

The Silent Killer

By ANITA RABIDOU

There is a deadly disease lurking all around us waiting and watching for an opportunity to strike and sink its fangs into your dog. The disease is complacency, and it is extremely difficult not to be affected by this ailment. The only cure for this often times deadly disease is prevention.

Complacency is a killer without mercy. We are satisfied that nothing could happen, especially when we have performed a certain action or set of behaviors over and over again for an extended period of time without a negative consequence. We become sure that this is always how it will be and even though we know better, we let our guard down. Here are three true dog stories that happened within the past six months to illustrate this point.

It is a beautiful morning, the air is crisp and cool and your dog looks at you with those big, brown almond eyes with an air of expectancy. You look back at your obedience champion pooch and decide that a trip to the park is a great idea. You grab your car keys and your beloved best friend's leash. But you don't put it on your dog's collar, after all, you are just going to the car in the driveway and he's done it a million times before as regular as clockwork. Besides he is a fine tuned Obedience Champ with all kinds of extra letters behind his name.

So, you open the front door and your dog waits for you to tell him to go to the car. You do so and your dog bounces out. Suddenly Champ sees a cat zoom up the sidewalk and even though he had no intention of chasing Mr. Speedball Kitty, he just can't help it. And, yes, you see it coming as you close your front door. You are, in fact, opening your mouth to give the command to "STOP," but, in the time it takes for you to speak, your dog is in the road. Your obedient dog does stop when the command reaches his ears – and that is when he is struck by the car that kills him. What killed him? Complacency.

Next, picture this: You just returned from a pleasant walk with your dog. You take her leash off and put her in her crate so you can go take a shower. How many times have you done this before? You do not think twice about the collar that she still wears around her neck. When you get out of the shower a short time later, you realize that it is awfully quiet in the other room so you peek in on your dog. She is unconscious and you see that somehow, her collar got caught on the crate and you can't even see where or how the collar is stuck as you try desperately to free her from the cause of her strangulation. Every set of instructions that come with a crate warns you to remove the dog's collar before crating, but you are sure that this is only a warning for inexperienced dog people, not *you*. Luckily you save your dog, but she suffered irreparable damage to her neck and throat and brain and will never be the same. What caused this? Complacency.

Lastly, you are at a dog show. You throw a sheet over your dogs crate so that he can rest until it is his time to enter the ring. You go and shop at a few of the vendors. When you return to your area, you notice that your crazy dog has pulled part of the sheet into the crate and is happily chewing away. Of course you scold Mr. Mouthy and think nothing of it, other than now you need a new sheet because there's a big hole in the current one. A few days later, Mr. Mouthy is not feeling well. He's throwing up his food and feeling a little under the weather. But you are not overly concerned at this point, not concerned enough to take him to the vet yet. The next day he is still not better and he is throwing up the water you gave him to prevent him from becoming dehydrated. You decide to bring him to the vet to get checked out. Another day passes and your vet asks if he could have gotten a hold of a towel or something. You remember last weekend's dog show and tell him "yes." The vet does some more diagnostic tests and calls to tell you that they are doing surgery because his intestine has shut down. As it turns out, a whole foot and a half of his intestine was affected because the sheet tried to pass through and couldn't, then became embedded in the intestine and stomach, and had to be cut out piece by piece. The bill totals \$2,500. In this case, your dog will make a full recovery. What caused this incident? Complacency.

So, as you go about your day to day routines, same as you have done before, take a step back and look for that silent killer. Look to make sure you are being the best guardian that you can be for your dog and that you do not become satisfied when a question of safety is involved.

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