

# Pandemic Puppies Unite!

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Hi there! Remember me? I'm Otis the pandemic puppy who occasionally writes a guest column in place of my pet parent, Sheralyn Roman.

For some reason, she has abandoned me this week ? thankfully, not literally, and not for long, but for something called a ?holiday.? Apparently whatever holidays are, you hoomans haven't been on one for at least the last two or three years so even though the pandemic isn't really over, a lot of you are going away.

I personally don't understand why you need a holiday, for me every day is great! I get to go for long walks, play outside, get plenty of treats and on Saturday mornings I go to a new place called the dog park! Who needs a vacation? Not this guy, that's for sure. However, it's not vacations I want to write about today, it's something far more serious, called a housing crisis!

And not just for us puppies either.

Just recently, I added another exciting milestone to my ?post rescue? dog life by meeting my ?cousin? for the very first time.

Who knew I had a cousin? It turns out that kind of like some unlucky dogs, you hoomans have a problem finding housing, specifically affordable housing. I'm guessing that's partly because you are looking for something with actual floors, not made out of dirt and with walls that add privacy unlike the cages me and my fellow rescues used to live in.

It seems like the cost of real estate, particularly here in the GTA and right here in Caledon is skyrocketing. I'm not really sure how much ?a million bucks? is, but when I hear the paw parents talking it sounds pretty serious. They say things like ?that's not even enough money to be able to afford a townhouse these days? and that sounds pretty alarming. That's just one of the reasons I'm encouraging us pandemic puppies to unite together; because some of us may have to start sharing our new digs with other members of the extended family. It's why I met my cousin recently, because Mum and Dad say he's coming to live with me for a while. They introduced us at that dog park I just told you about and wow, no one was more surprised than me to find out the great white Pyrenees I met a few weeks ago while at the dog park was also in my driveway when I got home!

So, it turns out I have this giant dog cousin who outweighs me by about 100 pounds! He came from a pound just like me but he has had a lot more training ? so now I'm supposed to have some more training too ? thanks a lot Appa! (That's his name by the way.) I was getting along just fine in the house till this big, white fluffy ball of fur came along and yet somehow I'm the one that needs to learn more manners! Sigh. Still, it sounds like there is a lot of this pandemic puppies ?moving in together thing? happening right now so I guess I'll get used to it and maybe we will even end up being friends. After all, with the average cost of real estate skyrocketing and interest rates beginning to climb it seems like more and more hoomans (and dogs) will be living together than ever before.

Mum left behind these thoughts she says I have to include. I've taken the liberty of paraphrasing them a little bit.

According to various employment search agencies, starting salaries for new graduates vary widely, depending of course on whether the position is in the trades, retail, requires a college diploma, a university degree or some combination of these things. The salary range is typically anywhere from around \$40,000 to as much as \$55,000 annually. Meanwhile, the average price for a townhome in the GTA was \$1,212,542 and for a detached home, \$1.7 million! Even I know that's a whole lotta money and probably not very affordable for someone earning \$55,000 grand a year.

According to TRREB (The Toronto Regional Real Estate Board) house prices have increased an average of 28% over this time last year. Even condos (where some of us dogs aren't even allowed to live) are occasionally selling for more than \$800,000. I might find

typing with paws difficult but I know with prices like that, housing affordability is not within reach for so many new people entering the market. Combined with many developers focussing on large suburban homes and some neighbourhoods resisting infill housing opportunities (like small apartment buildings, duplexes and other multi-family housing options) the lack of entry-point housing will only get worse. Not to mention, it doesn't even begin to address affordable housing options for those relying on assisted living options such as subsidized housing or ODSP payments to survive. How on earth is anyone supposed to be able to afford a home these days? Mum was pretty emphatic about reminding us that it's clearly NOT just because Generation Z is eating avocado toast! (Whatever that is?)

I guess this is all a very long way of saying it appears my ?cousin? will be living with me for a little while and maybe you have several pandemic puppies united under one roof too. My advice is pretty simple: it might seem challenging at first, but uniting together is better than living apart. I'm learning all kinds of new skills like cooperation and because everyone is taking turns around the house with something called ?chores,? some days that means I somehow get MORE walks than usual.

I started out being a bit protective of my new family and I'm a little guy with a big mouth so there may have been a couple of ?altercations? with cousin Appa but the truth is, the longer this big white fluffball hangs around, the more I'm realizing he's actually pretty comfortable to snuggle up with. Plus now I have help protecting our house when anyone comes to the front door. You should hear him bark! He even scares me a little! I'm not sure when the real estate market will ever be affordable for recent grads, young adults or newcomer families and those that need extra support but until it is, to all my fellow pandemic puppies ? stay united! Furry friends are much better than furry foes.