Precious Pets – Interview with Bonnie Meadows on October 27, 2020

The next time you are driving on highway 10 north, look to your right and salute Precious Pets Kennels. Precious Pets have spent 30 plus years looking after one of what many of us consider to be a family member…our pets. Bonnie Meadows has been in the kennel business for dogs and cats for 31 years, seven days a week, 24 hours a day, and on every holiday including Christmas. There are not a lot of people who would dedicate their life to 7 days a week, 365 days a year for three decades. Bonnie indicated that it has been a rewarding career full of daily responsibilities for employees and herself. It is more than just feeding and watering the animals. It requires the individual care of many animals in the absence of their owner. She recalls the first Christmas after her official opening, her mother Anna served her a turkey dinner at the front desk of the kennel. Behind her in the kennel were 34 dogs, 6 cats and 3 hamsters. This was the start of her life surrounded by animals and responsibility. Her responsibilities did not start at 9 a.m. and end at 5 p.m. Visits to the kennel in the middle of the night, the early morning and always during the day, are common, especially if an animal is displaying symptoms of disease or illness. If an animal is ill or showing signs of distress, so is Bonnie. She has spent endless hours tending to every physical need of all dogs and cats in her care whether they are healthy, elderly, young and playful, or in distress. She has taken many courses including Pet First Aide to ensure that animals in her care are looked after to the best of her capability. Her heart and actions are oriented so that all animals in her kennel are looked after with kindness, care, but most of all with love. In pre-Covid days, the kennel would be home for 30 to 40 pets from families and owners in The Pas, Opaskwayak Cree Nation, RM of Kelsey, and surrounding areas. Since March people have not been travelling and the kennels are no longer busy. Her decision on October 12 to close the kennel was not an easy one. She knows that there will be a void in the community once things open again, but she needs to take time now to reflect on her direction for the future. She is currently in the process of taking down the kennels that housed humans’ best friend and loyal companion the dog.

Since Bonnie can remember, she has had a love for dogs. There was never any doubt that she would build a life and career with dogs in the picture. Her whole life has been around loving dogs and taking great care of them. Bonnie knew that her life would involve looking after dogs in some form. “There was never a second choice for me.” After high school she thought that she should be a veterinarian but immediately changed her mind when she went to the Small Animal Clinic at the University of Saskatchewan and discovered that one of her duties as a veterinarian would mean she would be obligated to euthanize dogs if they were badly injured. She knew that she would not be able to do this type of work, so started looking for other options to work with animals. At that time, there was not an official kennel in town, although she had been looking after a few dogs out of her home. Out of this need, she started planning Precious Pets Kennel as a business for the community. Bonnie had an especially strong relationship with her mother and father who both fully supported her business plan financially, in designing, building, and working alongside Bonnie at the Kennels. The Meadows family were well known businesspeople in The Pas. Her mother, Anna spent many hours at Ann’s Shoe Shoppe on Fischer Avenue for 40 years prior to her retirement. Her father was also a businessman in the water delivery business. He had a water truck which he filled up at the town library and delivered to people in The Pas prior to the mill opening in 1969.

Both parents supported Bonnie in Precious Pets Kennels. Precious Pets became known as a safe place for pet owners to take their pets while they were off on vacation, business and medical. Her father was eager to help Bonnie make her dream come true. One day she drew a layout of the kennels on graph paper and gave it to her dad. It was not long before the kennels were built along with her own personal home on the same property within 100 feet from the kennels. Her father built an 8-foot fence around the entire property to ensure additional safety for the operation. Bonnie’s mother Anna moved onto the property in her senior years and helped Bonnie with the kennels. She was a familiar face greeting many pet owners when they entered the doors of Precious Pets. Bonnies parents have both passed on, but they are a strong reminder of what it takes to have a successful business in our community. They supported her in her dreams, from building the business to helping with the day to day operations when they could and to financially give her startup funds. She recognizes the influence they had on Precious Pets Kennels and is feeling uneasy about closing the business.

Bonnie has committed much of her life to more than making a living out of the kennels. She has been the top dog so to speak on bringing awareness to the plight of many dogs in our community and neighboring northern communities. Daily many dogs live a horrific existence of starvation, mange, disease, neglect, and abuse. Bonnie has seen it all with her involvement in dog rescues in our area. She has rescued dogs that have been so badly neglected, cut up and set on fire, puppies dying of parvo. Although she knows that there are many wonderful dog owners, she wants to bring awareness to the horrific existence that some dogs endure. It is not acceptable, and we cannot continue to tolerate it. As a community we need to find solutions to eliminate pet abuse. A dog will give us back more than we can imagine. They are truly our friends who will protect us, make us aware when danger is near, sit beside us and recognize when we are down. They greet us and wag their tail in acknowledgement that we are important to them. They are loyal companions once they are fitted in the right home. Once a dog trusts you, they will give you the greatest gift, their heart and unconditional love. She is having difficulty walking away from it all.

Ten years ago, Bonnie recognized that The Pas needed to set up affordable Spay and Neuter clinics for those lower income households who have pets but cannot afford the associated costs. She is an advocate for all dog owners to spay and neuter their pets. The importance of having a spay and neuter clinic in our area is key in controlling the amount of unwanted and neglected dogs born into our area. She would sooner see no puppies being born than the treatment that too many animals are enduring because of their birth. She has not turned her back on the issue, but rather has spent much of her time and personal finances to ensure that these animals are rescued and given to a home where they are treasured rather than neglected. She has been involved with 3 spay and neuter clinics over this time frame and cancelled one that was planned and in the works prior to the pandemic. She works with provincial veterinarians discussing pet issues that arise with animals in her care and with bringing affordable spay and neuter clinics to our town. It all started with a coffee donation can in her kennels encouraging pet owners to donate to the cause through tossing in a few dollars. She has commented on the perception of some in the community thinking that she is making a living off the rescues. This is not the case. All money donated to pet rescues go directly to the care of the dogs. Any pet owner knows the costs of having a pet, and the costs associated with veterinarian care. Often this is the reason pet owners do not spay or neuter their pets; they simply cannot afford it. The idea of a spay and neuter clinic addresses the affordability issue for the procedure. Over 700 pets in our community have been a part of the program all due to the donations collected from fundraisers and sponsors.

Bonnie has spent and continues to spend countless hours on the phone with pet owners seeking advice to their pet issues. She is also a contact if someone is witness to a pet being abused. She has created ties with many no kill rescues in the province to ensure that dogs are given a chance to find a pet owner who will take good care of them. The main dog rescues that she works with include Lost Boys Hope, Save a Dog, Spirit of Hope, Brandon Humane Society, Jenn’s Furry Friends, Earth Dog Rescue, Manitoba Underdogs, Tir Na Nog and the AARCS. These organizations will drive the long distance from Winnipeg and other areas in the Province of Manitoba to The Pas and return to transfer dogs for medical care and to match them with loving owners. Precious Pets has been a safe transition home for these dogs while the rescue arrangements are in the works. Rescue dogs have always been kept separate from the kennel as the regulations of the kennel include that all dogs must be current on their vaccinations. Many times, it is unknown if a rescue dog is vaccinated. Bonnie uses additional spaces created in her kennel to house rescue dogs until they are transferred into the safe hands of the Animal Shelters. Over the years, Bonnie has covered the costs of feeding, housing, and providing medical treatment for rescue dogs during the transition period. Often it is a few weeks, before the animals can be picked up, as most rescues operate on volunteer efforts. I have met Bonnie at the airport with dogs being flown out to a rescue in Winnipeg. She has spent much of her leisure time ensuring that these rescue dogs and puppies have a chance for a decent life. The fundraising that she does goes directly towards the needs of the rescue dogs. Every dog that comes in a rescue situation costs a minimal of $100.00 to look after their immediate needs of medical care such as vaccinations especially against Parvo. To clarify to the public, there is no exchange of money from rescue shelters to Precious Pets for the dogs. Bonnie and Precious Pets are all about the safety of the dogs and animals that she rescues.

Bonnie lives for the dogs, she eats, sleeps, and breathes for the dogs. In past years, Bonnie offered events such as Therapy Pets, Santa Paws, and obedience classes for the community. Therapy pets would involve visiting seniors living at St Paul’s, Pine View and Valhalla to deliver a message of love from the dogs along with a delicious sampler of chocolate. She continued this program for many years to bring a smile to a senior’s face which usually happens when a dog is in the room. She would bring her therapy dog program out often at Christmas time, Valentines and Thanksgiving, and honoring Mother’s and Father’s Day. Dogs can bring much joy to our lives. Many are treated as precious and as a loving family member. Others are treated with disregard, neglect, and abuse. Bonnie is bringing awareness to this side of our fellow humans. We need to look at how we treat ourselves, each other and all those who surround us, including our pets and our loyal companion…our dog.

Recently Bonnie lost her loyal dog companion she named Freeda. Freeda was one of the rescue dogs who was her beloved companion for 17 years. Freeda was found 17 years ago left to die on the corner of the Easterville road along with her puppies. She came into the loving arms of Bonnie, who took on the medical costs and responsibility to care for the dog. She soon became remarkably close to Freeda and created a reciprocal loving bond between pet and owner. Freeda was the Love of her Life. We can get extremely attached to our pets. The recent loss of Freeda has created a big void and emotional upset for Bonnie. She is feeling very alone in the world, being an only child without brothers and sisters, and having lost her loving parents some years ago. She is going through a time of reflection and is wondering what is happening to our world.

The normalization and regular abuse that she has responded to and witnessed in recent times is unbearable. Is the blood running cold through the hearts of our fellow humankind? This is the question that Bonnie and many other local dog rescuers are asking today. What have we become? Cold, callous, cruel, and unwilling to help an animal in need of the basics of shelter, food, and medical care. One rescue that is replaying in her mind is a recent rescue involving two dogs. Both were physically assaulted by youth using weapons. Although there was some talk about the dog being destroyed, Bonnie came to the rescue for the animals ensuring that each received veterinarian medical treatment. Both dogs are recovering because of Bonnies intervention. She has rescued many dogs from deplorable living conditions. These types of incidents break her heart, but she knows that she is making a difference and is asking others to help her in protecting our furry friends, through reporting animal abuse and surrendering your pet if you are unable to provide a safe environment for it.

Bonnie has created many friendships while operating Precious Pets. She would travel with the many people who went around the world through conversations when they dropped off and picked up their pets. She has had countless conversations with pet owners during the times that she groomed a pet as well as when they would purchase dog food and supplies. Precious Pets has been her life. So when you drive by, give Precious Pets a honk/salute and acknowledge all the hard work that Bonnie has given to our community through looking after your pet, through fundraising efforts for rescues, through the hours that she has given to ensure that every dog in our community is treated fairly by their human owner and through her efforts towards affordable spay and neuter clinics in our community.

Thank you, Precious Pets and Bonnie Meadows, for acting on your true spirit of kindness towards keeping our pets safe, in dog rescues and in your work towards eliminating animal cruelty.

If you have solutions that you would like to forward to protect animals from abuse, please forward them to Make Shift Happen @tri community awareness.