

Declaw Letter from Dominic

Tracie, I was an animal groomer for years and have taught mentally handicapped children for the past ten years. When I was a child, besides constantly rescuing wildlife and strays (which I still do), I would sometimes steal dogs and cats that were allowed to roam, have them neutered, and return them to their homes. I currently have four rescued pugs, three rescued cats, and a number of birds and small animals, many of whom are also rescues. I am a foster parent for a pug rescue organization. I feed my dogs and cats, a homemade raw food diet, which I grind and prepare myself. My dogs and cats have access to a huge backyard, which is fenced with a cat proof fence. I tell you all of this so that you can see that I am not just a shallow person, who cares more for my hard earned "things", on a teacher's salary, than I care for my cats.

My dogs and cats live together and I am very concerned with my cats occasionally smacking my bugged eye dogs in the face. Most of my cats (at one time there were six) would use scratching posts but my Cleo would use everything, including her favorite, the smooth kitchen cabinets. She also loved to jump on my back when I would bend over, and dig her claws in, to hang on. I decided to declaw.

I was amazed that my cats would come home the next day from the procedure and run, jump, climb, and act as if nothing had happened. I had heard all the horror stories and was very pleased with my experience. Those cats were now free to scratch wherever they wanted, smack a dog if they wished, and never to be scolded again. I have never had any of them become biters. I have no litter box problems. They can "claw" anywhere they like and can settle disputes with each other or the dogs, without fear of injury. They jump, climb, and exhibit the usual behaviors. I am amazed on how they do use their toes, like fingers, to manipulate and hold on to things. Cleo scratched with her imaginary claws, on the kitchen cabinets for the next twenty-one years. She did thankfully stop the jumping on my back behavior, because she soon learned that she would slide off.

Yes, I realize that declawing is a radical procedure, which is accompanied by some pain, immediately after surgery. We confine them to our homes, depriving them of the joy of freedom, because it is outweighed by their health and safety. Our desire to keep and love pets causes us to alter every animal we keep. We clip our birds' wings and keep our fish in glass boxes. Of course, the goal is to have every pet guardian make their pets' lives as happy and fulfilled as possible.

I'll never forget a vet who told me that he recommended declawing to a rescuer, who kept a number of cats in her home. She was constantly bringing cats in to see him, with injuries, caused by a few dominant cats in the mix. He declawed a few of those top cats. They remained on top, but no longer could injure the less aggressive kitties.

Tracie, I am convinced that many kitties will not be adopted and that there will be a large increase of cats turned into animal shelters, if declawing is not an option. All the training and scratching posts in the world, did not stop my Cleo from scratching the kitchen cabinets. The thought of innocent kitties being killed because another pet or a child was

injured, or because the cat loves the couch more than any scratching posts, is very frightening.

I am not convinced that declawing, from my own experiences, causes the behavior problems attributed to the procedure. When done by a competent vet, healing was quick and activity returned to normal, almost immediately. I wonder if many behavior problems are caused rather from the lack of understanding from guardians, poor diet, overcrowding, psychological disorders, and boredom.

I have not read the rationale of why vet schools no longer teach the procedure. Is it pressure from animal welfare/rights groups, or is there real science behind it? I am always annoyed by people who use one personal experience to argue an issue, but I have thirty-two years of experiences, which have shaped my opinion. I fear for my own living situation, for any cats that may come into my life in the future. Chances are, I may not have a Cleo and all future cats may use posts, but how do I keep cats from getting shredded ears or a pug from losing an eye?

Tracie, my attempt is not to debate, but to present very real concerns, which I have not heard, discussed on your program. What are the alternate solutions for those dominant cats who lash out at other pets? What are the alternate solutions for cats like Cleo, who I adored for twenty-two years? I welcome any information you can offer, because if declawing is outlawed, I need to know how to provide the safest and most peaceful environment, for all of my future pets.

Thank you for an interesting and informative program.

Sincerely, Dominic in Palmetto, Florida