

## *Tales from the Pet Sitter*

### **Begin the Begin: Stella**

I had just moved to New Haven, CT from Burlington, VT with my two children, two cats, two guinea pigs, one dog, one husband and a whole bunch of fish in April 2016. I knew that I didn't want to go back into healthcare after working as a clinical and surgical ophthalmology tech since 1995. The next question was, "What to do?" I knew I needed a job that was flexible as my children were having challenges related to the move and I wanted to be around for them. I also knew that I wanted to run my own business. I'm a bit of a renaissance Jill of all Trades sort of gal, so I started brainstorming a list centered around my interests and "Pet Sitting" seemed to be the most practical logistically. Little did I know then how all encompassing running a 7 day a week business would eventually be, but as they say, "Ignorance is bliss!"

I then began to create my business plan and solidify plans because as we all know, ideas are great, but you actually need to *DO* something in order to go from just a plan to a functional business. The first thing I needed was a name. I really wanted to connect to my new hometown and thus felt it was important to integrate "New Haven" into my business name. From there it didn't take long to come up with "The New Haven Pet Sitting Company" because it clearly stated what my business was all about and where all I intended to operate, which was solely in New Haven. The name also worked well for search engine optimization, something I remain grateful for years later. Next, I focused on creating a website, and that took about a month to get my online presence up and running. I also needed to know what I didn't know about running a pet sitting business, so I spent a fair amount of time crawling the web, and subsequently came up with contact forms, information gathering forms and contracts. After all, I wasn't reinventing the pet sitting wheel here, and it seemed way more time efficient to learn from other people's successes and failures. I didn't want to carry two phones at all times, or at all really, so I learned all about Google Voice and created a business number for texts and calls. I even came up with a jingle and took a number in which the last four digits spelled out "PETS." (So clever! I told myself.) I registered my business with the state of Connecticut and the city of New Haven to make it all legit. I set up liability insurance. I ordered business cards to hand out to prospective clients. The only thing left was to establish a formal start date, and since we were near the end of 2016, I proclaimed January 1, 2017 the official launch date of the New Haven Pet Sitting Company. Yeehaw!

It took about 6 weeks to get my first client, an older black dog named Stella. Stella was about 12 years old, so she was about as easy of a first client as one could possibly be. She was super sweet and friendly. She liked to walk, which you might think all dogs would enjoy, but trust me, I can tell you firsthand that this is often not the case. She also liked dinner, so in dog terms, I was 2/2 in those regards and we became fast friends over the next couple of months. Unfortunately, I didn't see Stella more than an handful

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of times as her owner was just about to graduate from Yale and move to NYC, which was too bad, but that's life. People come and go. And so do their pets. That's just the nature of this business. Fortunately, it has made me look at everyone as transient, which might sound a little detached, but honestly, it's quite the opposite. As every round of visits with my charges might be my last with them, I appreciate my time with them even more. This perspective leads to a very Zen mode of operation in which I very much exist in the present, something I often fail to do in other parts of my life in which I struggle how to get unstuck from the past or how not to get too caught up in the future.

When I first started my business, I wasn't doing a lot of pet photography. I wrote pet updates on paper instead of text or email. I was trying to stay old school. The truth was that I was a late adopter of the smartphone, and only did so because I was now running a business, but I really didn't want to become another human who was constantly getting neck pains from constantly staring downwards like 75% of the population at that time. Everyone was obsessed with their devices that always seemed to take priority over direct human interaction! Anyway, I am rather sad now that I don't have any pictures of Miss Stella. All that remains is her paperwork and her keys on their original keytags which I chose to keep like some business owners keep their first dollar. For all the other pets who have since relocated, I have kept their keys, without their keytags, now completely unidentifiable and mixed with hundreds of others that will one day be used for an art project entitled "Keys to My Heart." But the only key identified by name will be hers. Stella Abrams: #1/2, a great beginning for which to begin.

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