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[Home](#) > My Secret Shame. Part 1 of 2

My Secret Shame. Part 1 of 2

Fri, 2013-03-15 09:14 — Robin Olson

I've been skulking around, carrying a shameful secret in my heart for almost three years. Only a very few trusted friends knew what was going on. For legal reasons I couldn't say anything online about what was happening until there was a verdict in the court case. Yes, COURT CASE.

I suffered in silence, but I deserved it. It was part of the penance I had to pay for what I did.

Simply put, I made a terrible judgement error. I trusted a stranger when I should have been more careful. Although I consider myself to be a responsible person, I trust others too easily. When I take something on, I do it to the best of my ability. If I fail, I take the blame. I hold my head up and apologize and do my best to make it right again.

Because of my actions, a cat suffered in a most unfair and despicable way. I know that even now going public with my story may risk serious backlash from the other person involved in this horror. She will rain down on me, make untrue accusations, she will whine and twist her words. She may even do more than that, but I don't care about her feelings after what she's allowed to happen.

In July of 2010, we opened the doors to my Non-Profit rescue group, [Kitten Associates](#).^[1] We were still getting things sorted out, building our web site, setting up the foster room, sorting out what cats we rescue and how we would find them good homes. **I already had almost a decade of fostering and working with other cat rescues, so this was a natural next step.** I was scared. I was excited. I hoped I could help make a positive difference for cats and the people they live with. This was a big test for me.

At that time this blog, Covered in Cat Hair, had been going for over 4 years. I had a growing readership and my stories about rescue life were going very well. I leveraged my readership to help me get the word out on cats at kill shelters in the southern US who needed rescue. **It was working to make a difference and continues to be an exciting part of what I do.**

I'd already rescued cats from a few Georgia shelters in the past so when I heard about a [calico mama and her two, cow-patterned kittens](#)^[2], who needed to get "busted out," I jumped at the chance to help.



©2010 Maria S. Cali-Mama our first rescued cat, just after her spay surgery. She is mama to [Pattycake and Moonpie](#).^[3]

For years I had it drilled into my head that adopting out adults from a foster home is really tough and keeps one from rescuing more kittens. People don't make an effort to go to a private home, by appointment only, to see an adult. In other words, don't rescue mom-cats, just take on orphan kittens.

I was worried about what to do with this cat, who we called Cali-mama, but just after I broke the news that we were taking on our first rescues, **one of my readers contacted me saying she wanted to adopt the mom before we'd even gotten Cali OUT of the shelter!**

I was over-the-moon happy. It didn't occur to me to have her fill out an adoption application. We spoke on the phone at great length and shared many emails. **I was so relieved she wanted this cat that I didn't even charge her an adoption fee or ask her to sign an adoption contract! Yes, I was STUPID.**



©2010 Maria S. Cali and her daughter, Pattycake.

Within two weeks, we had the cat fully vetted, since the kittens were already weaned, and our friend, Bobby, drove her to her new home in North Carolina. **Cali-mama was our first adoption.**

Then everything went to Hell.

Bobby told me he didn't like the look of the woman. **The first warning sign - she wouldn't let him drop the cat off to her at home.** Though he offered many times, she wanted to meet him a few miles away-and this is after he just drove a few hundred miles with the cat - what was a few more? **He said there was something about her he didn't feel comfortable about and he wished he'd kept the cat, instead of let her go. When he told me that I feared we'd made a terrible mistake, but it was too late.**

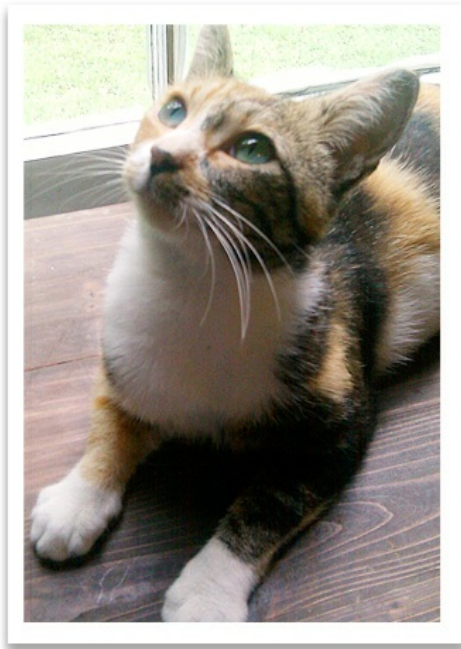


©2010 HCC&C. From my original post announcing that Cali had been adopted.

I got a few updates telling me that the cat was renamed Tansy. She was doing okay but a bit uncomfortable with the dog. She'd tried to get out of the house a few times, but seemed to be calming down. I didn't worry about Tansy. It sounded like she was adjusting, so I continued on with rescuing more cats.

In June of 2011, almost a YEAR later, I got a call from the adopter. She was very upset.

I asked her to tell me what happened. She went into a long rant, saying all sorts of things about the **Home Owner's Association saying that there was a stench coming from inside her home that could be smelled outside her home. It that was so bad they eventually called Animal Control. She said she was getting vilified and it was unfair; that there was some sort of pond causing the odor, not her house.**



©2010 Maria S. One of the last photos we'd see of Cali for the next two years.

Pressing for more details, I finally got my answer. When I heard it I felt like throwing up, then passing out, as the blood went out of my head, into my toes. **WHAT HAD I DONE?!** When I had a second to process her words I wanted to reach through the phone line to let's just say do something really bad involving causing this person a lot of PAIN, but I said nothing at first. I was too stunned to talk.

She was either a hoarder or really damn close to being one. Unbeknownst to me, she didn't have two dogs and a cat or two, she had 24 cats and two dogs. If I'd done ANY sort of reference check I probably would have found out there was a problem, but I didn't do that.

What happened next literally took a piece out of my heart.

Animal Control took ALL OF THE ANIMALS into custody.

This person, who I will call Sue (*not her real name*), tried to convince me she was a victim and that I should help her get her animals back.

Shaking, I told her that it was my responsibility to provide care to Tansy. That I would do whatever it takes to get her back and that I was sorry, but that I felt I should no longer speak to her any more and I suggested she see a Lawyer. If Animal Control seized the animals, clearly something was missing from her story.

I was able to find out where Tansy had been taken, so I immediately began calling and emailing them to get more information.

I found out the that conditions in the home were terrible. They would not say more than that for legal reasons. **They said they would not euthanize any of the animals unless they became seriously ill, so Tansy had a chance to get out alive.**

Humiliated, I had to tell the Director of Animal Control about my terrible error adopting out this cat to Sue. I couldn't even give her a microchip number because we hadn't started doing chips then. I had a few photos and luckily they matched one of the cats in custody. They took down my information and were a bit terse about dealing with me. **I deserved it, but at least they knew I would be there for this cat, with bells on, if I could only get her back.**

And then the wait began. **The fear left me breathless each time I emailed Animal Control to ask for an update. I didn't want them to forget me. I feared if I waited too long I'd miss my chance to get this poor cat back, so I just kept contacting them, hoping for good news.**

I thought about Tansy's life—**living in a tiny cage with no sunshine or fresh air, most likely living near barking dogs - what torture for her.** It would be a few weeks before the case would be heard, but certainly it wasn't a long enough time for being back in a kill shelter to do any harm to her, right?

But Sue wanted a fight so she got one. **The case dragged on. It went to a higher court. There were delays and more delays. MONTHS passed.** Each time I had to contact Animal Control for an update, my heart sank when I saw they'd replied.

Were they going to tell me I was too late or worse, that she went back to Sue?

In part two, the wait continues, as does the fear that I will never get Tansy back alive.

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[Georgia Rescue](#) ^[8]

[Calico](#) ^[9]

[You've Got to be Kidding!](#) ^[10]

[Kitten Associates](#) ^[11]

[Foster Mom](#) ^[12]

[Bobby](#) ^[13]

[Maria](#) ^[14]

[Busted Out!](#) ^[15]

Comments

Fri, 2013-03-15 09:34 — Catnonymouse (not verified)

Tansy ^[16]

This story is breaking my heart already! Don't know if I want to read Part 2 but do hope and pray that Tansy survived this horrible home and woman. As for you dear Robin, we all love you and know that this must of been really hard for you to write but please do not blame yourself for this. You are a wonderful, caring person who has made life SO much better for all the neglected and abused kitties that you have had! Wish I could give you a big hug and thank you for all you do! :)

Fri, 2013-03-15 10:10 — birdie (not verified)

I feel ya ^[17]

I expect you will get an avalanche of stories from other rescuers who have similar tales to tell. Who of us has not made an error in judgement? We are compassionate people, that's why we do what we do. Robyn, I'm sorry you have beat yourself up for so long over this. The whole story has yet to be revealed, however I don't have to read it to know this was just a tragic end to a well meaning act of compassion.

Fri, 2013-03-15 10:11 — birdie (not verified)

sorry ^[18]

robin, sorry for misspelling your name!

Fri, 2013-03-15 12:17 — Catnonymouse (not verified)

Tansy ^[19]

I live in Wilmington, NC. Is Tansy possibly there? I can adopt her & give her back to you if you can come get her. I can't keep her since I already have 5 cats.

Fri, 2013-03-15 12:54 — Terri (not verified)

Robin- I made a similar ^[20]

Robin-

I made a similar "mistake in judgement". Only this hoarder was working under the guise of being a rescue! I met her via facebook, and there was a mill bust north of here. She needed carriers and help with pulling from a shelter, and I volunteered my time. I met her at the shelter and helped her select and load so very many little dogs. Two of them, two small chihuahua's touched me. I offered to foster them, me - who had never met this woman before. She obliged, and let me take them. That should have been the first warning sign. I was unable to adopt them myself, and she made no attempts to find them a home. After months, I returned them to her. Updates were that they were doing well, blah blah blah. Only they weren't. A few more months passed, and she got busted - for hoarding. So many dogs in cages, feet deep in feces and urine, covered in filth. I contacted the shelter to check on the two girls after they were removed from the home. One was doing fairly well, one was gravely ill. Seems they had been altered, and then left to sit in those horrible filthy cages, no one checking incisions, no one cleaning cages, barely being fed and watered. I was heartbroken. I followed up repeatedly with the shelter, the sick dog recovered after intensive follow up care. Eventually they were adopted, and the hoarder was convicted.

I am sorry you encountered this "species" of person. I am also sorry I did. They are out there, they dress like us, they often look like us, and sometimes you simply do not know. Sadly the only take home from this sort of experience is to know more

moving forward. Be more careful, even skeptical. It is a sad world that we need to take precautions to avoid this, and that it is even happening to begin with. I hope Tansy has a happy ending. Animals are amazingly resilient, and can recover from so very much. Hugs.

Sat, 2013-03-16 14:04 — [Robin Olson](#) [21]

xoxo! [22]

Big hugs to you, Terri, for your wonderful heart, your compassion, for caring so much for those dogs. Yes, it's a tough lesson for everyone, but we do our best and hopefully LEARN a lesson..sigh...
Fri, 2013-03-15 15:18 — jmuhi (not verified)

RE: TANSY [23]

Unfortunately, "the hard way" is often how we learn life lessons. I pray that Tansy (and the other cats) was (were) rescued and that they are all right now. And needless to say, you'll never do that again! We all have things we would have done differently if we had them to do over again; the best of them do not involve other living beings. The others haunt us forever, but they hopefully give us very important experience and reason to improve ourselves and think more carefully before acting.

Sat, 2013-03-16 10:09 — Kathy (not verified)

Life lessons [24]

I agree. Unfortunately, we all have to learn from life lessons. It is called character building. As you have the courage to come out with the story to help others, I am sure that your story will help "New" rescuers not make the same mistake.

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Robin @ [Google+](#)

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- [1] <http://kittenassociates.org/>
- [2] <http://coveredincathair.com/content/not-my-watch-our-first-rescue-some-unexpected-trouble>
- [3] <http://coveredincathair.com/content/foster-cat-journal-moonpie-pattycake-their-journey-ends>
- [4] <http://coveredincathair.com/taxonomy/term/33>
- [5] <http://coveredincathair.com/taxonomy/term/89>
- [6] <http://coveredincathair.com/taxonomy/term/95>
- [7] <http://coveredincathair.com/taxonomy/term/100>
- [8] <http://coveredincathair.com/category/cich-content-categories/georgia-rescue>
- [9] <http://coveredincathair.com/category/cich-content-categories/calico>
- [10] <http://coveredincathair.com/category/cich-content-categories/youve-got-be-kidding>
- [11] <http://coveredincathair.com/category/cich-content-categories/kitten-associates>
- [12] <http://coveredincathair.com/category/cich-content-categories/foster-mom>
- [13] <http://coveredincathair.com/category/cich-content-categories/bobby>
- [14] <http://coveredincathair.com/category/cich-content-categories/maria>
- [15] <http://coveredincathair.com/category/cich-content-categories/busted-out>
- [16] <http://coveredincathair.com/comment/5901#comment-5901>
- [17] <http://coveredincathair.com/comment/5902#comment-5902>
- [18] <http://coveredincathair.com/comment/5903#comment-5903>
- [19] <http://coveredincathair.com/comment/5904#comment-5904>
- [20] <http://coveredincathair.com/comment/5905#comment-5905>
- [21] <http://coveredincathair.com/users/robin-olson>
- [22] <http://coveredincathair.com/comment/5915#comment-5915>
- [23] <http://coveredincathair.com/comment/5906#comment-5906>
- [24] <http://coveredincathair.com/comment/5913#comment-5913>