and bones. But she picks it up and she's got it before I realize it. . . . But to me it's against the law to put food out on the boulevard but what can you do about it I mean all you can do is avoid those places.

And at home she will steal food. "She gets up at the counter and eats things." Dora laughingly recalled an incident:

Well I don't know if it was funny, but my friend's children think it is funny. Anyway, it must be three years ago now and Martha had asked me out to supper and I said . . . I would make Pavlova because I had some canned passion pulp that I had brought back from Australia. Anyway it is a meringue base and then you put whipped cream all over it and you put fruit on top. Anyway I didn't put it in the fridge because I never liked them so

much when they are ice cold so I put it in on the dining room table and I had shut the door because I knew what she wanted. And something happened, somebody came or something, and for some reason the door got opened and she ate nearly all of it. She licked all the cream, she licked it all out. And you know it was a pie plate like this. Dora said she has to be careful with what she leaves out or what Shasta can get into. "I can't keep potatoes under the sink because she would eat them all." Dora didn't consider this to be negative because it is a characteristic of the breed. "Other people would think it was dreadful. But I can't stop her anyway because it is food. If I do anything about it she would go for me because it is her way of survival I guess."

Another characteristic of the breed is that they are very clean:

I don't have to groom her very much and she doesn't have to be bathed. Dalmatians preen themselves like cats. They lick themselves so it says in the book they don't really need grooming. And she's getting better now, she will let me touch her a bit. And I'm almost thinking I wonder if they put a muzzle on her whether I could have her bathed. I don't bathe her or anything. Well she gets into the water in the park.

Shasta also rolls around in her plastic swimming pool in the back yard.

Because of having a big back yard Dora's weekends are always busy with other people and their dogs:

You see all these people come to my yard because they've got nice lawns and they can let their dog do what they like in my yard. Well now if my husband was alive I would never have done that. But I find on Sunday, Sunday's the worst day, Saturday too when people aren't working. If I'm outside I can never get anything done because one after the other arrives and comes in for a minute and sits and chats. And many things they are all different things that I talk about.

Having these friends gives Dora an ease of mind knowing that she could count on them if she really needed to:

And I know all these people would if I needed anything would do it for me. But I figure there might come a day when I would have to ask them so if I can walk and look after myself I do. . . . But people say why don't you let me take you . . . but the time comes when you might have to do that. There comes a time when you will have to rely upon others and this must be very difficult. I don't know how I'll be but it must be.

Because these people bring their dogs over Shasta has company on weekends as well. "Lots of people drop in Saturday one after the other with their dogs and they play in the yard. She is not so good at playing now but she loved to play." Shasta is good with people:

She is good with children although she doesn't want to be bothered with them. But when she was little oh they would all say can we pet her. And now she has got in the habit that if she is good she wants a cookie and she wants to go near the owners more than the kids. But when she was younger they always used to make such a fuss of her. She doesn't bite children or do anything wrong like that. . . . But I am careful because I don't want children to be scared by her. The kids next door come over but I always say I must be there when Shasta is there because I would hate her to bite them and then they are scared of dogs for the rest of their lives because I have never been afraid of a dog in any way.

Another thing Dora does with Shasta is talk to her. "She understands every word I say because I talk a lot to her." At home Dora said, "I talk to her about things like Shasta I've got to get this cleaned up and I must do the washing and that type of thing." Dora also talks to her when they go out for their walks. "I seem to always be talking to her. When I go for a walk with Shasta if something is on my mind I'm talking it over the pros and the cons."

Shasta will respond to what Dora says by looking at her, wagging her tail, running to the chair to look out the window if Dora said she is going out, or getting excited and wagging her tail if Dora mentions food.



In relation to this Dora said, "I think English people really are silly about dogs. I am I know. I talk to her all the while. Perhaps that's all part of it." Dora did not get this same feeling about animals from Canadians:

There is definitely a different feeling. . . . If English people are coming here I never have any qualms I think oh they love dogs. But Canadians although I have been here all these years I think oh I hope they don't mind the dog. . . . English people are very fond of animals. You know treat them more like humans.

Dora explained that in England, "You don't have plain carpets. You have designed carpets so marks don't show in the same way," and they "never take their shoes off." Here, "most Canadians take their shoes off when they go in the house" and "most people have plain carpets that any mark would show." Dora said, "No it's a different way that English people like their homes. That's what it was here, there wasn't a mark anywhere and I guess this is because my husband was Canadian and had these ideas you see. He didn't like dogs peeing on the lawn or anything to make patches." Dora said another example of the differences between England and Canada is that in England you could take dogs on the train and in stores:

My mother said I would rather have some dogs in stores than I would some people. She was most indignant about saying this. . . . But that is the difference here, you wouldn't dream of taking a dog on the bus or on a train unless it was crated.

As well Dora felt dogs were more accepted in England:

I never knew anybody in England where you didn't knock on the door and take your dog in but here I wouldn't dream of taking my dog to other people's homes. I don't know there is a completely different feeling to me.

Dora said she has "never been much of a one to play" with dogs. In addition to the walk and talking to her Dora likes to "fondle, love them, and cuddle them."

Dora used to have to do a lot of washing because of Shasta. Right from a puppy she used to have a bladder problem that when she was sleeping she would relieve herself and soak everything. Since being diagnosed she has been on pills that control this problem. "But

because of the way she is getting up on things I do quite a bit of washing and that for her." But not as much as when she had her bladder problem. Dora said she vacuums "twice a week" but she would do that even if she did not have Shasta. "She is quite good hair wise. But most people with a dog have to vacuum every day because of the hair and that type of thing makes more work. . . . She is pretty clean, but lots of dogs get dirty where they lay and when they brush against the wall it all makes extra house work."

In talking about her lifestyle Dora said:

But as you can see it fills your day. . . . Basically I don't do very much without Shasta. The reason being the same old story. Shasta does take up a lot of my time. Perhaps lots of people wouldn't make a dog so much work as I do.

Dora did feel that, "I think a dog makes more work because you can't say to a dog like a child don't jump on this or don't do that, or stay out of there. They go where they want to."

After talking about their lifestyle together Dora said, "It just seems to be just so much part of my life. I would like to have more I know." At one point Dora had said she wanted two, "I really felt that if I had two they would keep each other company and exercise themselves" but some friends had said, "they won't hear of it. They say Shasta is too much for you." So Dora never did get another dog to keep Shasta company.

In addition to Shasta though the neighbor's cat comes over quite often. "Tia comes in here all the time but I really wish she wouldn't. She gets all around me and hair gets in my mouth." Dora said, "I put up with cats" but "to be truthful I am strictly dogs. I can be nice to cats or things like that but I wouldn't really want them. It is dogs. Yes and I do love puppies oh and they smell so nice." Dora preferred dogs because "I think they are better than cats that roam all over the neighborhood and dig in your garden and things like that." As well, Dora said, "I think maybe it is because they don't answer you back or something or other. But they are very dedicated anyway." Dora also thought that it is because of a certain feeling she has with dogs and she:

feels comfortable. I would probably be like a bit afraid of other animals. I don't quite trust cats. Well cats are a different type of animal aren't they. They are very independent and they are loners. But no it's hard to express it. I would much rather be with a dog than with children and that type of thing.

Dora has also "looked after quite a few dogs here since my husband died." One dog in particular she used to take care of quite a bit was Zac. She used to take care of him when his owner was away and they would often get together and let the dogs play. When it was time to have Zac put to sleep because it was so hard on Jessy, Dora brought Zac over to her place and had him put to sleep for Jessy when he went out of town. Thinking about this Dora said:

I know it is hard to think about when I think if anything happened to Shasta. . . . My idea was that I feel that if I had to part with Shasta I'd like to hold her but I don't think I could. . . . But I know it would, gee it would be an empty house again.

In addition to the ones she had already mentioned throughout our interviews, Dora identified a number of positive aspects associated with Shasta and with dogs in general. She felt that dogs "made me considerate of other people, unselfish because you have to consider them." She said, "To me it's very important in life I think to have an animal around you because it gives you something to live for. Even to get the meals. There is company always."

Shasta was company in many respects. She was something to do something with and for, "It's just like having another body in the house," "when you go to do something they are always there," and by "having another body around not being lonely." Dora added:

There is always somebody there pleased to see you or waiting for you when you come home and humans aren't necessarily like that because if you are late home for a human they've been worried about you so as soon as you come in they react to being mad whereas the dog is just so pleased to see you.

Dora liked the affection and the "cuddling and stroking." She said, "It's something that makes me feel good, warm, and comfortable. . . . Having a dog makes you feel better."

In addition to feeling safer when going for walks Dora also feels safer at home:

They do guard and they make a noise if somebody comes near the house. They warn you. I probably feel safer in the house because I know when I take her to the kennel . . . I think oh I'm going to be alone in the house tonight.

Dora also identified some negative aspects associated with Shasta or dogs in general. Dora said her "only real problem really is to go on a holiday." She elaborated by saying:

And I've adjusted to that now but it was hard at first when I used to take her to the kennel. Once she is there I am okay. And I think if I drove and had a car and could take her I would be okay but I'm dreading it for days ahead of time.

Initially Dora said, "I would do more travelling." But then added, "Yeah I say that whether I would or not because there is finances involved too." As well she said, "But Shasta has been a big excuse because I have been able to say to people I can't come I've got the dog." She is a good excuse because, "I am a sucker sort of thing. I couldn't say no."

As well, it restricts the length of time Dora is away from home. "I couldn't leave her shut up in the house for hours on end. That would really worry me." Dora added:

And really when I worked I never thought of leaving the dog all day but now I wouldn't dream of leaving Shasta. I feel mean every time I go out. But this is because if you go every day they know you are going out every day whereas if I go out it's quite a rarity and I'm sure there is no reason why I can't leave her for eight hours.

Dora did say that, "I leave her more now than I did."

Another negative aspect is housing. Because she has always had a house Dora said this wasn't a problem. But now that she is getting older she said:

I couldn't move into an apartment because of the dog. . . . I wouldn't move now because of the circumstances because I have so many friends, and I need a place for the dog. I used to say I would go into an apartment. Ben used to feel we would have to when we got to a certain age.

Dora wasn't sure though because it has always been important to her and her husband to "own your own home" and because Dora has lived in her house for a long time she said she has a lot of memories and it means a lot to her.

Another concern is if something happened to her. Dora does, however, have people who would help her. "Joey this side he could come to do things for her in an emergency and I've got quite a few friends." As well, Dora said, "Most people know now that if anything were to happen to take Shasta over to the kennel." However, Dora does "worry that you're going to get old and leave them alone."

When Shasta gets sick is also a bit of a worry:

I find a problem is if they get sick they can't tell you like a human what is wrong with them. And I think you need a good understanding vet which I have. But it's rather worrying when an animal gets sick because they can't tell you anything.

As well it is a worry that you are "doing the right thing for them."

When Shasta is healthy though Dora said she does not worry about her getting sick even though she has a bladder problem:

I said I can only look at it this way. I can appreciate that I've had her six years and if anything was wrong with her I could accept that I had to part with her whereas perhaps other people couldn't do this. But I would rather part with them than see her suffer.

Related to this negative aspect is the fact that, "they don't live long though. You do wish but then it's something you accept."

Another negative aspect associated with Shasta is related to her strength. Because "she is powerful and darts off suddenly" this has created problems in a number of situations. One time it was a major problem was when it led to Dora getting hurt:

... my accident with Shasta it was two years ago last February. I have a friend I walk with in the morning and I had her dog here. She had gone down to Las Vegas and they had come back that night, it was a Friday, and so I took the two, she was a Shasta too, Shasta's out and that Shasta is a Doberman. I wasn't going to take her home and then I

thought oh she would like to go and see her mother so I walked over to Ruth's. And I put my Shasta, I had put her leash over the fence and then I took the other Shasta up to see her mother. Well as soon as Shasta heard . . . she started to do all this barking. So I went back down these wooden stairs and tried to stop her barking but she wanted to see Ruth so I slid the leash off and for some reason I slid it over my wrist. And she pulled, and you know she is strong. And I twisted around and I landed on my knees at the bottom of the stairs boom like this and I was like this and she was pulling and my head went down on the stairs. I've got a bad knee still. And I smashed right across there [her face]. The bone was stuck out. This the nerve is cut here and that's why I have funny feelings here. But I had 16 stitches. And Ruth says she still has nightmares. She said I looked up and there was blood gushing out of my nose and the bone sticking up. But that was the bad experience. Fortunately I apparently got the best plastic surgeon in Vancouver and he did a wonderful job on my face.

Dora said as a result of this accident she is more cautious with her. "But she is a very powerful dog. People don't realize how strong she is."

Her strength is also a problem on their walks when she sees or smells food she will nearly pull Dora over. And it is also a problem when they are around little dogs.

She doesn't like little dogs. She used to be very good but she hates little dogs. . . . She used to be fine but she fights, she goes for them now. . . . That's why I don't like anybody else taking her out because I'm afraid she will get into a fight with them.

Dora recalled an incident about a year ago:

She is unpredictable. You don't know what dogs she is sniffing and then rurr she goes. And I think it isn't really fighting it's probably letting them know who is boss. But people are so possessive of their animals they think my dog attacks them. And I had an episode where she was off the leash in the park over here and a lady came along she was across the road from me and her dog was on one of those extended leads. And I called over to her which way are you doing because I thought if she was going this way I would

go that way to keep Shasta away from the dog. I was thinking but as I get older I don't put things into practice properly. And she didn't answer me, perhaps she was deaf. Instead of that the dog raced across the road and Shasta was in the field in the park and of course when the dog raced over the road, it was just a little thing, she raced towards it and then she attacked it basically. Well of course this poor woman was in a terrible state. Well I was upset. And anyway she reported me to the pound and he came and I told him. I told him I didn't think she was going to I mean because I said if there's anything wrong with the dog I gave her my name and address and I said you know I'll pay for anything but there wasn't any sign of blood or anything like that. But I was really upset because the dog was just a dear friendly little dog and it was Shasta that was nasty. But you know how friendly she is with you. She is very friendly. So this other side of her is so strange. Anyway as soon as the guy came I said oh yes my dog definitely did it. And I was sorry. So he just said he had to give me a warning that if it happened again that she would have to wear a muzzle and also of course she was off the leash you see. So that is why I'm more careful now.

Dora also finds it negative when people come over and Shasta will not leave them alone:

You know when people come to visit and she jumps up at them and wants to lick them. . . . It annoys me. . . . She does stop but she's very affectionate towards people and lots of people I feel don't like it. They don't like touching dogs because they've got to wash their hands before they touch their food and all this style of thing.

Dora felt other people might not be as understanding and consider the Dalmatian's scavenging characteristic to be negative. Dora said, "She's got a mean streak underneath" because "she would never let me take food away she would attack me." If "she picks up a bone in the park I've just got to get her home she's going to eat it one way or another."

Another bad habit Dora finds annoying is barking:

I get cross with Shasta about barking. This is something that aggravates me. But when she was younger she didn't bark a lot. But we have a dog over the back and he tells

Shasta everything that is going on so now she barks and tells him things. . . . I really wish she didn't bark but if you have a protection dog it needs to bark.

She will also bark when she wants something. "I never taught her to bark to get something but when Ken came to live with me that's the first thing he did and I'm not very good at telling people not to do things." Dora also finds it annoying when she wants to leave her outside a store. "I've got to tie her up outside then she does all this barking which is a darn nuisance."

Dora did not consider the cost of keeping a dog to be negative:

Well no because of my financial situation they aren't any worry to me but they would be yes if I was on limited money they would be because vet bills are quite high. And this is it about putting your dog in a kennel that's not cheap either . . . and then I've got to get over there and back. Yes it is quite an expense. The dog food I have to buy is expensive . . . it's twice the price of the other one. I say it's not something that worries me because of the situation and I don't have other expenses. Now if you had a husband and children it would be a big expense. In fact I say this about Shasta she is treated better than a lot of children. I spend more money on her than lots of people spend on their children.

Another negative aspect is damage. One thing is in relation to outside:

Some people have a lot of trouble in their gardens, wetting on the lawn or digging holes. I don't have any of that trouble. The only thing she does is she wants to help me and that's why I had to have the fence put up around the vegetable garden because she pulled all the corn out and ate all the beans. The first year, you know how you see a bird with a worm pulling it, well she was like that with the corn. And then when I cut it back in the fall, but she chewed it all because of the sugar taste to it. But she wants to help me is what it is. I let her come in the garden in the spring.

As well she used to pick the blooms off flowers that were in bedding boxes so Dora planted less flowers and put most of them in hanging baskets in the tree. "I just realized I couldn't have things like that. But although it saved a bit of work with all the watering in the long run."



Shasta also caused some damage inside as well. Dora said if she can get a hold of things like egg cartons or kleenex she will tear them up. Dora laughed as she recalled an incident:

The first experience I had with this business of pulling out the stuffing was with a box of kleenex when she was a puppy. There was a box downstairs in the bedroom. Shasta went down there and I realized she was quiet. It was so funny I wish I could have had a camera because she was just pulling them out one by one and they were all over and she upset the whole box and as one came out another would come up and they were all around her. And I'm kind of economical about things like that. I hate wasting things. And then she could get under the bed so she raced and got under the bed. I just regret never having a picture of them because it was the funniest thing really. I was mad at her but it was so funny so see these things.

Dora thought this sort of thing was funny rather than negative:

I don't say I'm right. I mean I think I am very wrong. I think when you read the books that dogs should be disciplined and they shouldn't run the house but this dog runs the house. But then I'm that way with children too. I'm not a strict mother type. I could never be like that. I don't like upsets. I don't like arguments. I don't like all this dissention and it is the same with a dog. . . . They know that they can take advantage of me because she is definitely the boss when she makes up her mind about something and it is only if I get really mad and yell that she knows.

Shasta will also damage her toys by chewing them. One time Dora bought her a toy that was supposed to be indestructible and "within two hours it was all chewed up. And this was something they said oh she'll never chew this but she just worked and worked and worked on it until she had destroyed it." Dora buys Shasta soft plush toys and she chews on those so she can pull the stuffing out of them. "She didn't destroy them but she had to chew at something, chew the tag off or chew the nose off." As well Dora said, "She takes things that are mine like she takes knives and chews the handle and things." And she still takes things off the counter:

Yes that is a negative but then that is bad training. That's my fault because I haven't trained her properly. This is the way I look at it. And it is negative in the fact that they are an animal and you can't neglect them it's like a human. Even a child can speak up and say they want something but with a dog you feel responsible and perhaps more so than a child in a way.

Another way she causes damage is by "rubbing herself all along the chesterfield and he had to do so much work on it. That's why I've got this thing on it because she rubs along there and scratches her back."

Shasta also scratched the window seal and damaged it. "A lot of it [damage] was done when she was a puppy," and "it's all part of having a dog." Dora added:

But you know she chewed a lot when she was younger. But she is good now. I mean some dogs do damage if you leave them whereas she doesn't she just sits and looks for you to come home. But yes it is a problem but there was a lot of things it's like a child you have to think ahead.

In talking about all of these negative factors Dora said, "We owe them because we are responsible for them." She added:

I think people that have dogs have them because they want them and don't make hard work of it. I mean they adjust to all these problems that you have. It's only people that don't like dogs and don't want a pet that don't adjust to things.

Dora also said, "I wouldn't advise people to get one that didn't understand them or love them because of being cruel to them." And:

I would have said to everybody get a dog but now I'm much more weary because I think not everybody likes dogs or appreciates them. They get annoyed with them instead of understanding that they are only dogs. They are not human beings. . . . And it might not always be a good time to get one especially if you are going to be out a lot and you are busy.

Dora said she is very attached to Shasta. Dora said she expressed her affection by cuddling and stroking, feeding her, and giving her cookies. Dora's love for Shasta and for dogs in general is so strong she said:

I like dogs more than children sort of thing. I'm not a child lover either but I am definitely a dog lover. . . . I've never longed to have children or have a lot of children around me but dogs I could have a whole lot of dogs and be quite happy.

Because Shasta means so much to her Dora said, "I sort of dread with Shasta the day she has to be put to sleep. I know the day is to come but I must admit that I dread it coming." But if Shasta got sick Dora said she would put her to sleep:

I've had six wonderful years that if there was anything that it was going to make her unhappy then I would have to put her to sleep. I wouldn't muck around anything that caused her pain or unhappiness because you can't explain to a dog to stay still. . . . I've convinced myself now that if anything happened to her that couldn't be helped in any way then I, you may think this is cruel to think of having the dog put to sleep but . . . it's the last kind deed you can do for them to put them out of any misery that they are in.

Dora felt losing a pet is very traumatic and that "there is maybe not the importance that there could be placed on "how difficult it is and how much it can affect people." Dora added, "It's a very traumatic time. . . . It must be as big a wrench as losing your husband because you make them so much part of your life. Like I say you center your life around them."

Should something happen to Shasta Dora thought she would experience loneliness:

I must admit that when I think about it I think, I'm great for thinking ahead of what's going to happen anyway, but I do wonder how, you know the day is coming and I mean I hope Shasta will live to be 13 or 14 but I sort of prepare myself for the fact that well I've had six years so if anything did happen that it would be a very lonely life.

Dora thought:

It must be hard for any widow if they've had a dog and then they've lost it because you're bound to get older and then you think oh I can't start afresh again now. Or if you are in an apartment it's hard to train a dog so it behaves and doesn't bark.

Dora reflected on a lot of factors as she was thinking whether or not she would get another companion animal if something happened to Shasta:

I know different friends of mine whose dogs are sick 10 years old and especially the one who's a lab. And I know Cindy wants to breed Bopper so maybe she'd have one of Bopper's puppies. I don't think I would do that. No I think I would just start afresh. I think you become attached to any dog in time. . . . Especially if you had them as a puppy. They do grow on you. Even if you had a male and a female and you bred them so you would have the puppies, they have their own personalities. Another Dalmatian won't be Shasta.

Dora felt that while "Shasta is my whole life" so were Sara and Diana.

So I'm sure when she is gone if I had another one in time they get used to you. You are just as attached to them. I'm not saying you don't look back and say oh Diana used to do this or something like that but I think you can adjust to it if you let yourself. So many people fight this all the time.

At the beginning of reflecting on whether she would get another dog Dora said:

Well I say no now because there again about going back to the lifestyle of when I didn't have to worry about a dog. I think I would try to get along without one because of the things that worries me would be supposing you get old and decrepit and couldn't look after the dog. I know my parents when they got old gave up having an animal because of that. They didn't want to think of the animal being left alone. So I say no I wouldn't but the only thing somebody may come along and say would you take our dog. . . . You have to think of them too I think. You have to think as you get older whether you will be able to give them the walks and what they deserve. So it will be soul searching but I know it is hard to think about when I think of anything happening to Shasta.

Upon further reflection Dora said:

Depending upon my leg I probably would at this stage if it was as early as this perhaps look for a dog that needed a home more that style of thing not start with a puppy again. But depending how old I was the closer you were to 80 the less likely I would want to start because I wouldn't want to leave a puppy again. Mind you I've more experience with Shasta then I would start out differently.

But Dora thought:

I would get an older dog if I could give it a home. As a matter of fact in a way older dogs are easier because puppies are a lot of work aren't they and they need a lot of training. That's what I find. With an older dog you know their personality and habits.

If she did get another dog Dora thought:

I think I would take a mutt another time, a mixed breed. I don't think I would go all out to get another Dalmatian necessarily. I would rather go to the pound and see a dog that appealed to me to give it a home. I think that's how I would feel. Mind you I can see I'd have to think of a few things like long hairs and big paws and all that but I expect at the time I would just want it if it appealed to me.

As far as getting a purebred or not Dora added:

I didn't really care but I always did have a mongrel more or less. And I've always sort of felt a mongrel was less worry because they are not so susceptible to things to a breed. But then on the other hand I do admire the breeds. . . with a mongrel you're not exactly sure what it will be like.

The size would not really make a difference although Dora needed to think about this factor as well:

I can see that well little dogs wouldn't need all the exercise. And really when you get older you wouldn't be so keen on a big dog. Oh I don't know I say that. Because I had always preferred bigger dogs then I still would. . . . But there again those are all things I find lots of things like this in life that people fight against and refuse to accept and if

they did accept them they would be a lot happier. They would still have a dog. But there is lots of things like that that you've got to accept. . . . So I know because I know lots of small dogs I could be just as happy with a small dog.

Upon additional reflection Dora's concern went back to her age:

You realize as you get older that you don't know what's going to happen to you. You know you see things happen to people around you. . . . In my thinking I mean from the point of view of you thinking if the dog would live as long as you. I wouldn't want to get a puppy because I'm 70 and by the time I'm 80 the dog would be 10 years old but would I be able to look after a dog. You do realize your days are numbered more. More for the point of view of the dog. It would hurt me to think a dog was left. But perhaps I'm wrong. Perhaps I make too much of animals and I think I am hurting them. . . . It's just something in my mind.

In her final reflection nearing the end of our second interview Dora said:

I've thought more from my age point of view if the dog would outlive me that style of thing. But talking to you I wonder whether I am wrong about that. If I had another dog and I trained it a little bit different from Shasta so it could go to somebody else. I've thought of that while I've been talking to you and the same I say things like I wouldn't get another dog because then I could travel and do things I wanted to do but then I think as I get older do I really want to travel. I don't want to travel so much now because I've done the things I wanted to do. There all these things make a difference. It would depend on when it happened. If it happened soon I think I would get another one but I don't think I would get a puppy. I think I would get an older dog.

### Summary

Dora is a woman in her early seventies who has been widowed for five years after 45 years of marriage. She is a tender-hearted, independent, easy going person.

Dora comes from a small family with only one brother who seemed more like a father to her. Because of the war and the ensuing tough times at the young age of seven Dora was

responsible for preparing suppers for her family and doing other household tasks. Even with this responsibility Dora had a happy childhood with her family, friends, and a very protective family dog who still means a great deal to her today.

After completing school at 16 Dora got clerical work with the air ministry. During these teenage years Dora had another family dog which she left behind when she and her husband and little baby immigrated to Canada from England.

The next 20 years were spent working, raising their son, and saving for their future. During this time they had a couple of dogs which Dora fondly remembers and has cherished memories of. Like her parents, Dora said she has always had a love of dogs and hates to see them being mistreated.

Until her current companion animal Dora did not have another dog from the ages of about 50 to 70. During this time she and her husband were working, they had an active social life, she did a fair amount of travelling, she went to England several times to visit her parents and eventually to settle their estate, and they became house proud where nothing was out of place.

One year before her husband passed away due to ill health from strokes Dora got her current companion animal. The intention was to have a dog that Dora's husband could pet so as to make him feel better. It turned out Shasta was too energetic for him but she helped to ease Dora's strain of constantly caring for a sick husband.

Shasta was a comfort during the transition to widowhood because Dora could cuddle and stroke her, talk to her, go for walks together, and she met other dog people who were younger. She was also a comfort and a great companion during that time which helped to ease Dora's loneliness and get over her husband loss. Although she was glad she had had Shasta during the transition she thought that if widows did not have a dog it would be better to wait for a while before getting a dog. However, she thought this was an individual thing.

Dora felt widowhood required a dramatic adjustment. Because she was alone for the first time in her life she had to learn how to stand on her own two feet and make her own

decisions. Dora found the adjustment difficult because she missed having someone to talk to, your mental and physical workload doubles, and she did not have a car so getting around was more difficult.

Widowhood was also positive in that she could eat what and when she wanted, go to bed and get up when she wanted, she could watch what she wanted to on television, buy what she wanted, go on a holiday when and where she wanted to go, and she could stay out without feeling guilty about leaving a husband at home.

Dora's lifestyle changed in that she did a lot more things with Shasta and spent more time with her. Because of Shasta she met a lot of dog people who still come over to visit and let the dogs play together.

Dora is very attached to Shasta and dreads being without her. Dora spoke of many positive aspects associated with Shasta, dogs in general, and previous companion animals. Dora felt that they: were a source of companionship; because they were protective Dora felt safer at home and going for walks; they were something to cuddle, stroke, and love; something to take for a walk and get exercise; amusing; make you more considerate of other people and things and be less selfish; make your life happier; give you a lot of pleasure; make raising children easier; help make the transition to widowhood easier; are comforting; are something to talk to; are something to come home to; are somebody to greet you; ease the strain in difficult times; don't answer you back; are always faithful; give you a lot of pleasure; are always pleased to see you; never berate you for anything; give you a good, warm, happy, comfortable feeling inside; are something to love; make a home feel like a home; provide an excuse for not going places or doing things you do not want to do; keep you active; keep you young; take the loneliness out of life; make people more approachable; are a source of protection; are a catalyst for happy dog conversations; Shasta does not have to be groomed very much; Shasta is good with people; they make you feel better; and they give you a reason for living.



Dora also identified some negative aspects as well: it was a bit of a worry working and leaving a dog home alone all day, dogs restrict you from doing a lot of travelling, the cost would be negative if you had financial difficulties, when you go out a dog restricts the amount of time you stay away, others may view breed characteristics such as disobedience and scavenging to be negative, they are a worry when they get sick to know what is wrong and if you are doing the right thing for them, dogs have a short lifespan, Shasta is so strong sometimes she is hard to control, fighting with little dogs, sometimes being over affectionate with people, barking when she wants something or is left outside a store, and doing damage. Dora considered a lot of these negative aspects her fault because of improper training. She also thought that if you have and love a companion animal you adjust to these things.

There are aspects or services which could make owning a dog easier or more enjoyable such as: having a place to let your dog run free such as a fenced yard in the park; having less restrictions so dogs would be allowed into more public places; people not letting their dogs bother yours; people not putting food or bones out in public places; affordable medical insurance for your companion animal; having a good vet close by; having a pet taxi; having special dog food available; dog walkers; house sitters; and having a reliable, trustworthy, affordable kennel.

Although Dora loves Shasta very much and is strongly attached to her she thought that if something happened to her because of her age she might not get another dog, or get an older dog because it would grieve her to leave a dog behind if something happened to her.

While Shasta gives her a reason for living and is a major part of her life, Dora thought that each person would be different and they would have to decide if they wanted a companion animal and would love it, if they were too busy to have one, and if they could afford to keep one.

### Themes

When reflecting on our conversation about the meaning of companion animals in Dora's life I identified 28 major areas or themes:

- 1) Independence. Dora has always been an independent person. As a young child she was given a lot of responsibility in having to prepare meals for the family and other household tasks. Throughout her adult life Dora said she liked doing things for herself and she dreads the day when she will be unable to do so.
- 2) Compassion and caring. Dora is compassionate and caring for people and companion animals. This was evident in a number of ways. In relation to people Dora looked after her sick husband for several years at home, she flew back and forth to England to look after her parents, she had a friend's dog put to sleep when it would have been too painful for him to do, and she voluntarily participated in this study providing as much information as she could with no concern for the amount of time it would require. In relation to animals, compassion and caring was evident in Dora's dislike of cruelty to animals whether it be on television, in circuses, or in pet shops. It was also evident in the way she took care of Shasta making sure she had enough exercise even in ill health and inclement weather, buying her special food, talking to her as if she was another person, not wanting to leave her alone for too long, making sure her needs were taken care of before Dora went out, and if anything happened to Shasta her decision to put her to sleep so she would not suffer.
- 3) Optimistic and positive attitude. This was evident in Dora's preference that people get along and not argue or fight. As well, during the transition to widowhood and in the years following Dora said she had to start afresh and set up a new life and not look back and live in the past.
- 4) Previous love of dogs. Dora said she had always loved dogs, that it was a feeling she had inside of her.
- 5) Family of origin. Dora considered herself to be an only child but she was not lonely because she had a lot of friends in childhood and growing up. Even though she had a lot of responsibility at a young age Dora said she had an extremely happy childhood.
- 6) Parents love of companion animals. Dora said both of her parents loved all types of companion animals but they especially loved dogs.

- 7) **Companion animals and childhood.** Dora had quite a few companion animals in her childhood. In addition to the family dog Dora used to play with and walk other dogs and their family used to care for dogs when people went away.
- 8) **Companion animals during marriage.** When they were first married they did not have a dog of their own but Dora was still able to play with her mother's dog. Shortly after Dora moved to Canada with her husband and young son they got their first dog. During those early years of marriage Dora did not work. They lived on a farm and the dog went everywhere with them. When they had their second dog they lived in the city, the dog did not go out with them as much, and Dora and her husband were busy working and saving for their future. As a result, Dora did not have as much time to spend with this dog.
- 9) **Companion animals and children.** Dora felt every child should have a companion animal because they provide companionship to the child and they teach them how to be more considerate of other people and things.
- 10) **Companion animals during middle years.** Between the ages of 50 to 70 Dora was without a companion animal. During these years they did not have a dog because Dora and her husband were working, they had an active social life, Dora did a fair amount of travelling, she went to England to take care of her parents, and they got house proud.
- 11) **Grieving and companion animals.** During her childhood when the family dog died Dora was heart broken because she had no other companion animal and she felt more alone because she did not have any brothers or sisters to play with either. Dora was also heart broken when her first dog had to be put to sleep. Dora still feels the effects of this loss as she has never eaten crumpets since that day. She was able to get over the loss of this dog easier because within a short time they got another dog. Dora said it was terrible when this dog died because they did not get another one. Dora found that the house was lonely and there was nobody there to greet you. Dora felt losing a dog is a very traumatic time. As a widow she feels losing your companion animal must be as traumatic as losing your husband because you make them such a part of your life. Dora said your life is centered around them.

12) Reason for getting her current companion animal. Dora got her current companion animal because she thought it might help her husband because he had responded to a friend's dog. Dora also got Shasta because of her love of dogs and Dalmatians in particular. Had her friends not made the arrangements Dora did not think she would have gotten a dog on her own.

13) Influence of previous companion animals. Previous companion animals had influenced Dora in a number of ways. After seeing a Dalmatian for the first time Dora always wanted one, and the personality of this dog as well. Dora named her first dog after her mother's dog and Shasta after the Shasta on the farm. As well, Dora had really liked a Chow Chow as a child and as an adult she said that breed would be her second choice because of this dog.

14) Type of companion animal. Dora had always been a dog lover. Although she would never hurt an animal she did not want another type of companion animal. She would put up with cats but they are very independent and she doesn't trust them, they roam around neighborhoods, and they dig in gardens. She did not have much to do with birds her mother had had when she was a child. In relation to dogs Dora said it wouldn't make a difference if it was a male or a female, a purebred or a mongrel breed, a small dog or a large dog. Although she had preferred a large dog she thought she could accept a small dog if it meant she would not have a dog at all.

15) Companion animals and the transition to widowhood. Having a companion animal eased the transition to widowhood because Shasta was a source of comfort, companionship, she was something to cuddle and fondle, something to take care of, somebody to do something for, and somebody else in the house. She eased the loneliness because of her presence and because when they went for their walks Dora met other dog people to talk to.

16) Acquiring a companion animal during the transition to widowhood. If Dora had not had a companion animal she did not think this would have been a good time to get one. Initially the widow has a lot to do and is not lonely for a while. Although having Shasta eased the transition and was a big excuse for not going places or doing things she did not want to do

she thought she might have travelled then. Dora did feel that this would depend on the person. Also, Dora did not think it was a good idea for someone to get a companion animal for a recently widowed person because after a time the widow may not want it, they might not have the time or the money for it, and then the companion animal would suffer.

17) Increasing importance and attachment to companion animal during widowhood. Dora said during the transition to widowhood her attachment to Shasta grew stronger and she almost replaced the affection she gave to her husband because she was all Dora had and she had more time with her. Her importance grew because she took her husband's place. Dora summed it up when she said her home became her sanctuary and Shasta her salvation.

18) Widowhood. Widowhood is a time when your lifestyle changes completely and you have to start afresh. Dora said you become more independent, stand on your own two feet, and make your own decisions. Because now you center your life around your companion animal because there is nobody else, their importance and your attachment to your companion animals grows stronger.

19) Companion animals and widows. Dora felt this is an individual thing and people should consider if they love them or not, have time to spend with them, and their financial situation.

20) Current lifestyle. Dora leads quite an active lifestyle. Dora takes care of her own house, plants a garden, makes most of her own food, watches television, visits with neighbors and friends, has a lot of friends visit and stay over, writes a lot of letters, goes on yearly vacations, goes for two to three hourly walks a day with Shasta, takes care of Shasta, and talks to her.

21) Importance of current companion animal. Dora dreads the day anything happens to Shasta and said life would be dreadful without a companion animal.

22) Strong attachment to previous and current companion animals. Dora is still very fond of her previous companion animals. She is more fond of Kipper, her first companion animal, than of humans she remembered from her childhood. Dora cried when talking about how much Kipper and her other companion animals meant to her. Dora said she loved them all

and she was attached to them in different ways. Dora said she expressed her attachment to Shasta by cuddling and stroking her, feeding her, giving her cookies, and taking her for walks.

23) Positive aspects associated with companion animals. Dora spoke of many positive aspects associated with companion animals. Dora said they: were a source of companionship; because they were protective Dora felt safer at home and going for walks; are something to cuddle, stroke, and love; are something to take for a walk and get exercise; are amusing; make you more considerate of other people and things and be less selfish; make your life happier; give you a lot of pleasure; make raising children easier; help make the transition to widowhood easier; are comforting; are something to talk to; are something to come home to; are somebody to greet you; ease the strain in difficult times; don't answer you back; are always faithful; give you a lot of pleasure; are always pleased to see you; never berate you for anything; give you a good, warm, happy, comfortable feeling inside; are something to love; make a home feel like a home; provide an excuse for not going places or doing things you do not want to do; keep you active; keep you young; take the loneliness out of life; make people more approachable; are a source of protection; are a catalyst for happy dog conversations; Shasta does not have to be groomed very much; Shasta is good with people; make you feel better; and they give you a reason for living.

24) Negative aspects associated with companion animals. Dora also identified some negative aspects associated with companion animals. Cost had never been an issue because in the past they did not go to the vet or get shots. In recent years it has not been a problem because financially Dora has no worries. As well, in the past housing had not been a problem because they had always owned their own home. Dora did think that as a widow it could be a problem if she wanted to move into an apartment. In the past it was a bit of a worry working and leaving the dog home alone all day. Dogs could be potentially restricting when married had they wanted to travel or go out a lot. A dog is restricting in the middle years if you want to do more travelling because you could afford to do so. As a widow dogs restrict you from

travelling and the length of time Dora is away when she goes out. Dora said others may view characteristics of the breed as being negative such as their disobedience and their being scavengers. Dora said she vacuums as much as she would even if she did not have a dog so this was not a problem. Dora did say it is a bit of a worry when Shasta gets sick because she can not tell her anything and Dora worries if she is doing the right thing for her. A dog's short life span is negative but it is something you accept. Shasta's strength is negative because at times she is hard to control. Other negative aspects are when Shasta fights with little dogs, sometimes when she is overly affectionate with people that come over, when she barks when she wants something, and when she barks when left outside a store. Doing damage, such as pulling things out of the garden, shredding things, chewing things, taking things that are not hers, rubbing against the couch, and scratching the window seal are negative. Dora felt that a lot of these bad habits were her fault because of not properly training her. As well, she felt it is all part of having a dog, we owe them because we are responsible for them, and if you want them and love them you adjust to all these things.

25) Societal aspects of services. There are aspects or services which Dora uses that make owning a dog easier. These included: having a good vet who is close by; being able to give the care they have now because of vets and medicine; having a reliable, trustworthy, affordable kennel; special dog food; a dog taxi service; and dog walkers. There are other aspects or services which could make owning a dog easier or more enjoyable. These include: more considerate people who don't let their dogs bother yours; people not putting food and bones out in public places; a place where dogs can run free such as a fenced area in parks; less restrictions so dogs would be allowed in more places; affordable pet insurance; and affordable, trustworthy house sitters.

26) Age. As she gets older Dora is concerned if she can remain independent and properly take care of a companion animal by giving them the walks and what they deserve. Dora thought the closer she got to 80 the less likely she would want to get a puppy. As you get older you do not know what is going to happen to you and you realize your days are

numbered more. For these reasons Dora thought she might get an older dog instead of a puppy. One of Dora's fears is dying and leaving a dog behind. She thought with different training perhaps the dog could go to somebody else.

27) Socio-economic status. Dora considered herself to be economical as a result of growing up with shortages during the war, being English, and the way she was brought up. Because Dora and her husband worked hard and saved for the future, as a widow Dora does not have any financial worries.

28) Companion animals and ethnicity. Dora felt the English have a greater fondness for dogs and treat them more like humans than animals. Dogs are more accepted in public places in England and in the homes of English people.

### Common Themes

Reflecting on the themes derived from each participant there are a number of themes common to these participants:

- 1) All participants were independent and wanted to take care of themselves and their companion animals in their own home for as long as they could.
- 2) All three participants were compassionate and caring towards people and animals.
- 3) All participants had had a previous love of dogs stemming from their childhood.
- 4) All participants had parents who loved companion animals and particularly dogs.
- 5) All participants preferred dogs over any other type of companion animal.
- 6) All three participants had an absence of companion animals during their middle years when they were busy working, raising a family, having an active social life, and/or travelling.
- 7) For the two participants who had experienced the loss of a companion animal this was very traumatic and they said a person never really does get over the loss.



- 8) For the two participants who had a companion animal during the transition to widowhood they thought it eased the pain and the companion animal was a source of comfort and companionship during this time.
- 9) All three participants thought if a person did not have a companion animal they should wait a little while after being widowed before getting one. They thought initially a person was too busy with other things, you might want to travel for a while, and you need time to grieve and decide to establish a whole new lifestyle for yourself. At this time, which would vary for each individual, the person could consider whether getting a companion animal was appropriate for them.
- 10) All three participants felt that companion animals take on a greater importance and your attachment to them grows during widowhood because they are the main part of your life and you do more things with them and spend more time with them. All three felt that their companion animal gave them a reason for living and life would be dreadful without them.
- 11) All participants had a very strong attachment to their previous and current companion animals.
- 12) All three participants got their current companion animal because of their love of dogs. Two of the participants got their current companion animal for health reasons as well.
- 13) All three participants identified a wide range of positive benefits.
- 14) While all three participants identified negative aspects associated with companion animals they all felt this was part of having the companion animal.
- 15) All participants identified societal factors that would help to make owning a companion animal easier or more enjoyable.
- 16) All three participants worried about getting older and not being able to properly care for their companion animal.
- 17) All three participants had enough financial resources to properly take care of their companion animal.

18) All three participants said their lifestyles changed dramatically when widowed. They all said that their companion animal became more important during widowhood as they were a major part of their life. They were a source of comfort and companionship, something to care for and love, and something to talk to. As well, they did more things with their companion animal and spent more time with them.

19) All three participants said that a major part of their current lifestyle was spent doing things with their companion animal.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion and Summary

This study explored the meaning of companion animals throughout the lives of non-institutionalized elderly widows living alone. The results suggest that companion animals mean a lot to these participants and there were a number of themes common to all of them.

This chapter will present a discussion of the study's theoretical implications, limitations of the study, implications for future research, and implications for counselling.

#### Theoretical Implications

It is apparent from this study that each of the theoretical frameworks described in Chapter I are applicable to these three participants. These women each had the role of companion animal owner, and for Pam and Dora, because they were recently widowed, this role took on greater importance when they were widowed. Although a companion animal did restrict these women from travelling they had thought of this as part of the responsibility of companion animal ownership before they had acquired their companion animals. As well, they all had felt that the benefit of having a companion animal strongly outweighed the negative aspects.

Exchange theory is apparent particularly in the women's discussion on whether or not they would obtain another companion animal should anything happen to their current one. Although they loved having a dog and would want another one they had to weigh this against their ability to take care of it because of their increasing age, how long they would live, and what would happen to their companion animal should they get sick or die before their companion.

Life span developmental theory also seems relevant. For these women early childhood association/attitude and attachment toward dogs seemed to influence their choice of a companion animal later in life. Each of the women had a preference for and love of dogs since childhood and each of these women had obtained a dog later in their lives.

Although I did not measure changes in health status, there appears to be some support for the sociobiological perspective. This is seen in relation to Martha. After she had a stroke she had been worried she would not be well enough to take care of her dog. To her relief and the doctor's surprise she had recovered better and faster than had been predicted. As well for Dora, the exercise she obtained from walking her dog helped her knee to recover faster.

These companion animals could be serving as a transitional object for these women. After they were widowed these women transferred much of their love and attention to their companion animal. Because of this, according to this theory these women can learn to love others again by loving and caring for their companion animals.

Support for the animals as a connection to nature theory is given by Dora when she said that her dog had taught her and helped her to be compassionate and understanding with others.

All three widows provided support for a social interaction theory in that their companion animals satisfy interaction needs by providing sustained companionship, something to talk to, and something to play with. As well, interaction needs can be met by communicating with others because companion animals, and particularly dogs, facilitate social interaction with others. In addition, when people interact with others they gain a greater understanding of themselves. By talking to their companion animals these widows may have enhanced their self-concept as worthwhile and lovable individuals because the companion animals they have been caring for love them in return.

While the purpose of this study was not to determine the applicability of existing theories or to formulate a new theory, the results of this study seem to offer support for each theoretical framework. It appears that further and more in-depth research into these theories is needed. It may be that each of these individual theories could be incorporated into a more comprehensive or all-encompassing theory.

### Limitations of the Study

The results of this study are not decisive as no statistical hypotheses were formulated and tested, nor was the data obtained from the participants verified with external sources. There is no way of knowing if the data is an accurate representation of their life experiences or if participants wanted to present themselves more favorably. The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of companion animals throughout the lives of elderly non-institutionalized widows so as to gain a greater understanding of this topic. Subsequent research with a quantitative methodology is necessary to produce conclusive results.

### Implications for Future Research

The results of this study identified a wide range of themes for these participants. Future research could explore the meaning of companion animals to other groups such as non-institutionalized elderly widowers. As well, future research could explore more in-depth one or several of the themes identified in this study such as grieving and companion animals, companion animals and the transition to widowhood, different types of companion animals, ethnicity and companion animals, level of attachment, and so on.

Qualitative research generates information for systematic testing. To extend this research study and to provide conclusive results a number of quantitative research studies could be conducted. For example, research could look at the meaning of companion animals, using the common themes from this research, in relation to a greater number of widows or a different population such as widowers, AIDS patients, children, and a variety of ethnic groups.

### Implications for Counselling

The results of this study will hopefully assist counsellors in gaining a greater understanding of the importance and value of companion animals to non-institutionalized elderly widows living alone. This study has shown that companion animals can serve as a widow's reason for living and can become a major part of her life. As this study has identified a number of themes, and many areas required much contemplation and reflection

on the part of the participants, a counsellor should appreciate the complexity of this topic and explore this issue with their clients on an individual basis. For non-companion animal owners, although there are many positive aspects to having a companion animal it might not be appropriate or timely for the person to get a companion animal. For current companion animal owners, a counsellor needs to appreciate the importance and value the companion animal may play in the lives of these clients.

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## APPENDIX A

## Participant Informed Consent Form

I agree to participate in a study exploring the meaning of companion animals to non-institutionalized widows 65 years of age and older who are living alone. I understand that I am required to participate in two interviews (each 2-3 hours in length), and in brief (half hour) sessions to provide feedback on data analysis. I understand that all interviews will be conducted in private in a mutually agreed upon location, and will be audio taped. Taped interviews will then be transcribed. I understand that the interviews are labelled with a randomly selected number, and all of the information collected will remain confidential and under no circumstances will I be either specifically or indirectly identified. At the end of the study these tapes will be erased.

I understand the benefits and risks to be: by participating in this study my experience will allow an in-depth understanding of the meaning of companion animals in my life. As well, my participation will help to increase people's understanding of the value of companion animals. Although not an objective of this study, reflection on experience in significant life areas enhances self awareness and personal insight. My feedback will be used to validate the investigator's conclusions.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time. I am also aware that the interviewer (Teresa Stokowski, 263-8645) or Dr. N. Amundson (822-5259) will answer any questions that I may have at any time concerning this project. Under these conditions I agree to participate in this project and I acknowledge having received a copy of this consent form.

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Signature

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Telephone Number

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Date