



Published on *Covered in Cat Hair* (<https://coveredincathair.com>)

[Home](#) > Hill's Pet Nutrition Center-The Tour, Part One

Hill's Pet Nutrition Center-The Tour, Part One

Tue, 2012-08-21 11:06 — Robin Olson

I was invited by Hill's to tour their Pet Nutrition Center in Topeka, Kansas and to listen to a number of presentations by Vets, Vet-Nutritionists, Scientists and staff. They also opened the doors to their state-of-the-art, very high-security manufacturing plant in Emporia, Kansas for an additional tour. They paid for my trip and accommodations, but not for my review, concerns or approval of their products or processing methods. This blog post series is based on my personal experience and opinion, only. Your experiences and opinions may differ.

Arrival



Welcome Bloggers

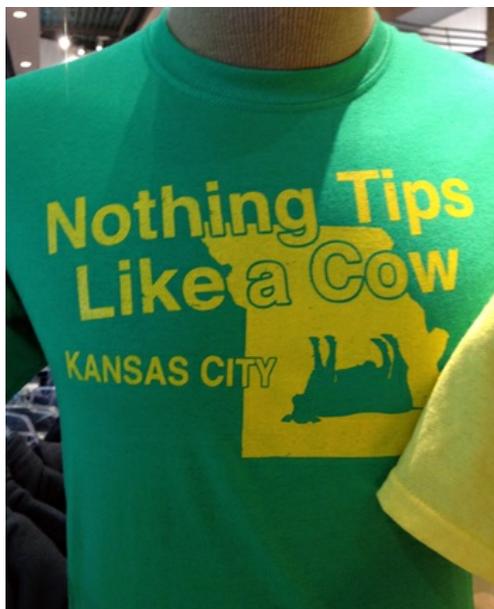
I had a lot of apprehension about going on this trip. As many of you know, I'm a diehard believer in "species appropriate" diets for cats. Translation: I feed a raw diet to my cats with no grain, no preservatives, no chemicals; just meat, egg yolks and a few other things like extra taurine and salmon oil. **There are Vets, Vet Associations and pet food companies who would tell you that you risk sickening your cats and yourself with Salmonella and other food borne illnesses and that you should never feed a raw meat diet to your cat, while there are other organizations and Vets who believe differently.**

Without getting into an argument about what IS the perfect diet for cats, my other apprehension was simple; I'm just a lone blogger. **My net worth equals the change you might find in Hill's lobby sofa cushions. Does this "David" dare to speak up about a "Goliath" of the pet food industry?** Do I have the nerve to write about something where I can be subject to scrutiny, blacklisting or worse; accusations of libel or lawsuits?

I will tread respectfully and as thoughtfully as possible.



Hill's ⁽¹⁾ is a multi-billion dollar company whose parent company is Colgate-Palmolive ⁽²⁾. Being their guest was frankly a bit intimidating. I knew they knew my position on appropriate diet for cats so I couldn't understand why they'd want me to see their operations. **I decided to be as open-minded as I could and just listen to what they had to say.**



©2012 Robin A.F. Olson. *I am definitely not in New York any more.*

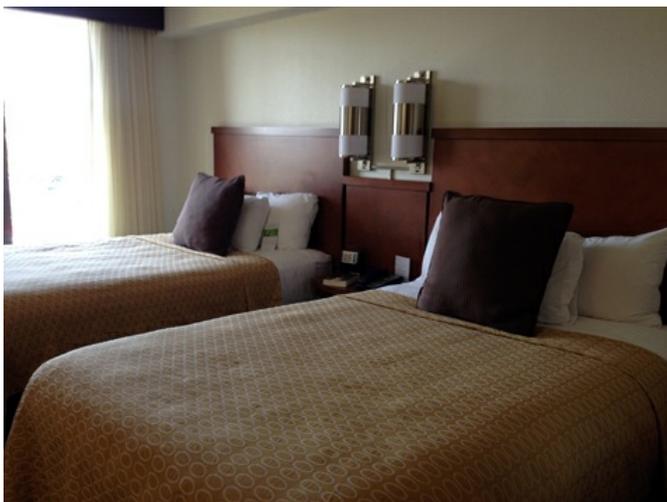
Arriving at Kansas City International airport, I expected to be tossed onto a shuttle bus and driven the hour-long ride to the Hyatt Topeka. I was surprised to be met by a cheerful driver and my friend, Angie Bailey (*of the infamous CatladyLand* ⁽³⁾), who'd just arrived from Minneapolis and who was also going on the tour.



©2012 Robin A.F. Olson. *Angie and me livin' large by our private car.*

The driver carried my bag and escorted us to a waiting black, shiny livery car with cushy back seats and bottled water waiting to refresh us. **I admit to feeling pampered and possibly a bit more nervous about what this tour was going to mean to my future.** Clearly Hill's was going to take good care of us on this trip.

The schedule was tightly paced. We had about 90 minutes after we arrived at the Hyatt to get ready for welcome dinner at the Kansas Museum of History ⁽⁴⁾. I entered my room and took a deep breath as I scanned the large, modern furnished space. Before me was a sitting room, wet bar, huge flat screen tv, along with a segregated space containing two freshly made double beds. Again, I expected less and got more. I was told when I got my room key that whatever I needed I should just put on the Hill's tab. Yikes. **Is this what life is like for a rock star?** I could get used to this.



©2012 Robin A.F. Olson. One end of my palatial room.

I got unpacked then met with Angie and an acquaintance, Teri Thorsteinson, a Vet Tech who writes [Curlz and Swirlz](#) ^[5]. Teri had two little bottles of champagne in her room and was determined we start the trip off right. **The three of us shared a toast and a few laughs before we left for the museum. Even though I didn't know Teri very well, I had a feeling she was going to become a good friend with a start like this.**



I enjoyed having dinner at a Museum after hours when all the tours for the day had left. **The group of media people and bloggers was fairly small, only about 14 people plus a few folks from Hill's, so it felt much more informal.** I kept waiting for the pitch about Hill's products to start, but it didn't come. We just chatted and got to know each other then finally, barely 25 minutes before we were scheduled to leave, we got to run around the museum and look at some of the exhibits.



©2012 Robin A.F. Olson. Angie, me and Teri (left to right). Why we're leaning over I have no idea.

Of course Angie, Teri and I ran for the gift shop. There wasn't one in the hotel and we had hoped to find some trinkets with the Wizard of Oz theme to bring home to our loved ones. This was my first visit to Kansas after all.



©2012 Robin A.F. Olson. Real train inside the museum surrounded by other artifacts.

Though the museum was quite enjoyable to explore, the gift shop left us wanting. This was a business trip, darn it! **We're not really there to have fun, but somehow we managed to squeeze in a few laughs and take delight in hearing that one specific seat on the REAL Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe locomotive ^[6] inside the building was haunted!**



©2012 Robin A.F. Olson. Angie afraid she'll be vaporized while sitting on the haunted seat.

The next day's schedule was jam-packed and we had to get up around 6AM, which was NOT my idea of a good time. **We had to be ready to board the bus for the Pet Nutrition Center (PNC) at 7:15AM.** I never sleep well in a hotel, but luckily for me, for the first time in my life, after I had a quick shower, as soon as my head hit the pillow, I passed out cold.



©2012 Robin A.F. Olson. Wonderful vintage McDonald's neon sign.

I had weird dreams about the garage doors at my Mother's house collapsing, falling and crushing my car. The next morning I realized it was the 6th anniversary of her passing. As I got ready to leave my room, I thought about her and my throat tightened as I remembered finding her passed away. I wondered what she would have thought about me going on this trip. **I guessed she would have given me grief that I care what I feed my cats. She fed my cat Bob Dole (he was her cat before he lived with me) Friskies® dry and wet. His teeth were so bad that 6 had to go the day after my Mom died and I took Bob to my Vet before bringing him into my home.** In time, Bob ended up loving raw food and regained back some of the vitality he'd lost, but sadly not his teeth.

Tour. Day One.



©2012 Hill's. Used with permission. Hill's Pet Nutrition Center, Aerial View

Hill's Pet Nutrition Center is set up like a college campus with a central grassy courtyard, surrounded by two storey buildings. Wearing security badges, we were escorted into an underground lecture room that could also be used as a tornado shelter (which I found amusing and a bit scary at the same time). Internet access was iffy and there was no cell service. We were asked to not take photos, which made me itchy. **I couldn't imagine what we could see in this room that we couldn't show anyone in the world.**



©2012 Robin A.F. Olson. Tour badge.

We had assigned seats and at each place there was a name placard and some promotional goodies from Hill's. Angie and I were separated by a few other visitors. I thought they may have done it on purpose since we seem to go into high-powered joke mode if we get too close to each other. It was for the best. **Time to concentrate, stay strong, but open-minded and make sure I didn't drink any Kool-Aid®.**



©2012 Robin A.F. Olson. Kostas Kontopanos (okay I snuck ONE photo).

First up was President of Hill's USA, [Kostas Kontopoulos](#) (7). Clearly we were not going to get a pitch from a junior executive. Mr. Kontopoulos wasn't going to say hello and rush off to a meeting, either. He was there for the day to share his vision and to listen to our questions. **It was hard not to be impressed by how seriously Hill's takes the paradigm shift of the past few years—people inherently do not trust marketing or advertising. With the advent of knowledgeable bloggers who have nothing to gain by speaking their mind about product quality or appropriateness, big companies are discovering that these bloggers strongly influence the purchasing power of their desired demographic.** In fact, as with my own blog, my demographic of readers is their target audience—much moreso than they can reach through an ad agency. They knew what I said DID matter and my readers trust me. The itchy feeling returned as I listened to the presentation.

Hill's is guided by its Mission:

“To help enrich and lengthen the special relationships between people and their pets.”

How they achieve or fail to achieve that goal is rather impressive. **That they opened their doors and invited “transparency” was a smart move.** Their fear is misinformation—that bloggers will declare their products are garbage or contain metal shavings or whatever you can dream up—and that the folks who read those blogs will believe what they say.

I'd like to think that anyone who writes a blog that includes information about pet nutrition would do some research before making such a declaration. **Perhaps I read between the lines of Mr. Kontopoulos presentation, that what Hill's may fear most is that people will become more educated and realize that they might want to reconsider what food they purchase for their cat or dog once they understand a few basic tenets about nutrition.**

But who controls the flow of that information?

Hill's stable of Vets (*they employ the second largest number of Vets in the world*) is responsible for creating and updating their “Small Animal Guide to Clinical Nutrition.” The Guide can be found on the website of the [Mark Morris Institute \(MMI\)](#) (8)—which was named after Hill's founder Mark L. Morris, Sr., DVM.

The [5th Edition](#) (9) was released in 2010 at a cost of \$130.00. (but I see it's on Amazon for [\\$14.75](#) (10)). **This is THE guide Vets use to reference nutrition questions.**



I find the link between MMI and Hill's to be somewhat distressing. **This may be completely innocent, but when you control the information about what makes up balanced nutrition, you affect the entire industry.** It makes it easy to point a finger at any of the 175 other pet food companies in the US and say they don't follow your guide, they don't do clinical testing and therefore the food may not be balanced, **which could make consumers fearful of making the wrong choice.** **We all want to do right by our pets, but understanding what “right” may be an ever-changing answer or perhaps it's been right under our noses all along?**

On MMI's website it states: **“MMI provides pet nutrition education for veterinarians and students of veterinary medicine around the world.”**

How better to color a Vet's perception of what makes up an appropriate diet if the company controlled the flow of information about nutrition to Vets while getting their training?

Perhaps, this multi-million dollar research is guided purely by the passion of a company to ensure that all small animals get the best nutrition possible? **But again, I'd ask, what is a “for profit” company's ultimate goal? Maybe it's both to make a profit and to educate? Maybe not.**

To be fair, I've ordered a copy of the Guide to review and to compare with the other books on pet nutrition I've read already, but I can already sense what I'm going to be reading.

I spoke with my own Vet about this and he agreed that Hill's makes it very easy for young Vets to get free products and education, but is that education completely balanced?

My Vet is constantly “courted” by Hill's, Purina and Royal Canin. **The representatives from those companies frequently ask him out to dinner and cajole him to only carry their product line.** (*he carries a few lines of each brand and says there are too many choices and it's too confusing to try to carry any more than that*).

Pet food industry sales are well into the billions of dollars. **People WILL spend MORE for what they perceive is a better product.** There's a lot at stake. How is Hill's going to stay competitive?

...part two next up...animal testing at Hill's.

CICH Content Categories:

[Bob Dole](#) ^[11]

[Cat Food](#) ^[12]

[Grain Free](#) ^[13]

[Vets](#) ^[14]

[Raw Food](#) ^[15]

[Diet](#) ^[16]

[Hill's Pet Nutrition Center](#) ^[17]

[Hill's](#) ^[18]

[Manufacturing Tour](#) ^[19]

[Pet Food Manufacturer](#) ^[20]

Comments

Tue, 2012-08-21 11:22 — Tracy Osborn (not verified)

Hill's Prescription Diet // Royal Canin Prescription Diet ^[21]

I have to comment and I may offend others. My cat, George, who is the absolute love of my life, has been plagued by urinary issues his entire life. He has been on Hill's Prescription c/d and Royal Canin SO for the majority of his life. The only instance when he has not been on this urinary prescription food is when I let myself be swayed by what I read about Wellness brand food and how the pet's urinary health was put first in all their products. I switched George. Within months, he had one of the worst urinary tract infections he has ever had. I let myself be influenced by 'people' and not my vet. My vet explained to me the research and years of experience that go into developing these foods. Others experiences may be different. This is just mine. I respect others opinions but this was a personal experience for myself and George. We will continue to feed the prescription diet for urinary health suggested by our vet. Thank you.

Tue, 2012-08-21 15:15 — [Robin Olson](#) ^[22]

I'm not judging ^[23]

Hi Tracy, There are stories like yours and stories of cats eating really poor quality dry food for their entire life and living until they're 20. I would never say not to feed a certain brand of food, but to be aware of what goes into your cat's diet. It's possible George was purging toxins and that's why he got sick and if you'd gone a bit longer it would have resolved. It also may not be the case. My cat Spencer developed horrific feline acne when I started him on raw. It was so bad I almost stopped. After speaking with my homeopathic vet she suggested I use calendula based cream AND that toxins were the reason for his skin issues. Within another week or so his face cleared up and he's never had a problem since. Lastly, aside from nutrition there is growing evidence to support that cats living in a stressed environment develop FLUTD, heart issues and inflammation in their digestive tract. I'm not saying you stress your cat. The point here is that there are also other factors playing a role in how our cat's organs react to stress and nutrition-which effects their overall health. I'm glad George is doing well and thank you for sharing your experiences with C/D.

Tue, 2012-08-21 11:31 — [Teri and the ca...](#) (not verified) ^[24]

Re: The Tour, Part One ^[25]

MeWowZa! Impurresive post! (and I don't know why we were leaning forward either, hahameow). I look forward to reading everyone's posts on this tour (although that wasn't something they requested of us, so maybe we won't see many perspectives unfortunately). Love, love, love your photos, and I really admire and respect your views and questions, especially coming from the Raw perspective and am left with that same ending thought as you...' People WILL spend MORE for what they perceive is a better product. There's a lot at stake. How is Hill's going to stay competitive?' I was impressed by all the things you were on the tour, and so hope I can get involved with other companies tours, too.

I thoroughly enjoyed getting to know you better, too and know the way to your heart and will always travel prepared (wait til BlogPaws!)

Tue, 2012-08-21 12:51 — Kitty Jay (not verified)

can't wait ^[26]

I can't wait for part III!!!

Tue, 2012-08-21 13:03 — [Kjelle Bus a.k....](#) (not verified) ^[27]

My "mom" feed me a little bit ^[28]

My "mom" feed me a little bit of everything , so hopefully I will live for a long time with my own teeths :)

Mom say´s that the catfood buisness is a djungle , with all these brands and different food they have for soon ever type of cat.

She is just waiting for cat food for striped cats *MOL*

I got a shuttle bus not a [30]

I got a shuttle bus not a car. No water was offered. *shrug*

Nice first post, I can't wait to read what else you have to say.

CICH @ [Google+](#)
Robin @ [Google+](#)

Source URL (modified on 2012-08-21 11:07): <https://coveredincathair.com/content/hill%E2%80%99s-pet-nutrition-center-tour-part-one>

Links

- [1] <http://www.hillspet.com/index.html>
- [2] <http://www.colgatepalmolive.com/app/Colgate/US/CompanyHomePage.cvsp>
- [3] <http://www.catladyland.net/>
- [4] <http://www.kshs.org/museum>.
- [5] <http://furrydancecats.blogspot.com/>
- [6] <http://www.kshs.org/p/museum-trains-and-towns-exhibit/10672>
- [7] <http://www.hillspet.com/our-company/kostas-kontopanos-named-president-hills-us.html>
- [8] <http://www.markmorrisinstitute.org/sacn5.html>
- [9] http://store.markmorrisinstitute.org/product_p/mmi-pub-3.htm
- [10] <http://www.amazon.com/Small-Animal-Clinical-Nutrition-Michael/dp/0615297013>
- [11] <https://coveredincathair.com/taxonomy/term/38>
- [12] <https://coveredincathair.com/taxonomy/term/41>
- [13] <https://coveredincathair.com/taxonomy/term/60>
- [14] <https://coveredincathair.com/taxonomy/term/85>
- [15] <https://coveredincathair.com/category/cich-content-categories/raw-food>
- [16] <https://coveredincathair.com/category/cich-content-categories/diet>
- [17] <https://coveredincathair.com/category/cich-content-categories/hills-pet-nutrition-center>
- [18] <https://coveredincathair.com/category/cich-content-categories/hills>
- [19] <https://coveredincathair.com/category/cich-content-categories/manufacturing-tour>
- [20] <https://coveredincathair.com/category/cich-content-categories/pet-food-manufacturer>
- [21] <https://coveredincathair.com/comment/5074#comment-5074>
- [22] <https://coveredincathair.com/users/robin-olson>
- [23] <https://coveredincathair.com/comment/5079#comment-5079>
- [24] <http://furrydancecats.blogspot.com>
- [25] <https://coveredincathair.com/comment/5075#comment-5075>
- [26] <https://coveredincathair.com/comment/5076#comment-5076>
- [27] <http://kjellebus.blogspot.com>
- [28] <https://coveredincathair.com/comment/5077#comment-5077>
- [29] <http://kittyblog.net>
- [30] <https://coveredincathair.com/comment/5078#comment-5078>