

## Case 5: Stealing Pets

In 2013, Judy Camp saw something that shocked her: her neighbor was keeping his dog (an Australian cattle dog named “Duke”) outside on a four foot chain in temperatures that were set to dive below freezing for several nights. This wasn’t the first time she’d seen the dog, which her neighbor claimed was being kept as a guard dog and treated as such, outside in miserable conditions. Other neighbors had complained to the police about possible neglect of the dog. Some states and municipalities have so-called “anti-chain” laws that prevent chaining dogs outside for a certain amount of time, but Camp’s town of Okanogan, Washington isn’t one of them<sup>22</sup>. The police had visited, but judged that the dog was being adequately fed, so they didn’t intervene.<sup>23</sup>

That night, Camp decided she had to do something drastic, and stole Duke from the chain. She brought him inside and after the weekend took him to the veterinarian. At the veterinarian the dog was found to be stolen and Camp had an altercation with the police. She was charged with stealing the dog and obstruction of justice. If she’d been found guilty on all charges, she could have faced \$5000 in fines and three years in jail.<sup>24</sup>

While there are laws against animal cruelty and animal neglect, dogs are considered property under the law and cannot be taken from their owners without their owners consent. The law gives dog owners a large degree of latitude in how they treat their dogs. However, Camp saw her action as a rescue from awful conditions that overrode the rights given to Duke’s owners.

In March a jury acquitted her and in the mean time she had offered \$500 to the dog’s owners for Duke and her offer was accepted. She was convicted only of obstructing justice and paid a fine as well as doing 100 hours of community service.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Rebecca F. Wisch, "Table of State Dog Tether Laws," Animal Legal & Historical Center, 2013, <http://www.animallaw.info/articles/State%20Tables/tbustetherlaws.htm>

<sup>23</sup> Kip Hill, "Okanogan woman cleared of pet theft," The Spokesman Review, March 28, 2014, <http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2014/mar/28/okangonan-woman-cleared-pet-theft/>

<sup>24</sup> Martha Neil, "Woman who says she rescued neglected dog is acquitted of pet theft but convicted of obstruction," ABA Journal, March 31, 2014, [http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/woman\\_who\\_says\\_she\\_rescued\\_neglected\\_dog\\_is\\_acquitted\\_of\\_pet\\_theft\\_but\\_conv/](http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/woman_who_says_she_rescued_neglected_dog_is_acquitted_of_pet_theft_but_conv/)

<sup>25</sup> Kip Hill, "Okanogan woman fined, sentenced to community service in dog theft case," The Spokesman Review, April 14, 2014, <http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2014/apr/14/okanogan-woman-fined-sentenced-community-service-d/>