

Going into Debt to Rescue Abandoned Dogs by Laura Simpson

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□Hunters in the United States will spend some \$22.9 billion in “sporting goods” this year, but at the end of the season, a few of them will abandon their hounds, allegedly over poor performance and the cost of a bowl of kibble.

□“Hounds are the best dogs out there and its hard to understand how someone could betray them,” explains volunteer rescuer Tracie Mitchum of South Carolina. “Some hunters take them into the woods, have them sit down and then tell them to stay and because the dogs are so loyal and so eager to please, they do. They die there in the woods because some hunters feel it’s cheaper to replace the dogs with new ones next season than to feed them all year long.”

□“Sometimes you’ll drive down the road and find 5 or 10 dogs,” Tracie says. She’s the first to acknowledge that this is not the norm for most hunters, but it’s happening frequently enough to cause great alarm. We hope that perhaps some of the dogs are simply lost. We pray that some of the hunters are looking for them. But we fear that abandonment is indeed on the rise.

□The first time Tracie found a hound on the side of a wooded, rural road, she brought the dog into her car and was able to track down her owners. She expected a joyful reunion and was surprised when the dog’s “owner” responded coolly. She offered to have the dog spayed for free but the man turned her down and sent her on her way. It wasn’t until the pattern of finding hound dogs on the side of the road repeated itself a couple times and after conversations with some insiders that Tracie realized what was happening.

□“That’s my only regret,” Tracie says mournfully. “I wish I had known back then what was going on. I can’t stand to think of what happened to those dogs once I returned them to their families.”

□On any given Saturday, you’ll find Tracie sitting outside in front of the Whole Foods Market with an array of cats and dogs she’s rescued. She brings the pets to the parking lot hoping to find applicants to adopt them and to raise funds to provide veterinary care to get them spayed/neutered, to treat them for heartworm and to repair their broken bones.

□“I feel welcome at Whole Foods and it’s refreshing,” Tracie says during our recent chat on the campus of the College of Charleston where she works as an administrative professional. “I need to be there on weekends because if I can squeeze out another \$50, I can save another life.”

□ And saving lives she does. The other day Tracie sent out a simple email asking for someone to accompany her to rescue a mother dog and some pups at an immigrant camp where she assists in spaying/neutering community cats. She made no promises that she could secure custody of the mother dog, but was determined to do what she could as soon as she received a tip that the dogs were in jeopardy of being turned over to animal control, where euthanasia is often an outcome due to overcrowding.

□ Because of the language barrier, the entirety of the situation was unclear to Tracie, but she did understand that the dogs were in imminent danger and her window of opportunity was closing fast. When I checked in with Tracie some 48 hours later, she reported that all were in foster care and doing well...including the mother dog.

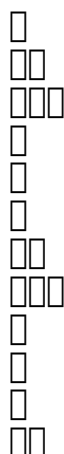
□ “Mom and pups are doing well,” Tracie explains. “The foster parents are in love with the mom and want to keep her as long as it takes for us to find a quality home for her ourselves, instead of putting her into the shelter’s program.”

□ No matter how long I’ve been in the rescue business and no matter how many faces I’ve seen, it’s those prize winning moments of individual power that give me goosebumps. Last year, Tracie spent nearly \$15,000 caring for rescued animals. Her boyfriend helped with part of those costs and the rest has gone onto credit cards which she’s trying to make a dent in each month. But the pace of animals in need is dizzying and Tracie seems to be gaining momentum. Most of all, she’s searching for rescue groups to connect with as it’s difficult to place all the animals herself.

□ When we spoke the other day, she had just finished pulling buckshot out of the hind leg of one of the dogs. I offered to send her a few hundred dollars and she immediately began trying to decide how to apply it for heartworm treatment for two dogs, surgery for another, mange treatment for a third, care for a cat with feline immunodeficiency virus...and so on and so on. I bit my lip as I realized how deep in she is and how much help she truly needs.

□ My charity, the Harmony Fund, is collecting funds to help Tracie. She can’t hold on for long without outside assistance and we’re not about to see her turn animals away for lack of funding alone. We’re setting up special fund for Tracie’s work with the hopes that help will come in a little bit at a time. If you’d like to help, please visit our website here.

□ I look forward to sharing some of Tracie’s rescue stories in upcoming blogs here on Care2.com. Meanwhile, have a look at the photos below, which represent just a few of the animals who are now safe thanks to Tracie’s limitless devotion.



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