

## **DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO RESCUE ANIMALS?**

**By Dottie Schira**

*The article below was written by Dottie Schira, founder of the Bird Placement Program and tireless worker for the animals. Dottie died of cancer complications on 6/5/07. She left a space that cannot be filled in the community that focuses on bird rescue and owner education. We felt the need to post this article (un-edited) on our site because we have been through so much of this ourselves.*

There is so much more involved in animal rescue than just helping unwanted animals. Many people do not realize what all it takes to become a rescuer or what a rescuer has to go through. It involves long hours, frustration, no pay but many rewards from the animals you save.

It is very costly to rescue. You need to purchase supplies you will need to properly provide for the animals you are going to rescue not to mention the stack of veterinarian bills you are going to have. Many of the animals you are going to rescue have either never been to a vet or are not healthy and need immediate medical attention. Some rescues appear healthy only to find a serious medical problem during a vet check. I have personally rescued heart worm positive dogs (costing over \$200 to treat and yes I had them treated), a very old Pionus parrot with cataracts in both eyes, crippled feet and bacterial infections. That bird's medical care ended up being over \$400. The bird lived less than a year before it's poor little system couldn't take it anymore from the years of untreated illnesses by its former owner. I have had puppy rescues die in my arms the next day after saving them, only to find they had distemper. I would cradle them in my arms trying to will them to live, telling them how much I loved them and praying to God to spare their lives as they were dying. This became too much for me to deal with so I decided many years ago to stop taking in abandoned puppies and rescue abandoned pregnant dogs. The puppies are born in my house free of parvo and distemper.

Now let's talk about the cleaning. You don't get any breaks here either. <grin> You can easily spend hours scrubbing bird cages, perches, toys the wall and floor around the cage...only to repeat the whole process in a few days or week later. I have been awakened at 4:00AM by a horrible smell only to find that a new dog rescue had diarrhea all over my laundry room and I mean all over; behind and under the washing machine, in the corner of the floor along the wood trim, on the wall and all over anything that was on the floor. NOW, you have to clean the mess while covering your nose hoping you don't make a mess yourself as a lump develops in your throat and your stomach churns from the horrible smell.

You may spend time nursing a sick bird, puppy or kitten having to feed the animal or medicate it several times a day, slowly and carefully, using an eyedropper. You cannot rush taking care of a sick animal because one mistake can mean the death of the animal. This is especially true when dealing with a sick bird. In the meantime, your family is sitting at the dinner table waiting for you to join them in the hopes of enjoying a family dinner together and your spouse is getting madder and madder that you are neglecting the

family – for the animals. You finally sit down to dinner and the phone rings. It is about another animal needing your help!

Your friends and relatives think you are “nuts” for doing what you do for your rescued dogs, birds, other animals and don’t like to come over for a visit because you have too many animals in the house. Wait a minute. This could be a good thing (just kidding <grin>). Your relatives get upset and do not understand why you cancel out on visiting someone on a holiday because you are nursing a sick bird or puppy.

I also do abandoned pregnant dog rescue. Many of the mother dogs have diarrhea for a day or two after delivering puppies which is brought on from all the stress they are under with coming to a new home usually just days prior. As the puppies get older they require more work. First thing in the morning or just before you go to bed you find that the puppies had diarrhea. Not only have they gone slipping and sliding through it but they have smeared it all over each other, on their food dishes, in their bed and on the floor even though you had newspaper down. You have to give each puppy a bath, scrub their food dishes, bed and floor. After you are all done with that mess you wonder, will I have to do this all over again tomorrow or is the diarrhea under control?

Now comes time to adopt the animals out to new homes. You can spend hours interviewing just one person who wishes to adopt an animal from you. You go over every aspect of owning a pet and the responsibilities involved. You invite them over to your house to meet the animal and spend more hours answering their questions and giving them advice only to find they really weren’t interested in adopting, they just wanted to bring the kids to see some animals or they are just looking for now. “And don’t think for a minute that this won’t happen – it happens often”. You rearrange your schedule to accommodate someone who must come and see the animal immediately or so they tell you. You cancel previous plans and wait at home for them to show up. They never show up or bother to call you to cancel.

Now come the people who expect you to give them the animal for free. After all, didn’t you get it for free? Do they consider the medical expenses you might have in the animal or the food and supplies you had to purchase not to mention your time involved? You try to explain all of this to them. You even explain that if you do ever make a profit, if you are lucky, it only ends up being taken by another rescue who ends up with medical problems that you have to treat. Do these people understand? Not for one minute. They only see the adoption fee before them and start adding up the adoption fees you are charging per animal knowing that you MUST be making a profit and thinking that you are taking advantage of them. Don’t bother explaining any further. You can not convince them you are not making a profit even though you have a stack of veterinary bills showing how far in debt you are from rescuing animals.

Your rescue efforts have grown and developed to the next level. You are taking in more animals and you need to start thinking about bringing in extra money to support these rescues. With the bird rescues I have decided to start charging a fee for behavioral consultations to bring in some extra money to support the rescues. In the past I gave out

this advice free of charge. I would say in the past over 80% of the people asking for behavioral advice for their pet birds would not listen or follow my advice. They would tell me why what I suggest won't work even though they have not tried it. Some people expected me to call them long distance at my expense and most didn't even bother to thank me or give me follow ups on how my advice was working. Now that I charge a fee I have to deal with rude comments from bird owners accusing me of not caring enough because I won't help them with their bird for free. I am not permitted to think, "Well isn't it fair to say if they cared enough about their pet they'd be willing to pay a fee especially when it is going for a good cause?" Why is it always on the rescuer's shoulder to do all the caring and paying?

Now you are thinking, "Okay, there can't be any more down sides to rescuing so now she is going to talk about the joys of rescuing," nope, not yet. **Now come the personal attacks.** People who feel everything you are doing is wrong. People who accuse you of everything you can imagine. After all, you must be up to something. Why else would you rescue animals in need if you claim to not be making any money at it? You will be accused of taking advantage of the animals you are rescuing because you are charging an adoption fee. You will hear people tell you how it is WRONG to ever make a profit from rescuing animals but it is okay to go in debt up to your ears. You will be accused of charging too much, not doing enough, not doing it well enough, not being nice enough, not giving enough FREE advice, not giving good enough advice, giving wrong advice and the list goes on.

Why is it okay for Doctors to charge fees for making people well but it is wrong for animal rescuers to charge a fee for making animals well? People do not understand the word profit when it comes to animal rescue. You can not consider an adoption fee profit. By the time you take out your feed and supply expenses, vet care expenses, not to mention your time involved, there is NO profit. People will tell you that you should not make a profit anyway. Those people think small. If you can make some money such as charging fees for behavioral consultations, fund raisers...it can be used towards medical care for future rescues. It's funny, many of the people telling us how we should not get paid even though we work hard and put in long hours, would never do what we do unless THEY got paid.

People who know nothing about you, the animals you have rescued, how you care for them, the environment in which you keep and house them, will throw personal attacks at you. They will accuse you of being selfish, just wanting attention, making money (although they never tell you how you are making money), or being an animal collector. You will be called all kinds of names and have every detail and aspect of your rescue efforts picked apart and criticized.

Who are doing these attacks and why? People just wanting to cause trouble for lack of anything better to do. Fellow rescuers who have turned bitter or become jealous because you are doing rescues better or more efficiently than they are. What are you as an animal rescuer expected to do? Take the abuse and walk away. If you defend yourself you will be accused of being too defensive therefore, you must be hiding something. Each time

you make a statement defending yourself the accuser will tell you how you are wrong. Do these attackers ever give advice on how you might do things better? NEVER. They get too much pleasure from attacking without cause, reason or morals. You will soon come to realize that these type of people attack for nothing more than the pure pleasure of upsetting you. Do you ever get offers from people wanting to help you or giving you advice on how you might improve your rescue efforts? Do you get comments from people commending you for a job well done? Very rarely and I mean very rarely.

### Summary

Let's review again for a minute what is involved with animal rescue and why we want to do it. It is expensive, not to mention hard work and long hours without pay. You put up with ungrateful people expecting the world from you, attack your every effort and accusing you of who knows what. So why do we rescue animals and where are the rewards involved? The animals. What do I mean by that statement? Just look into the eyes of an abused, scared or neglected animal finally starting to trust you and you will know what I mean. That is all the reward we need. I have seen many abused dogs who have been beaten and almost starved to death by their previous owners only to readily love and trust people again asking no more of us than to just love them. If only more people could be this trusting and forgiving.

If you are not scared out of wanting to rescue animals after reading this page then you have what it takes to rescue animals.