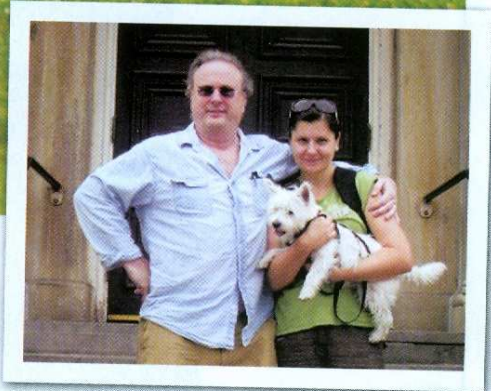




**Inset:** Polish-born **Irena Rodziewicz** with her west highlander terrier, **Abigail**, and her husband.



## Woof it up

Having a dog is popular in Canada, but it's also a big responsibility

By Lisa Evans

**W**hen TJ Lloyd takes Raven, his black Labrador, for a jog, he has to remember to pack a plastic bag in case she has to do a “number 2.” While dog ownership is common in Lloyd’s native home of Trinidad and Tobago, the poop-and-scoop law in his new Canadian home was new to him.

Picking up your pooch’s poop is just one of many dog ownership bylaws in most cities across Canada. Laws require all dogs to be kept on a leash except when in designated “off-leash areas,” usually large protected spaces in public parks. In Lloyd’s hometown of Toronto, failure to leash or scoop can result in a fine of \$245.

Most cities also require pet owners to register their animals. In Toronto, the cost ranges from \$25 for a neutered dog to \$60 for an unaltered dog, with a discount for seniors. The cost in Vancouver is slightly higher. A licence

helps to identify lost dogs and the fee goes toward helping shelters provide food and health care to abandoned animals.

Canadians love their pets and treat them as family members. This can be confusing for newcomers from countries where dogs are purchased to protect property, not to cuddle with on the couch. Irena Rodziewicz immigrated to Canada from Poland in June 2007 and owns a west highlander terrier named Abigail. Amused that she is referred to as Abigail’s “Mommy,” Rodziewicz says, “In Poland, we love animals, but not as much as here.” She and Abigail were invited to a Christmas event featuring photos with Santa — for dogs! “They took a picture of Abigail sitting on Santa Claus’ lap,” she chuckles.

With the arrival of warm weather, many people start thinking about canine parenthood. Shaswar Ahmad, canine behaviour specialist, at the Toronto Humane Soci-

ety, says the shelter sees a spike in dog adoptions during the summer. The sun brings out dogs and their owners who flock to parks to toss frisbees and play catch. For Lloyd and Raven, there is nothing better than spending the day at Toronto’s Cherry Beach.

“[Raven] loves the water, so she will swim the entire time, only coming out to say hello to another dog and then she’ll jump back into the lake,” says Lloyd.

Owning a dog can be fun, but it’s also a large responsibility, one that can be especially demanding in the winter months. Taking your dog for a stroll in the park when it’s 25 degrees and sunny is a pleasant way to enjoy the outdoors, but it’s not much fun when it’s snowing and minus 15.

The shelter sees many dogs return in the fall as those who adopted in the summer change their mind once the cold weather sets in. “They look at it like a rental car that they used and now want to bring back,” says Ahmad.

Rodziewicz compares owning a dog to having a child and advises

prospective owners to ask themselves whether they have enough time to take their dog for a walk every day and enough money for check-ups and vaccinations, as veterinary services can be very expensive. In Canada, dogs are required to receive vaccinations to protect against disease.

Ahmad advises potential dog owners to think about their life not just as it is today, but a few years from now. “When [new immigrants] first arrive to Canada, they may have a lot of free time because they’re not working yet or they’re in school, so they get a dog and then once they’ve settled, they realize they don’t have time for the animal,” he says. You may also move and change accommodation in your first few years, and if you’re renting, note that few rentals may allow pets.

Lloyd’s advice to those considering dog ownership is simple: “Think about what is fair to you and the dog.” 🍀