

Becky Correia, Sacramento City Shelter (Front Street)

I was a volunteer at the City of Sacramento animal shelter (now Front Street Shelter) from 2006 until this last summer. Penny was hired after I was already an experienced dog volunteer working under the supervision of the volunteer coordinator, Claudia at the time.

Penny brought her old school sheltering management right from the very beginning, us volunteers saw an immediate increase in dogs that were on the "adoptable" section being pulled and euthanized for a variety of callous reasons - too old, been too long, no one wants and her favorite, "barrier aggressive." Penny also empowered some very long term animal care tech's with pretty severe compassion fatigue with the power to make unilateral decisions on the lives of dogs not just in stray section but the adoptable section. One such dog was Cricket, a lovely 9 year old shepherd-mix female who was one of my favorites. This dog was a gem, she really was and yes, she was older and the networking by the shelter at the time under Penny's reign was pathetic but we took this dog to offsites, we had her out and about and she was a great dog. But one Saturday morning I came into work with the dogs and she was gone, had been pulled the night before by a staff person and euthanized that morning. Not one bad behavior had anyone ever seen but this person decided she had been aggressive towards another dog. We were outraged and brought this issue up to the Citizen's Advisory Board protesting what Penny was allowing to happen to all the animals at the shelter. It was a start but what really happened was Penny became angry at us volunteers and started taking steps to get rid of us.

She knew the city budgets were being hacked at due to the poor economy and one of the first cuts she offered up was to eliminate the volunteer coordinator (which in effect was removing us volunteers). The outcry at this maneuver was loud and vocal, we showed up at city council budget hearing meetings in force, there must have been 70 people in support of Claudia and the valuable position, we made statements, documented the countless volunteer hours we donated to the shelter that would have had to be done by paid staff, and it made a difference. Penny looked like a fool. While we saved the position, it still meant we had to deal with Penny and her reign of death.

Besides Cricket, another time I was working at the shelter doing the laundry and I was told about three puppies under 4 weeks of age, two terriers and a Chi-terrier mix, that would be euthanized if I couldn't foster them because Penny's policy was to kill animals that were too young to be put up for adoption. I immediately said yes I would and that I would take them home after I finished my volunteer chores. In between, somehow Penny saw these puppies in their temporary kennel and got on the internal

staff walkie-talkies and demanded to know who was "hiding" these puppies that were too young to adopt. One of the staff then spoke up and said they were going to foster. Those same little puppies are now living wonderful lives with friends of mine who adopted them. The Chi-mix is living with my good friend in San Francisco, he lives in a wonderful city and his owner is a partner with PriceWaterhouseCoopers. The other two dogs live in Sacramento with two very good friends and they too have fabulous lives. None of that would have happened if Penny had found the puppies before I stepped up to foster them. And she was responsible for so many deaths of puppies and kittens during her reign at our shelter, it was tragic.

There was also a personal interaction I had with Penny that showed me her real colors and her frightening temper. There were a couple pit bull puppies stolen from the adoptable section that had been adopted, they were just waiting for their spay/neuter appointment. One of the puppies was later found tied to a bench in a bad part of town. One of her staff alerted me that the puppy had been recovered but that he was very sick, possibly with parvo. They knew that I knew his adopter and she was heartbroken about him being stolen. So I told his adopter he had been found and she demanded the shelter still let her have him despite his sick condition, she took him to her own vet for care (which he sadly didn't survive, he had gone too long at the shelter without care). Penny was furious that someone told me he had been found and she cornered me in the office area where we sign in and out. She demanded that I tell her who had told me. I maintained my calm and told her no, I would not. She just about hit me, she was yelling and angry and I finally walked away but I know she wanted to hit me. This was in front of numerous other staff and volunteers, who all saw that she wanted the name so she could fire the person who did nothing wrong but try and help a puppy.

Ellen Nagata-Harper, Sacramento City Shelter (Front Street)

I have been a cat volunteer with the city shelter (Front Street) since Fall of 2007. I had my first encounter with Penny's animal care "philosophy" when I came in one morning to help with the cattery cleaning. I had been there a day or so before and the adoption and stray hold buildings were full. When I walked into the adoption building, I noticed many empty cat condos. I thought they had possibly been transferred to rescues. Then, I checked out the stray hold cat and kitten rooms and saw that they had been almost completely cleared out. When I asked what happened, Penny said she had a study that cited the ideal staff to cat ratio for the best care of cats, and she used that study to justify killing cats in the adoption building, as well as in the stray/sick buildings. I remember she said that she could have brought the numbers down further to fall in line with the recommended ratio, but didn't in order to save cats.

She almost derailed the efforts of cat volunteers to save the approximately 120-140 cats in a cat hoarding situation. The Friends of the Sacramento City Shelter Animals, a non-profit that supports the shelter animals, coordinated the successful adoption and transfer of all those cats. One volunteer in particular, Dia Goode, worked miracles to get donations, networked with rescues to enable transfers and convinced Best Friends to do an email blast to save these cats. Best Friends would only do it if we could guarantee that the cats would be safe at the house for at least 2 weeks after it sent out the plea nationwide. Penny agreed to this, but unbeknownst to us, she had talked with the Sacramento County shelter manager, Pat Claerbout, about transferring 20 of those cats to the county shelter. This was not what she had promised to us. We knew the county shelter was impacted and that there was a good chance the 20 cats would not make it out of there alive. The only way to stop this was to force Penny into documenting her intentions for others to see. We could not trust her otherwise. So, I sent an email to her and copied all who had been involved in the effort to save the "Belinda" cats. She backed off, as she would have to explain her decision to the larger group. (If you are not familiar with Pat Claerbout, she has a similar mindset as Penny and was recently removed as shelter mgr. in SoCal. I think she is still being investigated on her actions at that shelter.)

When city departments had to make budget cuts due to the downturn in the economy, Penny recommended cutting the Volunteer Coordinator position. Volunteers rallied and contacted their respective Council members about the idiocy of eliminating a position that was bringing in approx. \$87,000 of free labor per month during a time of staffing cuts. The Council came down pretty hard on the General Services Dept. Director (Penny's boss) and told her to find an equivalent cut someplace else. Later, I found out that Penny blamed the City Manager and Council for the recommendation to eliminate the volunteer coordinator position and stated that she was not supportive of cutting the position during a shelter Advisory Committee meeting.

In March of 2010, an ASPCA representative for community outreach who met with Penny on the shelter's progress on an initiative had written a letter that was shared with the volunteers. Among other things, it discussed a reduction in shelter hours instituted by Penny, which is another story to share! I took issue with it, as did many volunteers and contacted him. He responded to me and made a statement that I found rather puzzling. He said that Penny had made requests to the volunteers to help fill roles at the shelter, but nobody came forward. So, I felt we were portrayed as not cooperative and supportive of shelter programs. I had not seen any requests, nor had the volunteers who I contacted.

The list can continue on and on. Penny was not supportive of feral cat colonies and attempted to get the ball rolling on an indoor only ordinance for cats. At one point, she implemented a policy of euthanizing all kittens that weighed less than 2 lbs. At one point, she stopped the foster care program, which meant that bottle babies and those kittens weighing less than 2 lbs. would continue to be killed.

Capital Public Radio aired a piece on the shelter. The reporter said, "The 250 animals in the shelter are typically less adoptable than the animals you'll find at Happy Tails or the Sacramento SPCA. That's because the city shelter deals mostly with strays. Out of the 11 thousand animals a year that come into the shelter, about 90 percent are strays. So the euthanasia rate is typically high." Volunteers were not happy with the portrayal of the shelter animals and the reporter heard from many of us. When pressed to explain why he said that, he said he was only reporting what came from the shelter manager. To justify killing rather than promoting adoption was horrible!

Pamela Santin, Sacramento City Shelter (Front Street)

I have been a volunteer at Front Street Animal Care Services in Sacramento CA for 7 years. I worked with Penny Cistaro during her tenure here. During her stay we had constant euthanasia of many types of animals. No cat under two pounds was allowed to live, even if we had fosters lined up ready to take them!

She euthanized to make space. Any dog was vulnerable. No matter what behavior or eval they had.

My worst encounter with her was at an Offsite event in Natomas. She came late and we all had dogs we brought from the shelter for adoption. Penny came and took the dog from me that I brought. This was a young female pup with pretty significant dog aggression that we were working on. I asked why she was taking her and she said she wanted to spend time with her. Made me kind of panic because she already had done some horrible things. When she returned an hour later, she was laughing and said she took her to the dog park on the same site!!!! I asked what the heck she was thinking, taking a dog aggressive pup to a dog park! She replied to me that if the dog had acted up she would "pay the price"- I almost lost it. How dare her. It was almost like she was playing a game with this dog's life. One week later I went to work with the dog, and she had been pulled and euthanized. This woman is evil. I believe she gets some satisfaction from power and over killing. Kauai will be led down the same devastating path, and then she will leave. She has done it many times. She is a cruel woman who is a sociopath. I wish you luck in your petition and saving your shelter from her.

Claudia Schlachter, Sacramento City Shelter (Front Street)

I am the Volunteer Coordinator who Penny Cistaro attempted to fire in 2010. Fortunately for our Volunteer program, the entire City Council and an army of volunteers refused to accept her proposal to eliminate the position. Council Chambers was packed with protesters and Penny had to leave that meeting in relative disgrace. The volunteer program was highly successful, garnering the third largest number of volunteer hours behind the City's Parks and Recreation program and the Police Department. But having a successful program was entirely too threatening for Penny. Even after she lost that battle, she continued to harass the Volunteer program by trying to "re-organize" it and take over monthly Orientations. She threatened to turn my office into a "holding area" for animals and move the volunteer area (sign in, supplies, messages, meet and greets, cat volunteers, dog volunteers, etc.) outside in the staff parking lot!!

Most of our staff (2009-2011) felt threatened daily by her mismanagement. She discontinued or downgraded numerous successful programs we had in place such as Foster Programs, Feral Cat Programs, Animal Rescue transfers and others. When we conducted off-site adoptions or events, she was never there to support them in any fashion and volunteers obviously felt discredited. Internally, we were suffocating. After 2 1/2 years at the City of Sacramento ACS (Front Street Shelter) and with controversy mounting against her, she left for the Sacramento SPCA. That didn't turn out so well and she left the SSPCA for KHS and here we are again.

I have to say that initially, I was in complete support of hiring Penny Cistaro at the City of Sacramento. Her credentials were wonderful and we'd been suffering from a vacant Director position for some time. However, her very first day on the job was so utterly horrible we all were aghast at her and what we'd obviously missed in the interviews. It just continued to spiral downward from there.

I do hope that KHS is able to see the bigger picture here, that being the fact that these problems are long-standing problems going back to at least 3 other shelters. I think Penny's underlying problem is that she's "stuck" in a sheltering philosophy that goes back to the 1980's when any animal that was not claimed by its owner within 72 hours was automatically euthanized; volunteers were considered "suspect" and just "do-gooders" with nothing better to do but meddle; and shelters NEVER partnered with Rescue groups or considered other opinions as worthwhile.

Maria Barbaria, Peninsula Humane Society

I worked at Peninsula Humane Society from 1993 to 1997 as a Humane Officer. While working there Penny Cistaro was the director of operations.

Given my dealings with Penny it's ALL about power and nothing else! One example; I impounded (on an animal cruelty case) a pitt bull puppy who had his ears cut off by his 17 year old owner. After the puppy started to heal my vet (large animal vet who also worked with much of PHS's livestock cases) wanted to foster the pitt bull puppy and when the case was over wanted to adopt him. Our policy was NOT to adopt out pitt bull's and ALL pitt's were to be euthanized! I asked Penny if we could make an exception with this veterinarian. She said NO we don't place pitt's. I kinda argued with her stating I understand that and why (because of gangs and using them for dog fighting) but Kristen (the vet) and her husband would be a great home and this puppy would NOT be used for fighting! Well AFTER one year (this puppy grew up in the shelter a very bad experience for any puppy), Penny changed her mind and allowed the dog to go with the vet and her husband (my begging didn't hurt) anyway after being in the shelter for just over a year this dog didn't have a chance. After trying for 6 months the dog was beyond help. He destroyed many things in the vets home and had to be brought back to the shelter. That was his death sentence. Penny called me over the work truck to return to the shelter. She wanted to give me the option to be with the dog while she put him to sleep! Needless to say it ruined my day/week. I told Penny if we had allowed the vet to take the dog from the beginning we would not be destroying this dog now! I also remember Joe Montana and his wife (they lived in redwood city highlands) came into the shelter to adopt a cat. Well they were denied because they couldn't guarantee the cat would stay indoors. Again she would rather put this animal down then allow it to go to a home.

Suzi Johnston, Sacramento City Shelter (Front Street)

The volunteers were invited to have a "meet 'n greet" with the final three people being considered for the manager position with the Sacramento City Animal Shelter (now referred to as Front Street Animal Shelter). In talking with pc [Penny Cistaro], there was something horribly disconcerting in the way she dismissed people after she felt she'd spoken with them long enough. To say she was rude is an understatement. To me, the manager had to have camaraderie with the staff AND volunteers they would be working with. To say I didn't trust her from the get-go is putting it lightly. But I was going to do all I could to help once the decision to hire her was made.

While the City was cutting back on staffing, pc found it far more important to spend untold amounts of money to buy planters, soil & flowers along with building a ridiculous "outdoor" bunny run which was never used. The shelter was given a number of agility training items, & I was asked by management to get bids on having some empty space turned into an agility area & training area to make dogs more adoptable. So many companies wanted to help our shelter & offered to do extras without charge, like

planting much needed trees & bushes to make the area cooler in our hot summers. None of that was pc's idea so was of course killed. If it wasn't her idea, well..... you know.

Fostering puppies too young for adoption, & yes, bottle babies too, is my forte. Upon more bottle baby puppies being brought into the shelter, the Veterinarian, Dr. Warner, asked staff to call to see if I would take some puppies under wing. They called, I said YES, of course! They had to call pc who was not in the shelter that day to get her approval. pc gave staff an emphatic NO! pc ORDERED them to euthanize all the puppies even though I wanted to take them, & Dr. Warner had examined them & said they were healthy. NO said pc! I was devastated when staff called to tell me. Need I add that many tears were shed? pc even called staff about an hour or so later to see if they had euthanized them. They had not, & of course pc read them the riot act.

pc was someone who would smile in your face & tell you whatever she thought might make you feel some kind of acceptance of her or that she was befriending you, then she'd turn around & stab you in the back. She had staff in tears on so many occasions that I couldn't even count. She proudly (self) proclaimed herself an expert in "humane" euthanasia. I remember a staffer (who sadly died a few years ago) was upset about putting an animal down & the way pctreated her. pc told her that she'd show her the way to put an animal down, that there was no need to be upset & no need for a sedative for the dog. The dog was a big Rottweiler as I recall, & pc was so gruff with the dog that the dog BIT her! HA! That was the best thing I ever heard about her!

pc is vile! pc should NOT be allowed to have anything to do with ANY animal shelter or rescue EVER again. It sickens me to think the island's humane society board could be bamboozled by this person.

Many volunteers left the shelter during pc's reign, including me, because we could not stand to deal with that wicked person who didn't seem to care one iota for the animals in the shelter. pc didn't care much about staff either.