



**It is needs to be said, all is not right in the rescue world.**

Opening this can of worms isn't going to win anyone a popularity contest but we can't continue to ignore the shoddy care some shelter/rescues provide. Perhaps the subject is avoided for fear that people put off with the performance of some rescues will tar all rescues with the same brush. That would be more than a shame, it would be devastating. So let's be clear from the get-go, those who embrace the harsh and heart-wrenching task of rescuing animals are irreplaceable and priceless and they deserve our deepest gratitude. Still, the reality is it's not uncommon for animals to be neglected and mistreated at rescues.

**Anyone can call themselves a rescue.**

Rescues and shelters are sanctuaries for those vulnerable souls in need of aid and protection; a safe haven from harm. Regardless of how well intentioned a rescue staff may be, they can easily become overwhelmed and fall short of their ambitions. More rescues sink into this predicament than we would like to think. Worse are those who call themselves rescues but treat their charges as

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commodities and use rescues as a place to network for business, a façade behind which they can advance their own self-interests. Donations are not always used for their intended purpose but instead for personal expenses. This diverts donations from those rescues and shelters that really deserve them.

Listening to the experiences of potential adoptees, all too often the complaint is no response to their calls and emails so they eventually move on to find a pet elsewhere. This leads to longer stays than necessary for the animals and added costs for the rescue. Consequently, by the time these animals do find homes they are often stressed and exhibiting behavioral problems. It is not uncommon for their new 'forever home' to return them back to the shelter; a vicious circle that frustrates everyone. You can be assured puppy mills and back yard breeders eagerly call back all inquiries.

We've heard from people who have encountered rescues and shelters using shock collars as standard procedure. This egregious mistreatment of animals is generally by shock collar trainers who provide financially strapped rescues with their

training services for free. They electrically shock fearful and confused dogs to 'teach them manners', sometimes without the rescue of shelters knowledge. Why offer their services for free? It's a great way to expand their client base. When a new dog owner adopts from the shelter, the volunteer trainer is recommended. A trainer can profit substantially by selling new owners shock collars & classes. The added benefit is the instant respect and credibility their volunteer work generates, undeserved though it may be. There is nothing wrong with finding creative ways to gain new business. What's indefensible is to do it under the guise of helping animals when you are hurting them. Training sessions are mandatory when you adopt from some shelters, which is a good thing when the trainer is a positive one. Shock collars aren't the only abuse that takes place. In addition to shock collars, animals may also be subjected to overcrowding, medical neglect, debarking, declawing, inadequate food, hoarders and incompatible animals forced to live together in close quarters.

The rescue movement could be the best thing that ever happened for animals. Still it helps no one to bury our heads in the sand and ignore the fact that all rescues and shelters are not created equal.

Of the millions of animals dealt with by thousands of shelters each year, some will find loving homes, but just as many will face darker fate. The bar is set so low, if one can say there is a bar at all, the care some rescued animals receive can be worse than the neglect and abuse from whence they came.

**Nobody is watching. This begs the question. Who will rescue the rescued? It's you.**

Make an educated decision before adopting from or supporting any organization. Question everything and we all benefit. Spend time with the animals in a shelter and they will speak to you. Find out if the shelter or rescue declaws, removes vocal cords, uses bark collars or electrified enclosures. If you suspect abuse follow your instincts, report it to authorities and insist they document your complaint. Too often there is no investiga-

tion, follow up or record kept. To report abuse you will need to research who is responsible for enforcing animal cruelty law in your vicinity. In most places it is the SPCA. Where there is no local SPCA or other animal welfare group filling this role you would report abuse to the police. If it is critical and the animal is in imminent danger call the police immediately. If the abuse or neglect is taking place at a local rescue and not an emergency, report the abuse to the authority funding the group. If the response is unsatisfactory, report the abuse to your MP, your city councillor, the Mayor, anyone who will listen. If all else fails, call the media. Negligence and misconduct is not easy to prove and relief for the abused relies on your persistence, documentation and follow up. Outrageous as it seems, people will witness abuse but never report it. When you find a worthy rescue or shelter in need, please help, however you can.

*Generally speaking, the terms shelter, rescue and pound are used interchangeably. Add in SPCA's, Human Societies and other animal welfare groups and the difference between them can be confusing. Anyone can call themselves a rescue. One key difference lies in the way organizations are funded. Some rely strictly on private donations and set their own rules and standards, while others receive public tax dollars in which case the contributing authority may set their policies. Some small private rescues may only take in two of three animals. Some animal welfare groups may not be set up to shelter animals at all but instead concentrate more on educating the public about animal welfare issues. Even so, those who don't take in animals may be willing to help with finding adequate shelter for a needy animal and in certain situations assist with medical expenses. Collectively the purpose of all these groups is to help better the lives of animals.*