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## A Rescuer's Worst Nightmare. Hoarding.

Fri, 2016-03-11 18:06 — Robin Olson

*I just did something I don't feel good about. In fact, I'm shaking.*

I just got off the phone with a Humane Enforcement Officer because I needed to let her know about a situation that has weighed heavily on my heart these past few days. Due to the legal implications surrounding this case I have to change names and locations of all involved. I hope you understand that before I go on any further. **The last thing I need is for this to blow up, but I can't keep this story to myself either.**

Last week I got a call from a lady who lives out-of-state. She'd called me a few years ago asking for help with kittens. I was able to put her in touch with a great gal who does rescue in her area who could help her. This woman was a bit difficult to work with and seemed easily stressed and somewhat paranoid, but my goal is to help the cats whatever it takes, so I did my best to focus on the task at hand. The very nice gal took two moms and 12 kittens. Everyone of them was spayed and vetted and the moms were returned to the woman. The kittens were all adopted. At the time, I was told there was no concern for the living situation of the cats and that the great gal did not see any sign of hoarding.

When the woman called again the other day, things went differently. The woman told me she had two cats who were pregnant and about to give birth any day. She'd called on other rescues and shelters but they would spay-abort the cats and she couldn't allow that to happen.

I understood her feelings and I have to admit it's something I haven't done, either. This is a divisive topic between people who do rescue. They don't usually talk about aborting kittens. **Frankly, I don't want to even think about it, but...the woman told me the pregnant cats were 9-10 MONTHS OLD. They were still kittens themselves.** The stress on their bodies, their smaller size, their inexperience could add up to a very bad situation. Our foster kitty Winnie was very young when she gave birth and only one of her kittens, Piglet, survived. Piglet only lived because Winnie had parenting help from her cat-mother, Laney. Who would help these cats?

Trying to remain calm I asked about other cats in the home. The woman admitted to having over 30, brushing it off, blaming her husband for taking in a stray male cat who was intact and the fact that they couldn't get the cats fixed until spring when the mobile spay/neuter van came around. I told her I'd find her a vet to do the procedures sooner and that we'd even pay for it if that would help, but she continued on saying her home smelled like cat urine, as if that was something anyone in her situation would expect.

**Then she, matter-of-factly said something that made it tough to not crawl through the phone line and throttle her. She told me that last year she lost (died) 16 kittens to a "URI". SIXTEEN KITTENS DIED. WHAT THE HELL WAS GOING ON.**

Clearly there is a much bigger problem going on beyond needing a rescue to "get rid of" (her words) the kittens who would be born soon. She didn't suggest they be killed, but she wanted them out of her home, just like the last two litters...well they weren't the **last** two litters that were born. **The last kittens I knew of were born years ago and she's telling me that kittens are still being born because she added there were a bunch of kittens running around "but we're going to keep them. We just need help with the ones that are being born soon."**

**I offered to take the pregnant cats and that I'd work with a rescue/s to get the moms back to her once the kittens were weaned in about 8-12 weeks. She flipped out. She began to rant that the cats couldn't leave her. Why couldn't I just come get the kittens in 8 weeks? They could be born in her home. She had them locked up in a cat carrier in the bathroom so the other cats couldn't get to them. I told her about the health risks since she had so many kittens die that certainly there was an illness in her home and she volleyed back that her cats only had worms and that she used Frontline on her dogs and used the SAME stuff on her cats to save money (which can be DEADLY! DO NOT USE FLEA TREATMENT FOR DOGS ON CATS) .**

I explained that complications can arise during birth and asked her if she was ready to take the cats to the Vet should something happen. She said she didn't drive and was handicapped. I suggested that it would be much safer for the pregnant cats to leave her for now and that I was sure any rescue who took them would give her updates on how they were doing. **She got more and more upset, saying she didn't have email and she couldn't bear for the cats to leave her. They were "her life" and that "they got upset if she ever left the house."**

The conversation was going south fast. I tried everything I could think of to get her to let me take the cats. She said she'd have to think about it and call me back. **I knew she would never call again.** As I hung up the phone, I imagined the cats, suffering, probably quite sick, pregnant, in a home that struggled to provide for them.

**And then I made the mistake of going on Zillow.com to look up her address. She lives in a 470 sq ft trailer WITH OVER 30 CATS. I knew then I could not hope for the best. I had to do something about it.**

I did some research and there wasn't much available online. I managed to find the number of that state's SPCA. Though they did not have jurisdiction where I needed help, they did tell me a few things: *1: Over 24 animals requires a breeder's license, 2: if there are unsanitary (cat urine!) conditions then it doesn't matter how many animals are on the property.*

The officer gave me the contact info of a Humane Officer who could help and today was the day we were finally able to speak about the situation.

She agreed this person needed to be investigated and also that the part of town was notorious for having issues with animals. **Though this person wasn't on her radar she felt it was definitely something she had to check out. I don't know when she will go there, but I do know that the local shelter is too small to take all the cats. I've already started to reach out to some rescue folks for help but I plan to do a lot more once I have some answers and know what is needed.**

**I asked Sam to give me a hug after the call was over. I felt like the fate of these cats was in my hands; that if they were put to sleep it was because of my call. Sam reminded me that these cats would have died anyway, perhaps a lot slower, perhaps in much worse conditions. Maybe they'd die giving birth? I hate myself for doing this, but I'd also hate myself if I didn't make the call.**

For me, there is no winner in a situation like this. It's unlikely that all the cats will get out alive. What's likely is that this woman and her husband are being sickened by the ammonia in the air in their trailer. I want to think of the good that could come out of this. Perhaps not being stressed by the responsibility for caring for so many animals in too small of a space would help them, **but I doubt it will happen. I think the woman is going to flip out...way out...if they take her cats away and my fear is she's going to come after me next.**

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