



## **An Open Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Average Pet Owner**

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Average Pet Owner:

Thank you for contacting us animal rescuers, shelter volunteers, and foster-homes about your inability to keep your pet. We receive an extremely high volume of inquiries and requests to accept surrendered animals (and none of us is getting paid, OK?). To help us expedite your problem as quickly as possible, please observe the following guidelines:

1. Do not say that you are "CONSIDERING finding a good home" for your pet, or that you, "feel you MIGHT be forced to," or that you "really THINK it would be better if" you unloaded the poor beast. Ninety-five percent of you have already got your minds stone-cold made up that the animal WILL be out of your life by the weekend at the latest. Say so. If you don't, I'm going to waste a lot of time giving you common-sense, easy solutions for very fixable problems, and you're going to waste a lot of time coming up with fanciful reasons why the solution couldn't possibly work for you. For instance, you say the cat claws the furniture, and I tell you about nail-clipping and scratching posts and aversion training, and then you go into a long harangue about how your husband won't let you put a scratching post in the family room, and your ADHD daughter cries if you use a squirt bottle on the cat, and your congenital thumb abnormalities prevent you from using nail scissors and etc., etc. Just say you're getting rid of the cat.

2. Do not waste time trying to convince me how nice and humane you are. Your co-worker recommended that you contact me because I am nice to animals, not because I am nice to people, and I don't like people who "get rid of" their animals. "Get rid of" is my least favorite phrase in any language. I hope someone "gets rid of" YOU someday. I am an animal advocate, not a people therapist. After all, for your ADHD daughter, you can get counselors, special teachers, doctors, social workers, etc. Your pet has only me, and people like me, to turn to in his or her need, and we are unpaid, overworked, stressed-out, and demoralized. So don't tell me this big long story about how, "We love this dog so much, and we even bought him a special bed that cost \$50, and it is just KILLING us to part with him, but honestly, our maid is just awash in dog hair every time she cleans, and his breath sometimes just reeks of liver, so you can see how hard we've tried, and how dear he is to us, but we really just can't . . ." You are not nice, and it is not killing you. It is, in all probability, literally killing your dog, but you're going to be just fine once the beast is out of your sight. Don't waste my time trying to make me like you or feel sorry for you in your plight.

3. Do not try to convince me that your pet is exceptional and deserves special treatment. I don't care if you taught him to sit. I don't care if she's a beautiful Persian. I have a waiting list of battered and/or whacked-out animals who need help, and I have no room to foster-house your pet. Do not send me long messages detailing how Fido just l-o-v-e-s blankies and carries his favorite blankie everywhere, and oh, when he gets all excited and happy, he spins around in circles, isn't that cute? He really is darling, so it wouldn't be any trouble at all for us to find him a good home. Listen, we can go down to the pound and count the darling, spinning, blankie-loving beasts on death row by the dozens, any day of the week. And, honey, Fido is a six-year-old Shepherd-Lab mix. I am not lying when I tell you that big, older, mixed-breed, garden-variety dogs are almost completely unadoptable, and I don't care if they can whistle Dixie or send semaphore signals with their blankies. What you don't realize is that, though you're trying to lie to me, you're actually telling the truth: Your pet IS a special, wonderful, amazing creature. But this mean old world does not care. More importantly, YOU do not care, and I can't fix that problem.

All I can do is grieve for all the exceptional animals who live short, brutal, loveless lives and die without anyone ever recognizing that they were indeed very, very special.

4. Finally, just, for pity's sake, for the animal's sake, tell the truth, and the whole truth. Do you think that if you just mumble that your cat is "high-strung," I will say, "Okey-doke! No problemo!" and take it into foster care? No, I will start asking questions and uncover the truth, which is that your cat has not used a litter box in the last six months. Do not tell me that you "can't" crate your dog. I will ask what happens when you try to crate him, and you will either be forced to tell me the symptoms of full-blown, severe separation anxiety, or else you will resort to lying some more, wasting more of our time.

And, if you succeed in placing your pet in a shelter or foster care, do not tell yourself the biggest lie of all: "Those nice people will take him and find him a good home, and everything will be fine." Those nice people will indeed give the animal every possible chance, but if we discover serious health or behavior problems, if we find that your misguided attempts to train or discipline him have driven him over the edge, we will do what you are too immoral and cowardly to do: We will hold the animal in our arms, telling him truthfully that he is a good dog or cat, telling him truthfully that we are sorry and we love him, while the vet ends his life.

How can we be so heartless as to kill your pet, you ask? Do not ever dare to judge us. At least we tried. At least we stuck with him to the end. At least we never abandoned him to strangers, as you certainly did, didn't you? In short, this little old rescuer/foster momma has reached the point where she would prefer you pet owners to tell her stories like this:

"We went to Wal-Mart and picked up a free pet in the parking lot a couple of years ago. Now we don't want it anymore. We're lazier than we thought. We've got no patience either. We're starting to suspect the animal is really smarter than we are, which is giving us self-esteem issues. Clearly, we can't possibly keep it. Plus, it might be getting sick; it's acting kind of funny.

**"We would like you to take it in eagerly, enthusiastically, and immediately.**

**"We hope you'll realize what a deal you're getting and not ask us for a donation to help defray your costs. After all, this is an (almost) pure-bred animal, and we'll send the leftover food along with it. We get the food at Wal-Mart too, and boy, it's a really good deal, price-wise".**

**"We are very irritated that you haven't shown pity on us in our great need and picked the animal up already. We thought you people were supposed to be humane! Come and get it today. No, we couldn't possibly bring it to you; the final episode of "Survivor II" is on tonight."**

**Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Pet Owner, for your cooperation.**

***Author Unknown, but could be any shelter worker or rescuer.***

