**Audio Transcript**

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**A quick heads up, before we begin: This episode contains a few swears.**

**Previously on The Underdogs: [cue tape montage]**

*Jamie Nelson: There was a conversation and he said Fleur will take care of it. And it was my stupidity, I let the dogs leave before I saw the money.*

*Nate Hegyi: Have you ever done that before?*

*Jamie Nelson: No.*

*Underdog NZ answering machine: If you would like us to contact you, please send us an email….*

*Jodi Bailey: Like I’d get another email from Fleur with some lame-ass excuse.*

*Underdog NZ answering machine: … and we will get back to you as soon as we can.*

*Jodi Bailey: Stop lying to me. I know you’re lying to me.*

*Nate Hegyi: I’ve consistently struggled to get payments from you [mumbles]. It’s actually more than 30,000.*

*Jodi Bailey: Curt swore to god that they loved them and they’d take good care of then, and they’d all be home. And the person that was scheduled to pick them up came and got them the next day.*

**Nate Hegyi: I remember, a few years ago, I was riding my bicycle across Wyoming’s high desert.**

*[Cycling sounds]*

**As I crested a hill I saw a huge herd of black cattle moving across the highway.**

**There were men on horseback following the herd, whistling and hooting. Not at the cattle… But at their dogs.**

*[Whistling sounds, cows mooing]*

**Grey, mottled fur - athletic, pointy ears. The dogs were stalking the herd… rushing in and nipping at the heels of any stragglers.**

**They were cattle dogs. That was their job. It was what they were literally born to do.**

[MUX]

**For tens of thousands of years, this has been our relationship with dogs.**

**They worked for us.**

**The Blackfeet would use dogs to haul teepees across the Great Plains.**

**Dalmatians snarled and bit at people, clearing streets so that horse-drawn fire engines could pass through.**

**Even my own little Brittany Spaniel, Wallace, his ancestors were bred to help hunters find birds in northwestern France.**

**They weren’t pets. They were working animals.**

**I bring this up because we don’t see that as much anymore. But there are pockets of America where this relationship still exists. With those cowboys in Wyoming… and with professional mushers in Alaska.**

*[Sound from Dew Claw Kennels]*

**These folks will tell you they love their animals just as much as anybody else. But that love looks a lot different than what pet owners are used to.**

**Sled dogs don’t go to dog parks or sleep at the foot of your bed every night.**

**They aren’t even housetrained. Why would they be? They live outside.**

**All that’s fine when you’re out running with them on  the Iditarod trail. Mushers aren’t using doggy bags on the Alaskan tundra.**

**But when you pack a team of huskies into a trailer… take them out of their element… and drive them more than 3,000 miles to Los Angeles?**

**it’s a different story.**

*Amanda Hasenauer: They were all covered in feces and urine. They smelled terrible. And we were like, oh my gosh.*

[mux]

**That’s Amanda Hasenauer.  She works at Jet Pets. It’s a small family business near the Los Angeles International Airport that specializes in flying pets overseas. They do dogs, cats, horses….**

**So they’re used to dealing with animals.**

**But in December 2021, an Iditarod veteran and professional musher named Curt Perano showed up at Amanda’s doorstep with 15 Alaskan huskies.**

**And this was different.**

*Amanda Hasenauer: When they initially came out of this truck, it’s not like a giant rig or anything, it’s like these stacked little cubbies. And all these dogs have been shoved in there all the way from Alaska.*

*They were going insane. Like, they were, like, jumping off of the ceiling.*

**The Peranos were from New Zealand - and they had flown dogs with Jet Pets before. But never this many and never with this little notice.**

**Amanda had only found out Curt was coming the day *before* -  when she got a call from his wife, Fleur:**

*Amanda Hasenauer:] I think it was the first of December, and she called and she was like, Hey, like Kurt's in the valley and he has all the dogs. Like, what time can we drop them off tomorrow? And we're like, What are you talking about? Like, we haven't you haven't signed the contract, you haven't sent any payment, Like we have nothing from you. And she was like, Well, what do you want me to do? It’s hot:*

**It was 70 degrees in the valley. Which may not sound very hot, but’s it’s a dramatic shift from winter in Alaska.**

*Amanda Hasenauer: These dogs were coming from -25, 40 degrees or whatever. And then all of a sudden they're in these, like this little hot truck cooking. And so… it put like the heat under us and we were like, OK.*

**It didn’t seem right to say no, given the circumstances. .. But for Amanda, for the whole company - it was a risk.**

**Shipping a bunch of dogs like this to New Zealand is expensive and time-consuming as hell. You have to find cargo space on commercial flights. Make sure they’re up to date on physical exams and vaccinations. There are tests that need to be certified by both the New Zealand and United States governments.**

**The price tag for this particular job? Amanda had set it at about $127,000 dollars.**

*Amanda Hasenauer: Fleur kept telling us. She's like, You know, I'm good for it. You know, I'm good for it, you know? And so we're like, you know, but this is a lot of money, you know, just dangling in the air.*

**So they made Fleur sign a contract. AND she agreed to pay a big chunk of the money up front.**

*Amanda Hasenauer: Let’s see, the initial payment will be paid in full… 82,585 dollars.*

**Before Curt left the dogs there, Fleur told Amanda she had sent the payment - through an international money transfer. She even sent a receipt to prove it.**

*MUX*

**This sounds familiar, right?**

**It’s like watching a magic trick over and over again. At first, you’re like - wait . How did they do that?**

**Eventually you start watching the hands and eyes… soon you figure it out.**

**Here’s Curt and Fleur’s magic trick.**

**They make you trust them. Promise to pay big money for a favor. And then… they disappear.**

**Not completely. Occasionally they’ll pop back in… make some excuses… string you along… maybe even pay some of what they owe … but it’s never enough.**

**That was about to happen to Jet Pets.**

*Amanda Hasenauer: We asked her on the phone. We asked her through email. We asked her several, several times, and it was just again, excuse after excuse after excuse. And so by the time February came, we. For me. I was desperate.*

**I’m Nate Hegyi… and welcome to Outside/In presents… The Underdogs.**

**So far, we’ve taken you inside the guarded world of elite dog sled racing.**

**We’ve told you the story of how Curt and Fleur Perano dumped their team of sled dogs with Alaskan musher Jodi Bailey for nearly three years.**

**How Jaime Nelson, a renowned dog breeder from Minnesota, says those dogs were never paid for in the first place.**

**Today…. we’ve got one story left to tell.**

**The last chapter in the Underdog’s saga.**

**And, we’ll try one more time to get Curt and Fleur Perano on the record.**

**This is episode 3… You Sell Your Soul**

**###**

*Amanda Hasenauer: Ugh. the first I want to say week was essentially like seal training hell week. They had never been on anything other than a harness, it seemed, and they were just rip roaring and ready to run.*

**The underdogs had spent nearly three years at Dew claw kennel, in Alaska. They wouldn’t get stuck in California for even half that long.**

**But there’s a BIG difference between a professional dog sled kennel, and a transport company.**

*Amanda Hasenauer: We were taking each pair for 20 minutes on leashes, in a small yard. And we are being like on a sleigh ride, like, dragged through the entire facility until we get to this place.*

**Jet Pets is meant to be a *temporary* boarding space.**

**There are no long and winding trails… no snow.**

**And these dogs had spent their whole lives being chained outside - or harnessed to a dogsled.**

**Amanda couldn’t even risk letting them off leash.**

*Amanda Hasenauer: We’re having to keep them locked inside for hours on end… and it really did something them to them. Each of them. Mentally.*

**The dogs *weren’t* getting along. They were fighting, snapping at each other. And they weren’t fixed.**

**So the girls started going into heat.**

*Amanda Hasenauer: Which was interesting, because it changes the behavior of the entire pack.*

**Plus, it was hot out.  The dogs were eating different food than they were used to… To a casual pet owner - they almost seemed feral.**

*Amanda Hasenauer: They had constant diarrhea. Like it was just awful. And like, they're not like, oh, I went to the bathroom, Let me move over. They're like, Oh, I went to the bathroom. Let me, like, roll in it. And this is 15 dogs. And so it was just exhausting.*

**Meanwhile, the pressure was on.**

**Amanda and her team were trying to coordinate flights for the huskies. They were gathering vaccination records and health certificates.**

**Calling airlines.**

**Three dogs shipped out first. They were descendants of a legendary line of sled dogs owned by Lance Mackey. He was the Michael Jordan of the Iditarod. He died last year, but his line of dogs is *extremely* valuable.**

**Curt and Fleur wanted to breed them in New Zealand.**

**The rest of the dogs would have to wait until late February or March because their rabies test wasn’t done in time.**

**Not a huge problem… except that, by this time, there was an issue with the money.**

**The international money transfer Fleur swore she sent… hadn’t shown up in Jet Pets’ account.**

**MUX**

*Amanda Hasenauer: Sh  kept telling us that she had these meetings with the bank, but then she never gave us any information from the bank. All we could do is keep asking.*

**Fleur’s excuses for not paying sounded eerily similar to the ones she used on Jodi Bailey – the musher who cared for the Underdogs for nearly three years.**

**There were troubles with the bank. She was grieving because two of her dogs died. Curt’s father was sick.**

*Amanda Hasenauer: I think I really when she told me about Kurt's dad, I went crazy like I literally was like sleuthing, the Internet.*

**Amanda went as far as looking up their family burial plot in New Zealand to see if Curt’s father was actually dead.**

*Amanda Hasenauer: I was like, is he even alive now? You know, like, I went like nuts because I was just so, like, Are you telling me the truth?*

**But there’s a big difference between Jet Pets, and the other people the Peranos had messed around with before.**

**Jet Pets was NOT a part of the mushing community.**

**Their trust did not extend very far. And they’re a small family-owned business. they couldn’t afford to float the Peranos.**

**So within a few weeks of having the dogs, they set a deadline. February 14th. Valentine’s Day.**

**If they didn’t receive any more payments by then… the dogs would be declared legally abandoned by California law…  and Jet Pets would start finding them new homes.**

**Amanda remembered sending them an email.**

*Amanda Hasenauer: You know, just essentially begging her, I was just pleading with her. I was like, just come get them. You can have the dogs. You can pay us for the boarding. Just come get them, they’re your dogs. If you want them. Come take them.*

**On Valentine’s Day, they got a response. Fleur said the money was coming. That they had sold land to finance it.**

**That QUOTE “These dogs mean the world to us and we have done everything we can to get them home.”**

**And then?**

**Radio silence.**

**A week later… Jet Pets got a mysterious email from a man named Kerry.**

**He said that Fleur and her son had been in a serious car accident on Valentine’s Day. That they were in the hospital. That’s why they weren’t able to pay.**

**It’s worth noting that the original email from Fleur on Valentine’s Day… it was sent at 11:23 pm her time.**

**And made no mention of a car accident.**

*Amanda Hasenauer: If they were in an accident I am sorry that happened to them, but definitely I didn't buy it anymore, you know? And I just felt like this is another way to stall. // It was beyond repair.*

**Curt later asked for another extension but Jet Pets had figured out the Peranos magic trick. So they told him to contact their attorney.**

**That was the last the company ever heard from the Peranos.**

*Amanda Hasenauer: We never got a phone call from a lawyer. We never got a phone call from them. No one ever showed up here to try to collect the dogs. That was it.*

*MUX*

**For nearly three months, Amanda had never let the huskies off-leash outside. They weren’t hers. She couldn’t risk them jumping the fence.**

**But after the Peranos had disappeared… she said fuck it.**

*Amanda Hasenauer:  These dogs need to run. This lady isn't coming. They're essentially our dog. Let them fricking go. And that changed the game for them.*

*[SOUND OF THE DOGS RUNNING, Amanda saying “good girl, good girl”]*

**It was like they had been released from jail. They stopped fighting… … and started showing their own personalities.**

**There was a spunky little black coated girl who turns out, loved playing fetch.**

*Amanda Hasenauer [voice memo outside]: Scout, you want to chase the ball?*

**Then there was Brigg who was a major cuddler.**

*Amanda Hasenauer [voice memo outside]: My lap buddy. My lap buddy.*

**And who also didn’t listen.**

*Amanda Hasenauer [voice memo outside]: But this one is like velcro!*

**The Underdogs - these working dogs, who had spent years living outside and running some of the most grueling races on earth – were slowly turning into pets.**

*Amanda Hasenauer [voice memo outside]: I ran out of treats! You guys ate all my treats! Yes you did. Can we run? Let’s go! Let’s go run! Let’s go!*

**Now all these dogs needed new homes. Amanda… didn’t know where to start. So she sent an email to the woman whose name was all over their vet records from the past three years.**

**Jodi Bailey.**

*Jodi Bailey:  And she had basically asked in the email if I could call her, and so I kind of dropped what I was doing… you want to go out honey? I dropped what I was doing right then and I called her. My name is Jodi Bailey and Amanda wants to talk to me about the New Zealand dogs. And the person on the other end of the phone went, hi I’m Amanda. How did you know that?*

**Jodi was the musher who had taken care of the Underdogs for nearly three years. She’s the one who had gotten strung along by the Peranos – they had owed her more than $30,000 in late boarding fees – before they settled up and took the dogs down to Los Angeles.**

*Jodi Bailey: I had thought I was out of it and I'd moved on and we were doing the things that were actually important to us and our dogs.*

**Her and her husband Dan were days away from racing the 2022 Iditarod. She just didn’t have the bandwidth to help. But she did have friends who could.**

*Jodi Bailey: I had a pretty decent network that I could reach out to and say, All right, you guys aren't going to believe this. Thosebleep, bleep, bleep, bleepingmother bleeping bleep, bleep ers abandoned the dogs in LA. And everybody involved in was just so incredible.*

**A couple of former handlers at Jodi’s kennel answered the call. They organized a Facebook campaign to find new homes of the underdogs.  An animal rescue in Washington State volunteered to pay for many of the f flights.**

**Over the next eight months… the huskies started leaving Jet Pets.**

**Brigg and his best buddy Shield found a new home with a musher in Golden, Colorado.**

**Summit went to a couple in Fairbanks, Alaska.**

**A few others went to Minnesota and Portland. And the leader of the Underdogs – a nine-year-old girl named Ledge – she went to live with those two handlers who started the Facebook rehoming campaign.**

*Ledge: A whoo whoo whoo whoo whoo*

**I actually got a chance to see her when I was up in Alaska. It was dinnertime and Her new doggo parents, Jeff and Jenn Fisher, were feeding her and the three other Alaskan huskies they own.**

*Ledge: Awhoo awhoo*

**Jeff and Jenn had worked at Dew Claw Kennel for a year. They helped care for the Underdogs. They always had a soft spot for Ledge.**

*Jeff Fisher: Like she’s so polite, and so reserved. The only time she ever actually vocalizes is during dinner.*

*Jenn Fisher: And it’s very small vocalization. This little arp. Just this little arp. Yeah, it’s pretty endearing.*

*Ledge: Arooo! Arooo!*

*[sound of food being poured and snacking]*

**Here’s Jodi Bailey again.**

*Jodi: I think that these dogs, and this story really touched the people who were living with us and worked with them. Cause they got to know the dogs and got to see what it did to us. And I don’t think.. [voice chokes]... I don’t think they were willing to let go of it. It’s a really big huge injustice and it would be important for the truth to be known.*

**As of today, all of the dogs that were left in Los Angeles have found new homes. For them - this story is over.**

**But what about Curt and Fleur Perano?**

**The couple still owes Jet Pets more than $50,000 dollars in boarding and handling fees.**

*Amanda: We have thought about, you know. Pursuing things legally in New Zealand, sending it to collections in New Zealand. I think we're just so tired that we haven't gotten there.*

**Meanwhile, all of the abandoned dogs - the Perano’s *entire* U.S. racing team - are still featured on their website.**

**There are pictures, cute little bios… and worst of all, links for people to *personally* sponsor some of the dogs.**

**Let me say that again. They have pictures of dogs on their website that were declared LEGALLY ABANDONED…**

**…and the Peranos are asking for $500 a piece to sponsor some of these dogs.**

**[mux]**

*Jodi Bailey: I don't even know what adjective I was when Jen and Jeff told me they were still getting sponsorship money for these dogs.*

*And I have met people in New Zealand and in New Zealand. Nobody knows anything about this. And so over there they're still rock stars and our sport. Doesn't need fake rock stars. In the long run, that only hurts us more. Our sport is actively pushing to get people to understand that the people who run dogs, this is our life. We don't do things like this.*

BREAK

**I don’t like Marvel Movies… But Remember seeing Thor: Ragnorak in theaters a few years ago?**

*[Brief Thor clip]*

**And it’s actually funny. I mean, it had Jeff Goldblum in it.**

*Jeff Goldblum: This revolution has been a huge success. Yay us! Pat on the back.*

**That was ALSO the movie that starred one of Curt and Fleur Perano’s dogs. The dog’s name was Dickens.**

*[Thor clip of wolf growling]*

**And He played this big, bad wolf that attacks the Hulk.**

*[Thor clip of loud fighting]*

**But Looking back…?**

**I have NO idea why the wolf is attacking the Hulk. He has zero personality in the movie. He’s just a bad guy.**

**That’s how I feel about the Peranos right now. They did a bunch of bad stuff… but I really have no idea who they are.**

**I mean, yeah, I’ve heard their voices in interviews.**

*Curt Perano in interview tape: Yeah, Eagle Summit was interesting…*

**I’ve stalked them on Facebook.**

*Fleur Preano from advertisement: This is a great feeling being out here with the dogs…*

**I know they are both military veterans. They have a young son who plays soccer. But they are still just cardboard cutouts. Remember, they won’t answer my phone calls or emails.**

**I have no idea *why* they did what they did.**

**And the question is gnawing at me.**

**So…over the past few months, I’ve been casting a dragnet. I reached out to their friends, family, former handlers, people in the tiny New Zealand mushing community.**

**And this is what I’ve learned.**

*[MUX]*

**Competitive dogsledding takes money. Everyone has a side hustle. For Jodi Bailey, it’s catering. For Jamie Nelson it was driving a school bus.**

**For Curt Perano… it was private security work.**

**Curt was a veteran of New Zealand’s special forces. After he left the military he started working security for film productions in the middle east and later for Exxon Mobil at one of Iraq’s biggest oil fields.**

*Tony Turner: So he was getting paid well, getting paid in US dollars for everything. So they, they had a very good income from that.*

**That is Tony Turner. He’s a recreational musher in New Zealand and he used to be really good friends with the Peranos.**

**We’re talking barbeques and fishing trips with Fleur and her young son Wyatt.**

*Tony Turner: Wyatt for his fifth birthday, I put bloody Fleur, Kurt and Wyatt up in a helicopter. So, you know, you don't just do that for a non-ordinary friend.*

**And for a while - everything seemed fine. Curt Perano ran the Iditarod four years in a row, from 2012 to 2015. He was building his reputation as a contender, and building trust inside the North American mushing community.**

**But a couple of years later, Fleur started complaining about money.**

**In 2017, she told a friend that she couldn’t pay back a $4000 loan right away because Curt wasn’t getting work.**

**A year later - in the fall of 2018 - Curt picked up those nine dogs in Minnesota that musher Jamie Nelson says she was never paid for.**

**And then - a few months after that - when Curt was gearing up for the Yukon Quest in Alaska, Tony said Fleur was worried.**

*Tony Turner: Fleur was often saying, we can't afford to do this. We haven't got the money there. And I'm saying if you're financially in the shit, what the hell are you doing? You know, if you can't afford to do it, why are you going to make it worse. Um, but obviously what I was saying wasn’t worth another goat shit but yeah, I knew then that prior to them going to that Yukon Quest that they were financially strapped.*

**This was RIGHT BEFORE they dropped off their dogs with Jodi Bailey at Dew Claw kennel.**

**[pause]**

*Gemma Nave: I don't know if they were in debt, but if not in debt close to it.*

**Curt brought two handlers with him to the United States that year. They were both pretty new to the sport and helped train his team in Minnesota.**

*Gemma Nave: When I first got to know them, pretty lovely, we would have considered them pretty good friends.*

**That’s Gemma Nave [Neev]. One of the handlers.**

**People sign up for this kind of job because it’s an adventure. The sort of thing you tell stories about when you’re older - like a study abroad or backpacking through Europe.  They weren’t even being paid.**

**But the memory that stuck out to Gemma most was when they drove the dogs from Minnesota to Alaska.**

*Gemma Nave:  It was the the part of the the trip that I was probably looking forward to the most because I was so excited to drive through Canada. And this is going to be amazing and like going to see the the Rockies or whatever, you know, like see these amazing things, the buffalo on the highway that you go through. And, you know, I was so excited and it was awful. It was honestly just the worst experience of my life probably.*

**Gemma says that Curt was awful to be around. Grumpy. A micromanager. But during this trip to Alaska,  They drove almost 24-7… stopping only to let the dogs out for food and water. They would take shifts sleeping in the backseat of his pickup. No motels.**

**It was almost like running the Iditarod. Except Curt wasn’t chasing a championship trophy – He was chasing the cheapest gas he could find.**

**Filling up on canisters of it, so they wouldn’t have to pay for more expensive gas down the road.**

**After they got to Alaska… the truck broke down.**

*Gemma Nave: We're now stuck on the Denali Highway. There's no one around. And we were like, Well, it was quite late as well. And he said, Well, we're just going to sleep here and we'll try to get a tow truck in the morning.*

*And then we he was like, well, we'll all just try to sleep in the truck. It was pretty cold. And then he for some reason got so irritated at us for something that we were doing or saying, and he ended up sleeping in the back.*

*Trying to sleep in the dog box in the back of the van. It was just like and we were like, You're being so stupid right now. Yeah, it was just so ridiculous. And in the end, probably like 9:00 at night or 8:00 or something, he phoned it in and he called Fleur and she arranged somehow a pickup truck and we got picked up out of there and brought to a motel down the road.*

*And that was sort of the grand finale of our experience with Curt. And he left the next day or very soon after, to go back, and we then never saw him again.*

**That truck… it needed a brand new fuel pump, which can cost about a thousand dollars. Their friend, Tony Turner, remembered getting a call from Fleur. She wasn’t asking for money, but she was complaining:**

*Tony Turner: she was saying they were broke. They couldn't afford that new fuel pump.*

*They should never have started that Yukon Quest.*

*Nate: Why were they in this financial pickle? Was Kurt working? Did you know? Did you have any insight as to why they were suddenly financially strapped?*

*Tony: Well, I often wondered over the years, like knowing what it cost to maintain a team to run Iditarod and the cost of actually getting to Iditarod...*

*You know, like obviously, it did have a good job, but maybe not as good as what I thought it was. You know, like there's that old saying, you know, you sell your soul to Iditarod or the 1000 mile races. It's almost like they'd done that.*

*And, you know, the addiction to having to do the race, whether it was right or wrong, was always going to be there.*

*But yeah, just like prior to them going to the Yukon Quest in 219, things were changing. They were definitely, you know, struggling to afford to do stuff.*

**You sell your soul to the Iditarod.**

**Maybe that’s what happens when we hear stories about bad mushers.**

**The ones that hurt their huskies. The ones that dope their dogs, or dope themselves… anything to keep going.**

**Anything to keep the dream alive.**

**Now, nobody I’ve spoken with has accused the Peranos of physically abusing their dogs.**

*Tony Turner: I’d say the dogs here, they have taken very good care of. You can’t be critical of that. Everything you see portrays them to be good, caring people with their dogs. And and I'm bloody sure the dogs here are still being looked after well.*

**But there are other ways to sell your soul to the long-distance races.**

**I think The Peranos built their dream on a house of cards they could not afford. They kept spending money even as they were falling deeper into debt.**

**Instead of facing reality, they played a shell game - borrowing cash and moving funds here and there in hopes of covering up the truth.**

[mux]

**When Jodi Bailey was waiting for payments for watching over the underdogs in Alaska… Curt and Fleur spent more than $10,000 dollars shipping a couple of other huskies overseas.**

**Tony said they also bought a brand new snowmobile for their touring business. He showed a picture of it to me on Facebook.**

*Tony Turner: I'm thinking you owe a shit Ton of money and you're buying a brand new snowmobile?*

**These weren’t just debts owed to Jodi Bailey, Jamie Nelson, and Jet Pets. I’ve found at least a dozen other people who say the Peranos owe them cash.**

**There’s the Australian woman who says she’s owed more than $100,000 dollars in unpaid business loans.**

**An elderly Alaskan who said she was never paid for helping out with their sled dogs.**

**And… more than a dozen tourists said they never received refunds after the Peranos suddenly canceled their dogsledding trip.**

**There was even a newspaper article about it.**

**One customer on Trip Advisor wrote, “I have spent 3 months trying to get my money back to no avail. Constant lies, excuses over emails about the bank ‘rejecting the payment’.**

**In another review, someone calls the Peranos QUOTE “scammers and thieves.”**

**Another thing I asked people about were the excuses.**

**When Jodi Bailey put her foot down, and set a deadline for picking up the dogs - Fleur  told Jodi she was late in paying because she had just been diagnosed with a brain tumor, and was in the hospital.**

**That might actually be true. Or half-true, anyway.**

**Two people told me that Fleur was diagnosed with something called a pituitary tumor when she was younger. It’s a pretty common and usually non-malignant brain tumor.**

*Tony Turner: That happened a long time ago. I do know she’d been taking trips over to [transcription unclear] for sinus issues and things like that, but nothing that laid her up in hospital for long periods of time that I was aware of.*

**But from what I’ve heard, this wasn’t a new thing - so whether she was in the hospital or not, I don’t know.**

**But what about that serious car accident? The one that hospitalized her and her young son Wyatt on Valentine’s Day in 2022 - the same day she was supposed to send the rest of the money to Jet Pets.**

**Due to privacy laws I can’t pull hospital records. And I’m still waiting on a public records request from the local police department.**

**There’s nothing in the local papers, and nobody I spoke with remembers hearing about a serious car accident.**

*Nate Hegyi: So she was she was never in any car accident that you know of.*

*Tony Turner: No.*

*Nate Hegyi: So are you still friends with them now?*

*Tony Turner: No. I haven't. They have. It's like I've been wiped off the face of the planet. They were at a race last year and they walked 20ft past me and didn't even exist.*

*Nate Hegyi: So what happened?*

*Tony Turner: Um, I think I found out what was going on, and that became a very uncomfortable situation. And then when I actually found out that they had abandoned the dogs, I was really pissed off, Didn't really want to have a lot to do with them anyway.*

**But really - I still just want to talk to Curt and Fleur. To ask them: If all this financial trouble is true…**

**Why didn’t you ever reach out for help?**

**I had one last trick in my sleeve.**

*[Ring Ring]*

*Tim Brown: This is Tim speaking*

*Nate Hegyi: Hey Tim, it’s Nate Hegyi, that public radio reporter in the US.*

*Tim Brown: How’s it going.*

**I got ahold of Tim Brown. He’s a reporter for Radio New Zealand. They are like the Kiwi NPR.**

*[RNZ clip]*

**And I asked him for a huge favor. To drive out to Curt and Fleur sprawling kennel in New Zealand’s South Island and see if they’ll talk.**

**This is an old journalism technique called doorstepping.**

**It’s where you show up unannounced and hope for the best.**

*Tim: An ideal scenario, they invite me in, give me a cup of tea, and I get you on the line to interview them.*

*Nate: Yup, exactly.*

*Tim: If they just spit a few words out before slamming a door in my face and just take the chance and ask what I can?*

*Nate: Yup.*

*Tim: and then, worst case scenario, we get nothing from them, but, set the scene, get the audio of the door knock and them not being there or anything. No problem.*

*Nate: There is a chance that they won’t be home, obviously.*

*Tim: That’s cool, I’ve done a hundred and one doorknocks, so been there done that.*

*Nate: Ok, awesome Tim. Talk tomorrow.*

*Tim: Bye.*

*Nate: Bye.*

*\*\*From phone tape fade to real tape\*\**

*Tim: I’m just turning into what I understand to be Curt and Fleur’s residence. I now see their home in the distance.*

*Yes, I now see kennels. There’s dogs everywhere. At least a couple dozen dogs out in the field near their home. They’re curious, one dogs popped up on his kennel to get a better view of my car driving by. And nearer to the home there’s a few more kennels, just a handful in this case. I see there are cars here, so someone’s clearly home and there’s some dogs sitting on the front porch.… going to make my way up there shortly…*

*[sound of Tim exiting the car]*

*Tim: Is it Fleur, is it?*

*Fleur Perano: Yeah.*

*Tim Brown: Hi my name is Tim Brown, I’m with Radio New Zealand and the Outside/In podcast.*

*Fleur Perano: Oh ok, yeah.*

*Tim Brown: I’m just touching base with you because the guys from the podcast have a few questions for you and they’ve been trying to get in touch, and I’m just…*

*Fleur Perano: Yeah, yeah, we’re not willing to talk to them.*

*Tim Brown: … You’re not willing to talk.*

*Fleur Perano: No.*

*Tim Brown: You’ve got nothing to say?*

*Fleur Perano: No.*

*Tim Brown: I just wondered if you’d be willing to even…*

*Fleur Perano: No, I’m not going there because it’s all lies, so uh, I’ve got nothing to go on.*

*Tim Brown: You don’t accept of what’s been said?*

*Fleur Perano: No. Because a lot of it’s untrue.*

*Tim Brown: Owing money, and…?*

*Fleur Perano: None of that. Especially to Jodi Bailey.*

*Tim Brown: Ok. These reviews online about the business..*

*Fleur Perano: Yeah, and a lot of those have been sorted out. That was people giving us bank accounts where it had gone back to their credit card.*

*Tim Brown: Right.*

*Fleur Perano: Yeah, so..*

*Tim Brown: So you don’t owe any money currently, is that…?*

*Fleur Perano: No.*

*Tim Brown: So those who are saying that you do, what… is it…?*

*Fleur Perano: Hey – I’m not going there ok?*

*Tim Brown: Alright. No problem.*

*Fleur Perano: Thank you.*

*Tim Brown: Thank you for your time.*

*[SFX of Tim getting back into his car and driving away]*

*Tim Brown: So, I’m sure you heard there. Fleur wasn’t willing to engage on the question of money owed. I asked what I could. She sent me on her way. She’s now out on the porch watching me as I drive back down the driveway there. There is also a man on the porch, he appears to be dialing up on a phone at this time. I’m not sure whether it’s Curt or not, I can’t confirm that. But I’m now driving back down the dirt driveway, back out towards the Poplar line paddocks, and back towards Roxburgh.*

**I don’t know if you could catch that… What Fleur said was “It’s all lies.”**

**MUX**

**In a way, the Peranos remind me of sled dogs.**

**Sled dogs have incredible endurance. They can push past their limits. Triumph over hardship.**

**But that can come at a cost. They often ignore pain. They can run through torn shoulders or sprained paws. If a musher isn’t careful, a dog can push itself past the brink.**

**That’s why there are veterinarians at each checkpoint to make sure the dogs aren’t masking pain.**

**If they are… they’ll pull them out of the race.**

[pause]

**Of course, the Peranos didn’t just hurt themselves - the way a sled dog might. They also hurt the people around them.**

**I think Curt and Fleur are people who don’t know how to quit. They got themselves into this mess years ago and have been running the same race ever since.**

**But nobody has been able to get them to throw in the towel. To acknowledge the race is over.**

[pause]

**One thing I’ve wanted to know, is whether the Peranos would be allowed to race if they ever entered the Iditarod again.**

**So I reached out the organizers.**

**They didn’t respond to my question and said they had QUOTE “no information or any knowledge” about any of the accusations against Curt and Fleur - the money owed, the abandoned dogs.**

**Seems like that’s a missed opportunity.**

**I mean, I know the Iditarod is going through hard times. This year was the smallest race in its history. It’s losing sponsorships. It’s under scrutiny from powerful animal rights groups. It doesn’t need more bad press.**

**But this isn’t just a story about another bad musher. It’s a story about people who put themselves on the line to take care of these dogs. People like Jodi Bailey.**

*Jodi Bailey: A part of me still, like that little kid that wants life to be fair.*

*It’s not fair that they could do this to those dogs.*

*I would have let it go. Cause I am afraid of backlash. I am very afraid of backlash. You know, this doesn’t to make it to this story. But there’s a total possibility with the amount of talking that I’m doing that you could edit this and make me look like a real asshole.*

*But I always said - and Jeff maybe told you this same story. Jeff would always say, you need to out them! The world needs to know! These peope are bad. And I would take a deep breath, and I’d be like they are - and the world does. But I’m not going to tell my story until there’s a happy ending. Because the really important part of my story is that there are still people, even when it’s really shitty, and other people are telling them not to. I wasn’t going to talk about what happened here, until I had done everything I could to make sure that there was a happy ending.*

**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.**

**It’s worth restating that this entire mini-series came from a tip that I got from a friend of a friend. And in my many years as a journalist, I’d say that’s where the best stories tend to come from - somebody tipped me off.**

**We always welcome your suggestions about topics we should cover on Outside/In - and if you’ve got an especially shocking, or important story that you think the world needs to hear - don’t hesitate to reach out.**

**It could wind up being our next big project.**

**Shoot us an email at** [**outsidin@nhpr.org**](mailto:outsidin@nhpr.org) **or you can leave us a voicemail at 1-844-GO-OTTER.**

**A lot of special thanks in this episode – mainly to all the folks who spoke to me off-record. You know who you are. Thanks to Radio New Zealand, Tim Brown and John Hartveldt. Also huge thanks to a freelance journalist who helped us out big time… Naomi Arnold.**

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

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