

"ASK Nanny Fran" Article Tropical Breeze - May 2005

Dear Nanny Fran, I saw your rates page on your web site. How in the world can you charge so much? You must be very wealthy.

Actually, I do qualify for food stamps. Let me dispel a few myths the general populace seems to have about petsitters in general.

Fiction....Petsitters make a lot of money!!!

Fact.....Most petsitters HAVE TO HAVE ANOTHER JOB in order to stay in business. Just because you go away for one week and write a check to the petsitter for \$200 or so does not mean that she has three other clients doing the same thing for that week. Also, whatever she earns in that one week can be chopped in half or be absolutely nothing for the following week. There is NO CONSISTENT CASH FLOW EACH WEEK. At the rate of \$20 per visit to your home there is a half an hour travel time each way and then there is the hour spent at your home. The petsitter earns \$10 per hour. The mechanic for my jeep earns over \$80 per hour. The plumber I called yesterday charged me \$158 for an hour of work. The part only cost \$50. Everything else was travel time and expertise. Petsitters have to pay the same price for goods and services as you; however, earning \$10 per hour which has to cover all business and personal expenses makes life extremely difficult.

Fiction....As much as petsitters love what they do I bet they would do it for free.

Fact.....Petsitters have business expenses that all small businesses have, computers, computer repairs and upgrades, home, car, medical, liability and bonding insurances as well as gasoline, car repairs, car payments and house payments. However, many clients do get free visits all the time and are not told. Some clients are too cheap to pay for two visits a day when two are needed and the petsitter makes the extra visit anyway "for the good of the animal". The client is not told because they would think that the petsitter is trying to drain them of their cash and then they would switch to another sitter. With the new person the poor animal might not get such a dedicated animal lover who would make the extra visit and the animal(s) would suffer as a consequence. I many times have taken food and fed the animals because the client is starving their animals for God Only Knows what reasons. Obviously, I am not reimbursed. I also buy treats and toys for the animals because I know the dear ones will never see them otherwise AND I am not reimbursed.

Fiction.....How great to have a business where you can be your own boss.

Fact....When you are a petsitter you are not your own boss. You are On Call For Everyone's Life. Some people book your services a year, six months, one month, etc. in advance; however, many call you on a moment's notice. Everyone has a death in the family that is totally unexpected and you are called. Whatever plans you have in place have to be nixed so that you can be there for them and their animals. Or, people decide "last minute" to go out of town and they call you. You can NEVER plan ahead to be away for a full day anywhere because the minute you make the arrangements, a family will call and need your services.

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Fiction...Overnight petsitting has to be so great. You get to stay in someone else's home. It must be a vacation for you.

Fact....No matter if the home is a million dollar mansion or not, it is work, it is responsibility for the home and the animals and it is all very serious. Yes, it is work. You might stay for a week and you have to leave that home at the end of the week just as spotless as you found it. That means normal everyday housework, laundry, floor cleaning, etc. Just like you would do at your own home. Also, keep in mind that you still have your own animals at your own home to go home to two to three times daily to feed, water and walk. And, because you ARE a business you also have to drive to other client's homes to care for their animals. So staying overnight at someone else's home is NOT A VACATION. It is work.

Fiction...Wow...all the free time you have to be with your own animals and do what you want.

Fact....Free time? Petsitters do not get paid for sick days, vacation days, they have to work 365 days per year. Working 7 days a week for 10 years can become very, very old. All of my family members have stopped telephoning me on major holidays to wish me a "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Thanksgiving" because all they get is my voice mail because I am out walking dogs and scooping kitty litter boxes. People can and do leave town any one of the seven days of the week and they can be gone one, two or three days to two weeks or more. We have to visit the home several times daily during the entire time they are away. Then, if they get held up coming home you have to continue to visit the home and care for animals until they arrive home. Just recently I had a family become trapped in Colorado with the blizzard. Instead of visiting the home for five days it was seven days. Any plans that I might have made for myself on the sixth or seventh days had to be scrapped so that I was available to continue to visit the home and care for the animals.

Fiction...All petsitters must be real nut cases because every petsitter I know has 6 dogs, 10 cats or 5 cats and 10 dogs, etc.

Fact.....Over time all petsitters end up with EVERYONE ELSE'S DISPOSABLE ANIMALS. Yes, people will "toss away" a family member because they redecorated and the cat or dog does not match the new color scheme. You can double check this with the Humane Society of North Pinellas and the SPCA in Largo at any time. They also hear this. I have had clients who start out interviewing me to care for their kitties who are their children. Then 4 years later this young couple has a child and then another child. The kitties see less and less attention and start tinkling outside the litter box. They love that couple and are dying for the attention they used to get. Then the wife calls me and asks me to find them a home because she can't tolerate them urinating outside the litter box. However, she can tolerate continuing in her full time job while having two young children at home to care for. The husband is also working so there is no time for anything two legged or four legged to receive quality time from either "parent". THINGS have become so important that creatures with a pulse are terribly short changed. I might also add that this couple moved into a country club community within the last four years and "status", "appearance of wealth", etc. seem to have a very high priority at this point in their lives. I wonder who they will call to take away their children when they have problems.