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## *Big Paws to Fill*

Kippy was my big brother and best friend. We looked just alike and people used to ask if he was my mother. He was a sweet, confident and outgoing dog and was Miss A's best friend and companion. He went everywhere with her and I was the kid in the backseat as they sat up front holding paws.

As the ranch manager, Kippy's job was to keep all the animals in order and take care of Miss A. We had thirty-two horses and too many sheep to count. And I was supposed to follow him and learn how to do everything. Put the sheep in the shade and move them when the sun shifts. Don't stare at the rams or they'll charge. Stay out of the horse stalls and away from their feet, and don't chase the horses in the turnouts. Ugh! There was so much to remember.

Kippy was my best friend. We chased each other and tussled, but sometimes he played too hard and would drag me around by the nape of

my neck. When I got bigger I learned I could run up into the deep winter snow to get away from him. But he'd be waiting for me to start the chase and tussle as soon as I came out of the snow bank. So, while we had a lot of fun together, I was always a little afraid of that big dog that looked just like me.

One day Kippy got sick. Miss A was very sad and held me and told me I had "big paws to fill." That scared me. What did that mean? Time went by and Kippy never came home. Miss A missed him a lot and wanted me to sleep in his place and eat from his bowl and she told me to use his doghouse. What did all this mean? I was only two-years old. Where was Kippy, the pack leader? I was sad too and spent a lot of time lying on the bed wondering what was next.

Miss A kept telling me "you've got big paws to fill" and she'd pet me and hold my little paw. We started doing a lot of training on our walks. Some of my training was on the leash, and as I learned the tricks, some of the training was off-leash. I learned I could sit anywhere I was, not just when I was on leash beside Miss A. I could be running through the pasture and Miss A would holler, "Okie sit," and I would sit. Sometimes I'd sit in one place for a very long time. I got good at all these tricks and learning was fun. One day it was announced we were going to town. Hum, that sounded like an adventure.

Oh, going to town was scary! My legs shook and my tail was tucked as far under me as I could pull it. I wanted to vanish. This was

no fun. Town was filled with too many people, fast cars, big trucks, and very loud noises that hurt my big ears. We went day after day. After each session we'd sit together in the back of the big red pickup truck and share some water and a snack and watch all the busy people hurrying by. It was exhausting.

I'm not big and brave like Kippy; I am a little black and tan Kelpie who is a ranch dog with great big ears. I'm shy and I don't like noises, cars, or have much of a need for people, except for my people. We walked around town at a heel, staying close to Miss A and following her directions. Then I'd sit and stay, but I'd still shake. Just couldn't help it. Guess I looked like a scared puppy. People thought I was cute and would always ask, "Can we pet the little black dog with big ears?" Ugh! that was the worst. Why do they want to pet me? Why do I have such big ears?