**Nate Hegyi: A quick warning: this episode contains descriptions of injured animals and animal abuse that may be disturbing to listeners.**

**There are also a couple of swears.**

**There’s something I want to make clear. This series isn’t about animal abuse. But it is something we have to talk about.**

**In 1973, the Iditarod’s inaugural year, fifteen dogs didn’t survive the race. The second year, it was sixteen.**

**A lot of sled dog deaths are caused by aspiration pneumonia. It’s where they accidentally breathe in their own phlegm or vomit while running.**

**Or… their hearts will suddenly stop and they’ll just collapse.**

**But there are freak accidents too. Huskies have been hit by drunk snowmobilers. Trampled by moose. One was strangled after getting its harness caught on a passing tree.**

**After those first two races, in 1975, the Iditarod organizers made changes to protect dogs’ safety.**

**There were check-ups throughout the race. Dogs have to wear booties to protect their feet from the ice. And veterinary care is a lot better than it was back then.**

**So these days, a couple of years might go by without any dogs dying at all. But it still happens. And every so often there’s a bad run where four or five huskies won’t make it.**

**Injuries though… they’re a LOT more common.**

[mux]

**Every team starts with at least 12 dogs. But only about half of all the huskies that run the Iditarod will actually cross the finish line. Many of them get pulled out by mushers or veterinarians because they’re sick, exhausted, or hurt.**

**So it’s no surprise that animal rights groups have been railing against the Iditarod since the very beginning. PETA has staged protests at the opening ceremonies for a few years now.**

*PETA protester:150 dogs have died since the iditarod’s inception, but those are only the reported numbers, they don’t…*

**The Iditarod came about during a time when a lot of Americans were obsessed with the rugged mythos of Alaska. Mushing wasn’t just a sport - it was a source of regional pride and history.**

**But today, with American spending more money than ever to treat their pets like part of the family, those protests have really struck a chord.**

**Coverage of the Iditarod is quieter. Big companies like Coca-Cola, Wells Fargo and Exxon Mobile have pulled out as sponsors.**

*Clip: …Millennium hotels ended it’s sponsorship…*

*…PETA vows to keep pushing back as Alaska Airlines exits the stage. In Seattle, Glenn Farley, King 5 News.*

**This year? It was the *smallest field in Iditarod history.* Only 33 mushers ran the race.**

*PETA video: I’m an Alaskan, and I do not support the Iditarod.*

*PETA protesters: End the Iditarod! End the Iditarod! End the Iditarod!*

**Nate Hegyi: And – I’m sorry to keep piling this on – but it’s not just the Iditarod. The entire sport is under fire.**

**There have been *dog* doping rumors.  
  
A legendary musher was disqualified after testing positive for *methamphetamine*.**

**In 2010, a man in Whistler, British Columbia pled guilty to slaughtering over *fifty* healthy sled dogs – and dumping them in a mass grave.**

*News clip montage: Tonight, shock and outrage on the streets of Whistler and across the country. More than 800 people have joined a Facebook page boycotting outdoor adventures, Whistler, also tonight, Tourism Whistler has suspended reservations for the company…*

**Nate Hegyi: In response, British Columbia strengthened its animal cruelty laws. And dogsledding companies there have to submit to annual inspections now.**

*News clip montage: …it’s not right, we know it’s not right in our society…*

*…How hard is it to pick up a phone and call SPCA to come and get these dogs?*

**Nate Hegyi: So if this *isn’t* a series about abuse - what am I getting at?**

**My point is that all this controversy has made mushers a lot more guarded. Wary.**

**They know that every time a reporter covers the sport, there’s a chance that they’re going to devote a few paragraphs to the Whistler dogsledding massacre, or the latest PETA protest - like I just did.**

**And THAT’S why I was so surprised when I got the tip that led me to this story.**

*Jamie Nelson: Did I trust him? I don’t know! But there was no reason not to.*

**Nate Hegyi: I mean, what kind of behind-the-scenes drama does it take for a bunch of tight-knit dogsledders to call ME - an environmental podcaster from the lower forty-eight?**

*Jamie Nelson: Where is the promise you made to me?*

**Nate Hegyi: The community doesn’t need more bad press, right?**

**In this case, they’re willing to risk it.**

*Jodi Bailey: I had never dealt with someone who was serially lying to me.*

**Nate Hegyi: I’m Nate Hegyi and you’re listening to Outside/In presents… the Underdogs. It’s about the guarded world of competitive sled dog racing and two mushers who burned bridges, destroyed friendships, and owe people tens of thousands of dollars.**

*Jodi Bailey: I’m not going to give her the luxury of calling it denial. I think they knew full well what they were fucking doing.*

**Nate Hegyi: This is part 2… It has to be earned.**

*Nate Hegyi: oh, that’s probably me missing it. Hey did you watch me miss a turn?*

*Jamie Nelson: Yup. You went, you turned and you were supposed to come straight.*

*Nate Hegyi: Straight, yeah, yup, I…*

**Nate Hegyi: Jamie Nelson doesn’t live in Alaska. She’s from northern Minnesota. Fargo country.**

**And she’s a member of the OLD guard of competitive mushing.**

*Jamie Nelson: Well, I ran the Beargrease ‘84 - well did not’ complete - but I did it in ‘85, ‘86, ‘87, ‘88…*

**Nate Hegyi: Minnesota is home to the longest dogsled race in the lower 48. It’s a four-hundred-mile slog along the North shore of Lake Superior that mushers refer to as “the Beargrease.”**

*Jamie Nelson I won it in ‘88, and they lengthened it to 500 miles because they said it would slow me down.*

**Nate Hegyi: Jamie has won Beargrease four times. But she raced her first *Iditarod* in 1989.**

*Jamie Nelson: 70 mph winds the first day, and we saw the roof of a shed flying. We get onto the trail, and it’s getting towards evening, and a guy comes by and runs over my leader, passing, you know.*

*Nate Hegyi: One of your dogs?*

*Jamie Nelson: Yeah.*

*Nate Hegyi: Well, was he in a truck, or… what was he?*

*Jamie Nelson: He was in a sled.*

*Nate Hegyi: Oh a sled! Wow.*

*Jamie Nelson: You know, the edge of that runner hitting a dog's leg… Well that’s just the start. It gets worse!*

*Nate Hegyi: Were you able to finish that first Iditarod?*

*Jamie Nelson: Oh yeah.*

*Nate Hegyi: What place did you get?*

*Jamie Nelson: Middle of the pack.*

*Nate Hegyi: Middle of the pack.*

**Jamie has been through at all.**

**She’s fallen through ice, nearly died from carbon monoxide poisoning because a propane heater broke in her tent. And she’s got a lot of old injuries. Bad back. Bad knees.**

*Jamie Nelson: That ankle does not work real well. So it has not been pleasant for awhile.*

*Nate Hegyi: You getting surgery on that one?*

*Jamie Nelson: Yeah.*

*Nate Hegyi: When’s that?*

*Jamie Nelson: April 5th…*

**Nate Hegyi: Nowadays she doesn’t race anymore. Most of her huskies have been sold, or adopted. But there are a few in a dog yard near her cabin and a couple more that live inside with her.**

**Actually, if you hear any clicking sounds in my interview tape? That’s the static electricity from her indoor dogs coats interfering with my recorder.**

**There was a big one, named Skid… and another one named... One.**

*Jamie Nelson: only dog in her litter. That's why she's named one.*

**One was small and black and she had this really cool trick that Jamie taught her…**

*Jamie Nelson: One wood!*

*Nate Hegyi: Now she’s running towards the woodshed.*

*Jamie Nelson: Just a minute*

*Nate Hegyi: Good girl!*

*Jamie Nelson: Alright, woodbox!*

*Nate Hegyi: and then she puts it into the woodbox*

*Jamie Nelson: Aw, you missed… thatagirl!*

**Nate Hegyi: Jamie didn’t just race Alaskan huskies… she also bred and trained them.**

**Ya see, competitive sled dog teams are a lot like football teams.**

**Players get old, they get beat up, they retire… so you’re constantly having to draft new ones. Same goes with sled dogs. And Jamie has sold her huskies for thousands of dollars each.**

*Jamie Nelson: And there's an awful lot of dogs up there in Alaska that come from what I've bred the years. Yeah.*

**Nate Hegyi: It’s a somewhat lucrative side business. But Jamie also drove a school bus for 20 years. and she runs mushing boot camps for wannabe dogsled racers.**

**That’s how she met Curt and Fleur Perano.**

*Jamie Nelson: I had a lot of people say what, you know, that they were a future. Possible threat to, you know, being a competitive, real competitive team.*

*Nate Hegyi: That they were good*

*Jamie Nelson: That they were good!*

**Nate Hegyi: Like other people I’ve spoken to for this story, Jaime has bad blood with the Peranos – the pair of successful New Zealand dogsledders who’ve burnt bridges across the North American mushing community.**

**But unlike some of my other sources, Jaime said she’d only talk in person. She’s not on social media. Doesn’t spend much time on the internet.**

**If she was going to tell me her story, it would have to be face-to-face. Because trust… is something mushers don’t take lightly.**

*Jamie Nelson: And that’s the thing that has been so hard to deal with what they have done since. What happened? What did they go through? What made them turn into evil people?*

**Nate Hegyi: It was fifteen years ago. Jamie says Curt Perano was built like a rugby player.**

*Jamie Nelson: Kurt, definitely looked military.*

**Nate Hegyi: Square jaw, squinting gray eyes and a gap between his two front teeth.**

**He** [**reportedly**](https://www.frontiersman.com/sports/iditarod-kiwi-style-musher-splits-year-between-willow-new-zealand/article_b56c83ba-d430-11e4-b750-57d85082f5d2.html) **served in New Zealand’s special forces and even did a tour in Afghanistan.**

*Jamie Nelson: You could tell by his attitude that he he didn't give up on things. He'd been well trained. He was a a force to be reckoned with. And you could feel it.*

**Nate Hegyi: Curt and his wife had shown up to one of Jamie’s boot camps in October 2007. At the time, they were still new to the sport - or “greenhorns”. They only owned a couple of Malamutes.**

*Jamie Nelson: they just wanted to learn how to control these big fuzzies*

**Nate Hegyi: Unlike Alaskan Huskies, Malamutes look more what you expect a sled dog to look like - longer coat, wolf-like. They’re considered one of 16 “basal breeds” that are more closely related to wolves.**

**But one of Curt and Fleur’s malamutes in particular was aggressive towards other dogs. Sure enough, when they set out on a training run with Jaime:**

*Jamie Nelson: first thing the dog did was latch on to a Siberian husky.*

*Nate Hegyi: Just bite on.*

*Jamie Nelson: Right on the top of the back, right behind the shoulders, just latched on. I happened to be standing there and we carry a piece of hose because, you know, you just don't put your hand in a dog fight. It's just not safe.*

*Nate Hegyi: Because you can get bitten.*

*Jamie Nelson: You should bet you can get bitten. You can get bitten pretty bad. I've had my share.*

**Nate Hegyi: There is something you should know about Jamie. She’s old school in a way that many other musher’s aren’t. That a lot of dog owners aren’t.**

*Jamie Nelson: and I had my hose and I used it on him. And they both stood there. They didn't know what was going on. I said, ‘this is not acceptable behavior.’*

*And I had my arm on Fleur because she was worried I might hurt her dog. Well, it was a piece of hose with nothing in it or it wasn't, you know, just flopped. Of course, it was pretty, you know, serious hose. And it was probably about that long. And I kept on the dog until we could get him free. and went another 50 feet and he found another one. And he got it. He came off a lot quicker because I really lit into him hard that time.*

**The next time his Malamute attacked another dog… she says Curt struck it with that floppy hose, too. It told her two things:**

*Jamie Nelson: They weren’t afraid to get after the dogs. And they weren’t going to hold it against me, that I had gotten after them.*

*And they thanked me for getting after him.*

*Everytime that dog saw me the rest of those three days. He would not listen to them. He would come to me.*

*Because I had set rules. And that’s the one thing malamutes like is the rules.*

*Nate Hegyi: And you had shown him the rules. Yeah, because you had shown him the rules. And I think we should address this because I know there are going to be listeners who think, ‘Oh my God, Jamie, you were being abusive to that dog. You were hitting it with a hose – what’s your rationale behind that?*

*Jamie Nelson: Well, I don't want to get hurt myself. I am not going to stick my hand in the middle of a dog fight that I do not know the dogs. I felt that if it wasn't fair to the people who had the other dog, the Siberians, that got hurt. The dog was doing wrong and they don't feel because of their hair coat. So the only place they feel is the nose. And the nose is what's in trouble. So why wouldn't I be fair to the whole thing? Because I feel that discipline is not cruel if it's done fairly. And this was a situation that they were going to have to leave or get control of that dog.*

*Nate Hegyi: And it worked.*

*Jamie Nelson: And it worked. The dog loved me until he died.*

**Years later, Fleur - the woman from New Zealand - would express discomfort with how Jamie treated dogs.   
  
But at the time, she and her husband Curt were both greenhorns. They were eager to learn. They soon began working for Jamie, as her dog handlers.**

**They lived in a small cabin on her property. Took turns running the huskies and doing chores. Many nights they’d come over for dinner.**

*Nate Hegyi: do you remember did they have any hobbies or things they'd like to talk about outside of of of mushing when they were here?*

*Jamie Nelson: I'm not sure I can answer that because we were so focused that I didn't have time for other things and I didn't notice a lot of things because I was focused on my own stuff.*

*Nate Hegyi: And they were like that, though, too, it sounds like.*

*Jamie Nelson: Yes, in a way,*

**Nate Hegyi: They were friends. Or at least, they were all on the same team - in the same circle of mushers, living a way of life that very few others understand.**

**When the Peranos left Minnesota to start their own dogsledding tourism company in New Zealand - Jaime said she gave them a fifteen thousand dollar business loan.**

**When Jaime needed back surgery, and couldn’t take care of her kennel? Curt came out and stayed with her to manage the dogs.**

**And when Curt and Fleur wanted to buy new huskies for their US racing team? Jaime sold them. $2000 bucks a pop.**

**Because Jamie and the Peranos were in the same circle of trust, these tended to be informal deals - based on verbal agreements and handshakes. A musher’s code.**

*Nate Hegyi: Why is that? Why was it always handshakes? Why did you never bother to write things down?*

*Jamie Nelson: Well I never have. I take people for who they are. And honesty is something that I've always felt and integrity and professionalism and everything.*

*Nate Hegyi: And that’s been exemplified within the sled dog community that you’ve worked with.*

*Jamie Nelson: Most often. Everything was on the up and up.*

**Everything was on the up and up.**

**In 2018, Curt reached out again.**

**He wanted to pick up nine new fully trained dogs for his US dog sled team. Jaime said, of course. Curt came and picked them up.**

**The cost would be eighteen thousand dollars. Curt told Jamie that Fleur would get in touch about the money.**

*Jamie Nelson: He said Fleur will take care of it. And that was my stupidity in that I let the dogs leave before I saw some money.*

*Nate Hegyi: Have you done that before?*

*Jamie Nelson: No.*

*Nate Hegyi: But you trusted him.*

*Jamie Nelson: Did I trust him? I don't know, did I? But there was no reason not to.*

**Nate Hegyi: Jamie says she was never paid for those nine dogs. But *WE* know exactly what happened to them next.**

**Koal, Sam, Smudge and Summit…. They and the others all wound up on Curt and Fleur’s US dogsledding team.**

**They would go on to race in the 2019 Yukon Quest.**

**And after that, they would get dropped off at Dewclaw Kennels, in Fairbanks Alaska… Dropped off with another Iditarod veteran.**

**Jodi Bailey.**

**The woman from the last episode.**

**Jodi Bailey: You want to give people the chance to do the right thing. You want to give people a chance to be good. I really spent far too long wanting Fleur to be good.**

**Nate Hegyi: In 2019… When New Zealanders Curt and Fleur Perano left their U.S. team of 24 sled dogs with Jodi Bailey of Dew Claw Kennel… the arrangement was supposed to last about six months.**

**But then they asked for an extension.**

**And that extension took them right into the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.**

**And New Zealand had some of the tightest Covid restrictions on the planet - picking up the dogs was nearly impossible.**

*Jodi Bailey: And during Covid I was a little bit conflicted, in theory it was true that it would be hard to move the dogs. It wasn’t hard to move the money. So I was still pissed off.*

**Nate Hegyi: By October of 2021, that original six-month agreement had dragged on for nearly three years.**

**The dogs, for the most part, were fine. One of them had died of old age. But for the rest? They were living outside, in cold weather, running every day.**

**Jodi and Dan, on the other, were not fine.**

**By this point, the Peranos had now amassed more than $32,000 in late boarding fees.**

**It was a pattern Jodi was used to by now. She would press them on the money, and Fleur would say something terrible had happened.**

**Curt’s dad was sick. Her mother was sick. Her bank account had been hacked.**

*Jodi Bailey: I'd get another email from floor with some lame ass excuse. Oh, I already paid it. No you didn't. And, you know, I'm not entirely proud of all the messages that I sent to her because I would absolutely lose it.*

**Nate Hegyi: I should mention at this point that documenting all of this hasn’t been easy. Because these arrangements were originally built on trust - between fellow mushers - the paper trail isn’t ideal. At times, I’ve felt like an IRS agent hounding a professional dog sitter.**

**But I’ve now read through hundreds of these Facebook messages, including the ones from Curt and Fleur. I’ve also looked at invoices and emails. And I’ve spoken to more than a dozen people about what happened here.**

**And when you piece it all together… it all lines up with Jodi’s story.**

*Jodi Bailey: I was having a lot of anger issues. I was so mad at them and mad that people could do this, and this whole life is unfair and this is ridiculous.*

*Nate Hegyi: Did that anger just bleed into other areas of your life?*

*Jodi Bailey: Um, I would like to think no, because I was aware of it, but I think I was angry enough that it did. There were days that it would just affect my whole mood. I'd get a text from her with another lie, and the rest of my day, I would literally have to do, like a put effort into making a mental reset so I could be happy again. and there'd be like days at a time. I wouldn't even walk into the New Zealand dog yard, wouldn't even look at it. And it wasn’t their fault. Like anybody would ask me, I had hatred for the Peranos, I was hoping their trucks would explode, like I was wishing bad things on them which is not a good place to be.*

**Nate Hegyi: Jodi had had enough. She and her husband Dan had drained savings accounts. She had started going to therapy.**

**So Jodi had sent a letter to the Peranos giving them three options:**

*Jodi Bailey: You can pay me in full and have the dogs gone by this date. You can pay me in full. We will keep the dogs as long as you prepay the remaining months, because at this point in time they were still asking us for more time. And if you do neither of these things, we will be rehoming your team. No rehomed dogs will be returned to you.*

**Nate Hegyi: She set a deadline for October 15th, 2022.**

**When that day came… Jodi got a message from Fleur. She said she was just diagnosed with a brain tumor. Was in the hospital.**

**It was a tragic story… and Jodi didn’t believe it. She felt like was being gaslit.**

*Jodi Bailey: She was so deep in her own whatever she was pulling, you know? And I'm not going to give her the luxury of calling it denial. I think they knew full well what they were fucking doing. Like. And I guess when you're that kind of person, you get in so deep, all you can do is dig yourself deeper.*

**At this point, Jodi had spoken with a lawyer, and felt confident that she wouldn’t get sued… Brain tumor or not - the Peranos had missed their deadline again.**

**So Jodi called their bluff.**

*Jodi Bailey: I actually started Rehoming Dogs.*

**One of the dogs - Finn - went to a mushing friend in Alaska. Griz and Smudge were adopted by a couple of former handlers in Fairbanks.**

**But soon, one way or another, Fleur found out about one of the rehomed dogs.**

**She reached out to Jodi, and the dog’s new owner and threatened them both with legal action. Said they were still her dogs.**

**And she told Jodi that she had filed a police report - though I haven’t found any evidence that actually happened, and I’m not sure what she would have said if she did file one.   
  
But most importantly, Fleur also rushed to finally pay her debts - and transferred a single payment of more than $42,000 dollars into Jodi’s bank account. This time, there were no delays or problems. It went through just fine.**

*Jodi Bailey: they obviously had money. It wasn't that they didn't have money to pay us. They just didn't.*

**Nate Hegyi: Around this same time, Jodi found out - through a mutual mushing friend - that Fleur’s husband, Curt, was actually already in Alaska. He was staying at a hotel. So she picked up the phone.**

*Jodi Bailey: I called the hotel and asked very nicely if they'd put me in contact with my friend Kurt Marino. I here staying with you from New Zealand, and that is how I talked to him in person.*

**Nate Hegyi: It was the first time she had spoken to either Curt or Fleur in two and a half years. The cell phone number she had for them stopped working for her awhile back. Everything had been through Facebook messenger.**

*Jodi Bailey: And he was pretty shocked when I got him on the phone. And then I was waiting for him to say anything like, you know, I'm really sorry or let's see what we can work out. But he played dumb. He pretended he didn't know anything about it. And I said, Well, listen, would you like me to send you this certified letter that your wife's had for now four months that says that I'm going to rehome your dogs and you're not getting them back. And he asked me if he could get my phone number and call me back because he wanted to talk to floor. And I mean, what else could I do? In about a half an hour later, he called back and that's when he said, okay, I talked to Flor. You are right. We're just going to pick up the dogs that you have left. You know, I understand he claimed to be really sorry. He claimed it was all Fleur’s fault. I'm really, really sorry about this. Are you sure you got the payment? Yes, we got the payment. All right, well, then we're just going to come get the dogs that we can get. And the person who is scheduled to get them came and picked them up the next day.*

**Nate Hegyi: When the 15 remaining dogs finally left Alaska - it was by truck.**

**They were headed for Los Angeles - to the office of a company called Jet Pets, that specialized in transporting animals internationally. The plan was then to ship them back to Curt and Fleur’s kennel, in New Zealand.**

**I asked Jodi how it felt, to say goodbye. She thought about it, and grabbed another chunk of wood to put in the fire.**

*Jodi Bailey: It was, like, bittersweet. I hated giving the dogs back to those awful people, but at the same time, I felt like relieved that our nightmare was over, This is going to sound totally naive, but I had never dealt with people like this. You know, I mean, don't get me wrong, I know assholes and jerks and also but I had never dealt with somebody who was serially lying to me who like. And for reasons that I will never understand, did these horrible, horrible things. But at least at this point in time, they had gotten their dogs and Kurt swore to God that they loved them and would take good care to them and they'd all be home.*

**Nate Hegyi: They’d all be quote unquote “home”.**

**Even though many of these dogs had never stepped foot in New Zeland, she hoped it would be a happy transition for them.**

**But what Jodi didn’t know at the time was that most of the dogs weren’t flying to New Zealand. They were just going to another type of limbo.**

**That’s coming up after the break.**

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**BREAK**

**Nate Hegyi: So far, there’s two very obvious voices missing from this series: Curt and Fleur Perano.**

**Everything I know about them is pretty one-dimensional: Just a handful of online messages, invoices, and YouTube clips.**

**But it’s not for lack of trying.**

**After I got home from Alaska, I tried emailing them. No answer. I also tried calling a number listed on the website for their New Zealand kennel, Underdog New Zealand. No luck.**

*FP: Our 2022 winter season is now closed. We’ll be opening the books up soon for our 2023 winter season. If you’d like us to contact you, please send us an email or a text and we’ll get back to you as soon as we can.*

**Nate Hegyi: I even sent a letter by certified mail, which - by the way - cost 176 dollars. And 24 cents. So they know I’m trying to get in touch.**

**Why did they leave their dogs in Alaska so long? If it was money troubles, why didn’t they just come clean? And did Fluer really get diagnosed with a brain tumor the same week Jodi told her she had to pick up the dogs?**

**The one thing that I know about Curt and Fleur Perano - aside from all of the money stuff - is that they’re mushers.**

*Nate Hegyi: Alrighty, here we go, thanks.*

**Nate Hegyi: It was my last day of reporting at Jodi’s place and I was about to go mushing.**

**I was standing on a metal sled with a team of seven dogs ahead of me. These weren’t the hardcore racing huskies. Jodi calls them “the paperclips.” They’re the dogs they use for tourists. But already, they were jumping and banging at their harnesses.**

**Jodi was on a snowmobile ahead of me. She turned around and gave me a thumbs up.**

*Nate Hegyi: you tell me when to let go. Letting go?*

**Nate Hegyi: I let go of the brake and I was off.**

**The sled tugged hard and I nearly fell over.**

*Nate Hegyi: whoo! Oh shit.*

*Nate Hegyi: it’s okay it’s okay… Whoo!*

**Nate Hegyi: The dogs do most of the work, sure. But I had to stay low on the sled… knees bent. Almost like skiing.**

*Nate Hegyi: Okay, we’re good we’re good!*

**Nate Hegyi: And honestly? It was a workout!**

**When you go uphill you take one foot off the sled and kick to help the dogs, kind of like you’re riding a scooter.**

**And it takes a lot of core strength to keep your balance. Sleds can tip going around turns, and dump you in the snow.**

*Jodi Bailey: I’m just going to fix the tangle. How does it feel?*

*Nate Hegyi: A little bit of a wild start, but it was good.*

*Jodi Bailey: Can you imagine doing it with the race dogs?*

*Nate Hegyi: Oh my god, yeah. I’m glad we wer doing with the paperclips right now.*

**Nate Hegyi: After four miles I was wiped. I can’t imagine Curt Perano doing this for more than a hundred miles a day on the Iditarod trail.**

**That takes endurance. A tolerance for pain. And for hunger.**

**Mushers will often lose weight – about a pound every couple of days – and can battle sprained ankles, frozen hands. They can get frostbite so bad the skin peels off their fingers when they remove their gloves.**

**So what drives a person to do such a thing?**

*MW: That was all we knew. There was no snow machines. No other modes of transportation.*

**This is Mike Williams Senior.**

**Mike is Yupiaq, and he grew up in a small village in Western Alaska. Up until the 1960s, he says, there were no trucks or snowmobiles. Just dog sleds.**

*Mike Williams Sr.: It’s not just to have dogs, it’s the dogs are part of our family. They are so strong mentally, physically, spiritually. THey’re just strong.*

**Nate Hegyi: For Mike, and a lot of other dogsledders, the people who protest the Iditarod just don’t know what they’re talking about. Alaska Natives have had dogs for thousands of years. They take better care of them than most people take care of their pets, he says.**

**Mike’s family has been racing in the Iditarod since 1983. For them, dogsledding is a way of preserving their heritage.**

*Mike Williams Sr.: my dad said was that we are not going to lose our dogs. Because of the snow machine. It's like languages and our land we lost. If we lose a dog, then we lose them.*

**Nate Hegyi: This year, the three top finishers in the Iditarod were all Native Alaskans. But the truth is, most people mushing in the Iditarod today can’t lay claim to that same heritage. And what connects them to the sport is a little harder to define.**

**Jodi’s husband, Dan Kaduce, grew up in Wisconsin – he used to run triathalons there – and Jodi… she’s from Martha’s Vineyard. She came to Alaska in the 1990’s looking for adventure.**

*Jodi Bailey: I didn't even race, you know, I just ran the dogs. I didn't think I wanted to do it. It didn't matter. I just was having fun. But if you get into dog mushing and then you start doing distance mushing and you start doing 100 mile races and 200 mile races, everybody starts asking you, when are you going to do, the Iditarod?*

**Jodi has now done it six times. And just like a grueling ultramarathon or a seven-week backpacking trip, it can be hard to put into words just how exhausting and exhilarating it is.**

*Jodi Bailey: here's the example I use when you're a virgin. Sex is very interesting to you. You think about it a lot. You prepare for it. You might even say practice or watch a movie. But the bottom line is you don't really know what it is until the pants come off. And so sometimes it's running 1000 miles is like that. You can watch all the movies, you can read the books you can. But it is an experience that is really so intense that it kind of has to be earned. I don't know how I would explain it. I can give you the basics. Yeah. You're exhausted. You're super tired. You're sleeping for maybe 4 to 6 hours every 24 hours. Most people will, at some point in time hallucinate. They're so tired. I tend to have auditory hallucinations.*

*Nate Hegyi: Can you give me an example of an auditory hallucination you had?*

*Jodi Bailey: I was running down the Yukon River in the middle of absolutely nowhere in the middle of the night. And all of a sudden, I very clearly heard an entire marching band playing Sousa. You know, duh duh, duh, duh, duh. No, no, no, no, no, no, no. You know, and I have this little internal dialog going on in my head now where you're like, Okay, Jodi, you know that there is not a marching band in the middle of nowhere on the Yukon, but maybe there is. You hear it? Yes. Jodi, you're hallucinating. Oh, but doesn't it sound pretty? Yeah, but let's be realistic. Maybe just turn around and look, you know, so, like, you know, you're hallucinating, but at the same time, it's, you know, and yeah, I turned around and looked. There was no band, you know. And then I and as soon as I turned on and looked, I stopped hearing it.*

*but it's not all bad. Like sometimes you'll be like you'll be running along under a full moon and the team is just smooth and looking beautiful. And before you know it, you're crying because you just love those dogs so much. Then other times you come through something incredibly hard, you’ve bounced off trees and you’re crying because you’re pretty sure you’re the stupidest person you know.*

**Nate Hegyi: “It’s an experience that has to be earned.”**

**I don’t know that any of these stories can help me better understand Curt and Fleur, and why they left their dogs in Alaska for so long.**

**What I can tell you, is that this is exactly what the Peranos have taken advantage of.**

**Because there aren’t that many people that know firsthand what Jodi is talking about.**

**And that means, sharing an experience as intense as 1,000 miles on the Iditarod trail - it doesn’t just earn you experience.**

**It earns you respect. It fast-tracks the process of building trust.**

**Because why would you screw over the only other people in the world that love what you love?**

**Back in 2019 - when Fleur had first dropped the underdogs off with Jodi Bailey in Fairbanks - Jodi got a phone call.**

*Jodi Bailey: I had gotten a call from a very well kno wn woman named Jamie Nelson, who’s a very well known dog trainer from Togo, Minessota.*

**Nate Hegyi: Remember Jamie? She’s the old-school musher from the beginning of this episode.**

*Jodi Bailey: She said, I hear you’ve got the Perano dogs. She said, they never paid me for them. I’m coming to get them. I said Jamie - can you prove it? And she said… I’m not sure.*

*Jamie Nelson: I don't have any proof. I have no proof that they're mine.*

**Nate Hegyi: For Jodi, this was before Curt and Fleur had started missing payments. Before things went south. So she told Jamie, listen - I agreed to take care of these dogs, and I can’t just let you take them without proof that they’re yours.**

*Jodi Bailey: And I think Jaime said something like, you know I actually respect you for that. Like she understood what I was saying. But she said, when you find out what you’re dealing with - call me.*

**x`x`**

*Jamie Nelson: I don't have any proof. I have no proof that they're mine. Except that I can name them.*

*Nate Hegyi: No proof of ownership or anything?*

*Jamie Nelson: No, no, none.*

*Nate Hegyi: You have no proof that he did pay you because there’s no contract or anything.*

*Jamie Nelson: No Nothing. Well that’s the thing, Jodi knows that they came from me. So does the whole rest of the world up in Alaska.*

**Nate Hegyi: This places me in a tricky spot. Reporters need evidence. Jodi had bank statements and invoices she sent to Fleur. Plus a copy of all those Facebook messages.**

**Jamie doesn’t.**

**Since I was there, I asked her if it was ok if I dug around on her phone.**

**Finally, we found it. A couple of emails that Jamie had sent to Fleur and Curt back in 2019. They were strongly worded, saying that she was out a great deal of money and had tried to contact them multiple times to get payments.**

**There was also an invoice attached. Not only did it show the Peranos owing her $18,000 for the nine dogs. But also tens of thousands of dollars more in missed payments for the business loan and for dog food and boarding.**

**All in all, the debt totaled more than $40,000 dollars.**

**But we still needed some kind of acknowledgment from the Peranos, that they actually knew about the debt.**

**Jamie kept telling me that Fleur had responded to her email.**

*Nate Hegyi: And you said that she sent you an email. Right?*

*Jamie Nelson: Yes, she sent me one that said I never intended not to pay you.*

**Nate Hegyi: But I never found it, and I left Minnesota a little disappointed.**

**A few weeks later when I got back from my recording trip, I was looking through all my notes… and I found it.**

**But it wasn’t an email between Fleur and Jamie. It was one of the Facebook messages between Fleur and Jodi.**

**It was about a year and half into the saga at Dew Claw Kennel.**

**Jodi was trying to get Curt and Fleur to square up on their late boarding fees.   
  
And to underline the fact that it was a pattern… she had written that it was QUOTE no secret that Jamie is upset about the dogs leaving her place without being paid for.”**

**End quote.**

**Jodi was throwing down the gauntlet - telling Fleur that she knew those 9 dogs from Minnesota had essentially been stolen.**

**Fleur didn’t deny.**

**Instead, she wrote back “Jamie will be paid fully by the end of this year.”**

**Proof… that Curt and Fleur knew they had a debt with Jamie.**

*Jamie Nelson: where is it? Where is the, you know, the promise you made to me? You know I’ve never dealt with contract and things like that. Jodi said she’d never done it either before, but now she said she does.*

**Nate Hegyi: Jamie was never paid her money. But Jodi was. The dogs were picked up, the nightmare was over, and she got the more than $40,000 she was owed.**

*Jodi Bailey: I can't believe we actually got paid. And, you know, like all of my friends were like, Jodi, you did it. You held your guns and you you sent her the letter and you stuck to your guns and you did it, you know, like people were happy for me. I was happy for me.*

**Nate Hegyi: A few months past and she and Dan were able to finally focus on racing again. He was gearing up for his next Iditarod.**

*Jodi Bailey: And I'm sitting at the desk checking my emails end of the day or whatever. And I didn't know the name of the person who emailed me, but I recognized at Jet Pets dot com.*

**That was the name of the pet transport company that Fleur and Curt were using to fly the Underdogs home to New Zealand.**

*Jodi Bailey: And I didn't even read the email. I just saw, you know, when you look at your list and it's so and so and so at. And my heart sunk because I knew. I knew!*

**The dogs had been abandoned in Los Angeles.**

*Amanda Hausnauer: They were all covered in feces, and urine. They were going insane.*

**Coming up on the Underdogs - the final leg of their journey.**

**And we try one last time to speak with Curt and Fleur about why they abandoned their US racing team.**

*Tim Brown: I now see their home in the distance. Kennels, there are dogs everywhere. There are cars in the area so someone is clearly home. I’m just going to make my way up there shortly.*

**CREDITS**

**Outside/In’s The Underdogs, was reported and produced by me Nate Hegyi.**

**It was edited and mixed by Taylor Quimby.**

**Additional editing help from Jack Rodolico, Justine Paradis, Felix Poon, Jessica Hunt, and from our Executive Producer, Rebecca Lavoie.**

**Maybe one of the most interesting things about the Iditarod is the rule against having two-way communication devices. Racers have a GPS, but aren’t coordinating with a team, like race car drivers. They’re on their own.**

**Side note: This year, a former champion - who was doing very well, I might add - was disqualified for having an iPod touch with him, because it can be used to send text messages.**

**We’ve got links to a story on that, as well as the Native Alaskans who took the top three spots, in the show notes and on our website.**

**Special thanks to Beau Baker and Maggie Ross for housing me in Duluth. Also to Tony Turner and Peter McClelland.**

**Music in this episode from Blue Dot Sessions, Dylan Sitts, Joseph Beg, Hanna Lindgren, and Amaranth Cove.**

**Graphics by Sara Plourde**

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