

Declawing Regrets

September 26, 2013 by Tatiana Garrett in Blogs, Featured, Tatiana Garrett, Wellness with 10 Comments



By Tatiana Garrett

As an animal advocate, it is hard for me to even admit that I once declawed a cat, but I want to tell the story and explain why I regret it. I'm sharing this because I know there are still so many who think declawing is not a big deal. If one person reads this and decides against it I'll be happy to have shared my mistake.

Human beings are always learning and I love that. I grew up in a very animal-friendly household, yet in my lifetime there have been many improvements in pet care that make the norms of recent years less than desirable. Education is key.

I understand the idea of why some choose to declaw cats. People love kitties and want to have them as companions, but don't want to sacrifice nice furniture. My case was similar (although the furniture concerns weren't mine).

I was in my early twenties and was moving in with my boyfriend down in south Florida from my hometown, Chicago. Young and in love, I was sure this was going to be the man I would marry. If only I knew then what I know now...but life is about the journey and the lessons we gain through experience.

My boyfriend flew up to Chicago so we could drive down together with my car. I was excited about the move, not only because it meant that we would be together after dating long-distance for six months (we met while he was on an assignment in Chicago), but also because I really wanted a chance to live near the ocean.

A few weeks after the move, we found a place and got settled in and my mom was going to put my cat, Ronin, on a flight. As my mother and I discussed preparing him for the journey and locating his vaccine records, my boyfriend chimed in with, "Your cat is declawed, right? I love cats, but ours were always declawed and my white leather couches weren't cheap."

I remember hesitating at first. My cat was rescued; taken in as an injured stray with a broken hip. I found him in the woods near my grandmother's house when I was ten years old, so he was at least twelve years old at the time I was moving to Florida. It seemed "extra wrong" to me to declaw him so late in life. I was learning to compromise to be in a relationship though, and my mother

took Ronin in for the procedure (which seems like such a light word in retrospect) and he arrived and settled in to our home within a few weeks.

I have to say that Ronin recovered from the surgery and adjusted well to Florida living. He lived for another five years afterwards (his final three years were just me and him back home in Chicago), and never displayed any signs of discomfort in his paws, but I still regret putting him through the surgery.

The Florida relationship didn't last. I turned my life upside-down, moved a considerable distance, and declawed my cat. The boyfriend turned out to not be so ready to share his life, and was much more enthusiastic about partying and maintaining pristine couches. I lived in south Florida for a total of two years and eventually drove myself back to Chicago with Ronin.

Years later I learned that declawing isn't a simple nail trim. Back when I put my cat through the "procedure," I mistakenly thought it was a short nail trim that would be cauterized to prevent future nail growth. When I learned that I actually had my cat's first joints removed my stomach sank. What I truly regret was that I had it done to Ronin for a relationship with someone that wasn't even really in love with me.

Lesson learned. Real love means acceptance and valuing the happiness of another over material things. The Florida experience taught me to hold out for someone that accepts me for the person that I am and who celebrates the fact that I'm empathetic enough to not want to hurt living beings in my care.

Life, love, and all the things worth doing can get a little dirty and messy at times. Look for people that value genuine friendships over carpets, furniture, or other things that only hold material value. I feel bad for people that have beautiful things, but are too afraid to let friends (furry or otherwise) into their heart and home. It must be so lonely to live in a pristine museum.

Declawing is illegal in many areas of Europe and some veterinarians in the U.S. refuse to perform the procedure. In an NPR interview, John Bradshaw, author of *Cat Sense*, said declawing is "regarded as mutilation of the animal." He described how a section of the digit/finger is removed, and spoke about personally experiencing "phantom pains" when he had a similar injury to a finger.

Since having the procedure performed on my cat, I have met people with horror stories of cats that were maimed, developed permanent limps, or could no longer enter a litter box after being declawed. I was a wreck when Ronin passed away, he was my faithful companion for seventeen years and he had been there for me through so much. I regret declawing him still, and I have adopted two other cats since Ronin—they are both healthy, happy, and have all of their digits intact.

My two cats now benefit from regular "pawdicures." Training them to enjoy this was quite easy. I started as soon as I adopted them and began by simply handling their paws and manually extending their claws. I did this on a frequent basis and always praised and rewarded them. A small human toenail trimmer held sideways (as to not splinter the claw) works best for me. I also give them some great scratching post options at home.

I regret declawing Ronin, but he taught me the valuable lesson that true love means acceptance. To love a pet means you put up with a little hair and possibly some scratched furniture. In exchange, you have the greetings, support, and unconditional love of a devoted companion. Hold out for human relationships that value the same attributes that are found in bonds between humans and their fur babies.