

All the good news about animals, wildlife, and the earth

November/December 2005

# Best Friends

## Hurricane Katrina

Search ... Rescue  
... Reunion





# Shelter from the storm

## Rescue and reunion in the wake of Katrina



Hurricane Katrina slammed into New Orleans and the Gulf Coast on Monday, August 29th. Nobody expected what followed ... the flooding of a whole city ... a government in chaos ... tens of thousands of animals abandoned ... rescuers stopped from entering the city to do their job ... a lake of toxic chemicals and sewage ... dogs and cats stranded on the roofs of cars and porches, or left locked up in homes, for weeks on end.

Nor did anyone expect the huge outpouring of support for the rescue efforts. At Best Friends, we could not have imagined how a single event like this, and the desire of

thousands of people to help, would change the face of this whole organization.

Certainly, we had participated in rescue efforts before: the Northridge earthquake in California in 1994, and also the fires there, as well as in a support and fundraising role for animal rescue groups in South Asia after the tsunami a year ago. We expected to do no less for rescue groups along the Gulf Coast.

What unfolded, as Paul Berry, our director of operations, headed for New Orleans that Monday afternoon, was a very different story . . .



## A Beacon of Hope in a Sea of Trouble

### Day One: August 29, 3 p.m.

Paul Berry, Best Friends' director of operations, leaves Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in Kanab, Utah, to board a flight to Houston, Texas, and drive from there to the hurricane region to get a preliminary sense of the needs of local rescue groups.

Paul, a native New Orleanian, has had years of experience running mobile clinic operations around Louisiana and has been in hurricane rescue work before.

The general assumption is that there will be a lot of damage – but not yet that this is the dreaded “Big One” that will one day breach the levees and flood the city.

Paul arrives in New Orleans early the following morning and starts touring the region to assess damage and critical needs.

### Day Two

In New Orleans, Paul visits the Southern Animal Foundation, of which he is one of the founders. There is a lot of damage to buildings and infrastructure, but they are able to drive around the largely evacuated city mostly without problem ...

... except that now, on Poydras Street, they begin to see water flowing down the street toward them – “a bit like watching the tide coming in.” Back in the car, they head away from the water just as WWL radio announces that the levee has been breached at the lakefront, about 15 miles away. A quick calculation suggests that if the water is already here on Poydras, then the area near the lake must be under six to eight feet of water by now, and most of the city will be deep under water within a few hours. This is, indeed, The Big One.

Local people have known for years, for generations, that one day, sooner or later, the levees will be breached and the city will be a disaster area – a 500-year-flood scenario. Whatever plans and preparations the city, state, and federal authorities have made for this are about to be tested.

“There were really two disasters,” Paul later recalls. “First, the natural disaster. And second, the response from the authorities, which was even more catastrophic.”

The Southern Animal Foundation has 60-plus animals at their shelter/clinic who are now stranded. As the water level rises, the staff move the animals up to the top floor of the building. They have food for a couple of days at most.







Photos by Best Friends Photographers Troy Snow and Clay Myers

For animals all across the city, a terrible drama is now about to unfold. Tens of thousands of animals have already been left behind. Tens of thousands more are about to be abandoned as people are instructed by the authorities to evacuate without them. They are all going to be trapped or stranded for what may be days or weeks or months.

**“There were really two disasters. First, the natural disaster. And then the response from the authorities.”**

### Day Three

On his way out of town to look for a staging area where Best Friends can begin to care for whatever animals we can, Paul takes a call from the St. Francis Animal Sanctuary in Tylertown, about 100 miles north of New Orleans.

It's a sanctuary Best Friends helped to set up in 2000. Pam Perez and her daughter, Heidi Krup, care for about 400 homeless dogs and cats there, and run an adoption program in New Orleans. They have sent out a cry for help, saying that power and water are out, roads to their sanctuary are blocked, and they're down to their last 48 hours of food.

Paul heads for St. Francis and gets help from the sheriff's department which has just cleared trees from the road so people can get in and out.

Back at Best Friends, in southern Utah, we decide to send a team to St. Francis to help them get the sanctuary back up and running. A convoy will leave the next morning, equipped with food and generators.

Pam and Heidi offer their adjoining land to Best Friends to create an emergency rescue center.

Paul also calls an old colleague, Bert Smith, director of animal control for Jefferson Parish, the largest animal control district in the greater New Orleans area. Bert's Westbank Shelter has sustained damage but is up and running; his Eastbank Shelter is damaged and out of power.

Since before the storm arrived, Bert has been evacuating animals to a makeshift area at the Franklinton Fairgrounds, about 70 miles to the north. They're safe there for a day or two, but there are 130 of them, all in cages and carriers in sultry, oppressive heat, and they need relief as quickly as possible.

### Day Four



As the streets of New Orleans begin to flood, a puppy is born to a Rottweiler mother rescued and brought into the care of Best Friends.

Meanwhile, the first rescue team leaves the sanctuary in Kanab, Utah, loaded with supplies and equipment.



The first rescue convoy leaves Best Friends. We also ask staff members and volunteers from Best Friends Atlanta to come out and help look after Bert's animals at the Franklinton Fairgrounds. And we start coordinating rescue work and foster programs with local rescue organizations.

Then we put a notice on the Best Friends website inviting people to support our Hurricane Relief Fund. Within an hour, thousands of dollars, along with offers of supplies and other help, start pouring in.

The immediate need is to rush fresh water, food, shelter, medical supplies, and ongoing vet care to as many animal victims of the hurricane as we can reach.

Veterinarian Audrey Voors, whose house was destroyed, is also making her way to Franklinton to assist with medical needs.

## Frantic Days of Rescue and Relief

### Day Five

The team of five from Best Friends Atlanta, including veterinarian Will Mangham, arrives at the Franklinton Fairgrounds and takes over the care of the 130 animals there, freeing up Bert Smith's animal control staff. The Atlanta team will camp out there until more facilities are set up at Tybertown.

### Day Six

Paul Berry joins Bert Smith and his team as they start their first daily sweeps of the streets to rescue as many animals as they can. They pick up 100 dogs and take them to the Westbank Shelter, which is now full.

The team from Best Friends in Utah, headed up by Russ Mead, arrives at Tybertown with food and generators for the St. Francis animals, and fencing to create a relief center at the sanctuary. By the time Russ and his team have finished building their 24-acre tent city, there will be space for 1,000 dogs, cats, and other animals from Franklinton, from the Westbank Shelter, and from all around New Orleans.

Meanwhile, other rescue groups have been gathering around Louisiana. In Slidell, Noah's Wish is taking animals from the local shelter, which is flooded. United Animal Nations is setting up shelters in Monroe, Louisiana, and Jackson, Mississippi. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) is setting up staging areas in Jackson and in Gonzalez, Louisiana. The ASPCA and AHA are working with them.



*Jeff Popowich (above) and Kit Boggio (below) of the Best Friends rescue team.*







Early days at the Best Friends / St. Francis sanctuary at Tylertown.



Rescue teams arrive back at the relief center with their precious cargo as late as 2 a.m. every night. Marcello Forte (orange shirt) of New York City's Animal Haven helps unload the Colorado Humane Society's truck. Tomorrow, he'll drive a truckload to foster homes in New York.



Donations of supplies came pouring in.



One of the first kittens rescued.

Many rescue groups want to start rescuing animals, too, but government bureaucracy is clamping down, both on people trying to get animals out of the city and on rescue workers trying to get in to help them.

The full horror of this policy is becoming apparent as thousands of people are told to leave their animals behind – literally at the side of the road – as they board buses at pickup points along the freeway to be taken to Red Cross shelters.

At the Southern Animal Foundation, supplies are running low, and looters have been trying to break in to get the drugs in the medical dispensary. The dogs help scare them off. Finally, the SAF's veterinarian, Missy Jackson, rents a truck in Baton Rouge

## People are forced to leave their pets at the roadside as they board buses at pickup points along the freeway.

and gets clearance to go into New Orleans to rescue dogs, cats, and staff.

At Franklinton, the team from Atlanta has organized an enclosed area for the cats, and they are adapting some hog pens for the dogs. Local people come by and take some of the animals into foster care. Other scared, stray animals are hanging around the fairgrounds. The team tries to bring them in. One of them plucks up his courage to come close whenever dinner is served – so he becomes known as Dinnertime.

At 11 p.m., as the first fenced areas are completed at the Tylertown sanctuary, Paul and the rescue teams arrive back at St. Francis with 70 animals.

### Day Seven

The Best Friends staff have now been joined by about 40 volunteers on any given day from all across the country, including veterinarians and other experts.

They're working around the clock but have to be careful. Temperatures soar over 100 degrees in sopping-wet humidity. If they get overheated, they can go into heat exhaustion. Members of the team often need to be re-hydrated with IV fluids.

Trucks are also arriving, loaded with supplies donated by well-wishers. On one phone call, Russ mentions that the pile of donated blankets is now 12-foot-long by 7-foot-wide



and 17 feet high!

A daily routine is beginning to develop: Rescue teams leave early in the morning, drive two hours to the city, pick up animals from around the city all day, stop at the West-bank Shelter in the evening to load as many more as they have room for in order to free up space at the shelter, and then head back to St. Francis, another two-hour drive.

With so much needing to be done on the fly, much of what happens at the relief center is a miracle of self-organization as everyone works together – always in the ever-oppressive heat and humidity.

Animals are medically treated and groomed, walked, fed, and cared for. People occasionally manage to catch a quick nap before, at about 2 a.m., the rescue teams arrive back. Then, the animals have to be unloaded, photographed, tagged, and entered into the records – so they can be reunited with

## **Rescue organizations that are playing by the rules and going along with the bureaucracy are becoming more frustrated by the day.**

families who may be looking for them. Then a bit more nap time, and a new day starts.

Every day, fresh volunteers arrive – some for a few days, some for a week or more. Today, a convoy has arrived from the Colorado Humane Society – seven trucks loaded with supplies and a team of 10 people. Bob Warren, director of the humane society, and his team unload the trucks, then head down to the fairgrounds in Franklinton to help out there, too.

With the relief center now able to accommodate more and more animals, plans are to shut down the operation at Franklinton and bring all those animals to Tylertown – except that this creates a potential issue with the state bureaucracy . . .

The Louisiana state vet has issued a ruling that no rescued animals may leave the state. And Tylertown is just across the border in Mississippi. The ruling claims to be for the purposes of helping people to reunite with their pets, which is reasonable. But the state veterinarian's office has begun to refer to Best Friends as a "rogue operation," which means we're unlikely to get a waiver if we



*Thousands of dogs took refuge by standing on the hoods or roofs of cars – in many cases, for weeks.*



*Ethan Gurney and Jeff Popowich steer toward an anxious but eager dog.*





s on end until they were rescued.



Volunteer rescuer Suzanne Hall from Hope Safe-house carries an injured dog to safety.

## Band of Brothers – and Sisters

All of us cracked sooner or later. It didn't matter how strong you were. It was like being in a war. Sooner or later, it got to you, one way or another. We'd warn the newest arrivals, but none of us quite believed it until it happened to each of us. It was a combination of the heat, the exhaustion, the sadness of it all, the faces of the animals, and the faces of the people who were missing them.

The thing that really haunted those of us on the rescue teams was the knowledge, each day, that however many we brought back, we were always leaving thousands more behind.

One of us had been part of a team that was just distributing food. "We didn't have crates or an enclosed truck. And as we were leaving town, some dogs appeared and started running toward the truck. We stopped and pulled in as many as we could. But we couldn't fit them all in. I'm still haunted by the face of one that we left behind."

It got to us in different ways. There was one of us who'd been there pretty much from the start, and it seemed like nothing could faze him. Then one day I passed him at the sanctuary and he looked straight past me. It was what soldiers call the "thousand-yard stare." He was back to normal a few hours later, but you knew it had finally gotten to him.

But it also drew us together – again, like soldiers who have been together in a war. It's an experience we shared together.

ask for one.

So we decide to remain a "rogue operation" and hopefully stay under the radar, since entering into the official system makes it likely we'll be refused entry to the city to rescue the animals. Rescue organizations that are playing by the rules and going along with the bureaucracy are becoming more frustrated by the day – sitting on the perimeter and in large part being denied access to where the animals so desperately need them. It's a case of damned if you do and damned if you don't.

Meanwhile, Best Friends continues to operate with Bert Smith under the authority of the sheriff of Jefferson Parish. And the powers-that-be are reluctant to mess with Jefferson Parish. Frustrated by the federal government's bungling of relief operations, Aaron Broussard, president of Jefferson Parish, has already threatened to secede from the Union. The new State of Jeffertonia, he says, with bitter sarcasm, may be able to get more help from the federal government by applying for foreign aid!

Today, we also get a report of animals abandoned at a pet supply store. The sheriff gives the go-ahead to break into the store and get them all out. They're mostly pocket pets and birds – from parrots to snakes, and hamsters to tarantulas. At the end of the day, the Best Friends rescue team arrives back at St. Francis with all of those, plus 40 more dogs. (The next day, grateful staffers from the store come to St. Francis to retrieve them.)

## "Kindly Leave Your Pets Behind."

### Day Eight

One of our rescue teams is invited to work along with the 82nd Airborne 3rd Battalion 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment. They take 20 boats into New Orleans to sweep for lost animals who will then be taken into the care of Best Friends.

Working with the military is enormously satisfying for our team. The troops are very helpful and always eager to help the animals. Basically, it's a complementary effort – and a clear example of how the people-rescue mission and the animal-rescue mission can work successfully hand in hand.

The government's rule, telling people they can't take their animals with them, has been entirely counter-productive. Just for starters, hundreds of people all over town are simply refusing to leave because they



will not abandon their pets.

And for those who have been trusting the government and following their instructions, it's been heartbreaking. These folks have lost everything – their homes, their possessions, their jobs – and now, as they board buses at pickup points along the freeway to be taken out of town, they're being told to leave Fido or Fluffy at the side of the road. So the last they see of New Orleans, as they look back out of the bus window, is their beloved pet gazing helplessly at them or chasing the bus until they collapse, exhausted, on the highway.

But working with the 82nd Airborne is a model of how the rescue operation should work. They go first; we follow behind. They evacuate the people, promising them that their animals will be safe with us. We take the pets. The operation is swift and free of hassle and heartbreak.

And the troops tell us that working with the animals, who offer only love and gratitude, is something of a therapy in itself.

## Day Nine

### An emotional Anderson Cooper of CNN describes the dog rescue as the one bright spot in another day of hell and horror.

Back at Best Friends headquarters in Utah, dozens of staff members have joined the relief effort to assist with the thousands of e-mails and phone calls coming in – 100,000 in the first two weeks. Requests for help, offers of help. Calls for information. Calls from the media.

Mid-afternoon, we answer an urgent call from a nurse stationed at the I-10 and Elysian Fields in New Orleans, where boats are delivering people to ambulances heading to the hospital. (The I-10 is an elevated freeway. So vehicles drive down the off-ramp and stop at the water's edge where the boats wait for them.)

People boarding the ambulances are being told they have to leave their animals behind. One man, who refuses to part with his dog, is now holding up the entire line. "Please, can you pick up this patient's dog?" Nurse McGowan asks us.

Communications are still very spotty, but we manage to reach Paul Berry and his team, who, by good fortune, are not far away.



*The St. Francis Animal Sanctuary from the air. The blue tarps are a rough guide to the areas built out as the Best Friends relief center.*







Leah Hogsten, Salt Lake Tribune

## A Day on the Water

► **By Troy Snow, Best Friends team member and photographer**

We exit the I-10, drive down the off-ramp, and park our truck at the water's edge of what were once the streets of New Orleans. Two bloated human bodies lie half-in, half-out, looking like they may explode any moment.

Ken Ray unhitches the boat. He's a volunteer from Alabama, who came out to help, discovered we needed boats, and drove another 700 miles to go and get his own boat.

We spend the day in just a three-block area. Three of us are on this boat: Ethan and Jeff, from Best Friends Dogtown, and me, Troy, helping them and taking a few photos. First, we see two pit bull dogs standing on the edge of a recreational boat parked in a driveway. They must have been standing there since the hurricane blew in 11 days ago. We cut through the fence to let our boat come closer and pull up to the dogs. They jump aboard and smother us in kisses. These must have been fighting dogs. One of them is covered in old scars.

Next, we see two more pit bulls standing on the roof of a car. One of them dives into the water and starts swimming to us as we pull closer. We pull him aboard and navigate our way toward his pal. He is tired and fearful and not sure whether we're friend or foe. ... OK, now we have him. He's smiling now. He knows he's safe.

In all, we gather up just 10 dogs. Each one means navigating up to fenced yards, cutting through the fence to get the boat in, grabbing tree branches to pull up toward the porch. Some pets are on porches, some still indoors. At one address we've been asked to visit, we hear a dog barking through the windows. We pull up to the window and see him inside, standing on the bed to stay above the water line. At other houses, we can't break through the fence, although we hear meowing.

Several times during the day, we go back to the freeway off-ramp to deliver the dogs to Ken, who's waiting at water's edge. On one trip, we're joined by a reporter from the *Los Angeles Times* who's seen us from the freeway and stopped to see what we're doing.

At the end of the day, with a boatful of dogs, we return to the freeway ramp once again. It's beginning to get dark and we're bone-tired. We hitch the boat back up to the truck and are about to leave when we hear an eerie howl in the dusk, echoing across the neighborhood. At first we say to ourselves, we'll get him tomorrow. Then we look at each other, and unhitch the boat again. The dog is about 300 yards away, standing in the back of an old truck. Again, he's been sitting there for 11 days, bewildered, emaciated, dehydrated. The water there is about five feet deep. We bring him aboard.

On the way back, we see a cat on a roof. Try to get there. Can't do it.

We have photos, details, and addresses of every animal we've picked up. Hopefully, one day, they'll all be reunited with families – at least if their families are not like the ones lying there on the off-ramp, half-in, half-out of the water.

What we've done today is really just a drop in the bucket. There are thousands upon thousands more animals stranded like this, with only days before they too will just give out.

We seem to be the only people in this entire area of town. Why are others being turned back when there is so much to be done? Will we even be allowed in tomorrow? At least, as we drive back to the sanctuary out of town, we have a few furry refugees with us. We comfort them as they comfort us.

By the time they arrive at water's edge, the ambulances have left, and the dog is tied to a post, along with two more. As we untie them, a TV news crew shows up and starts taping. On CNN, a few minutes later, we see an emotional Anderson Cooper describing the dog rescue as the one bright spot in another day of hell and horror.

## Of Rescues & Reunions

### Day Eleven

We're now switching almost entirely to boat rescue – reaching into parts of the city that are still flooded and where animals have been stranded on chairs atop porches, on car roofs and hoods, and on the roofs of houses, for almost two weeks.

One of today's teams is joined by Leah Hogsten of the *Salt Lake Tribune*. Yesterday it was Canada's *Globe & Mail*. The news media are becoming an increasingly important way of getting the message out and encouraging more people from around the country to join the effort.

Thousands of animals are still stuck out here in a vast wasteland of toxic water. Eleven days after the hurricane, time is running out for these forgotten ones. They're emaciated, starved, dehydrated. Volunteer veterinarian Dr. Debbie Rykoff gives them fluids and revives them in the boat if they start to lose consciousness.

Leah Hogsten writes a front-page story about animal rescue for tomorrow's paper.

### Day Thirteen

When the hurricane struck, John Steinwinder, his sons Johnny and Philip, daughter Jean, and their dog Goldie lived in Chalmette, a suburb of New Orleans.

The family waded to a high school gym, with Goldie swimming along with them, then they went by ferry to a warehouse where they slept on wooden pallets, then it was on to the I-10/Causeway Boulevard pickup point to be bused to safety. John and his children waited there for three days to get on a bus. When the time finally came, they were told they couldn't take Goldie.

John knew he had to get the kids out, and so, crying, he gave Goldie to a Jefferson Parish Animal Control officer who told him she would be taken to the Westbank Shelter.

Yesterday, as soon as he and his children were safe at his sister's house, John called the shelter, and heard that Goldie was on her way to Best Friends. He came to our relief center later that day, but Goldie wasn't there.



(We'd had to focus on a group of animals needing to be brought out for critical care.)

But today, John is back at St. Francis, and Goldie is there to meet him, bathed and groomed and none the worse for wear!

It's a great reunion!

## They Call It "God's City"

### Day Fourteen

Volunteers who have been to Best Friends in Utah say that the sanctuary at Tylertown is "just like Best Friends Dogtown" – meaning wide fences and big open compounds, rather than small cages or just pet carriers.

Volunteers are building more shelter every day to keep up with all the new arrivals. Other teams make sure every dog has water, food, toys, and shade.

The many pets who were obviously loved and cared for by their families are being loved here now. Grooming time and play time are a necessary part of the schedule.

New arrivals are scanned for microchips and entered into a database. Today, a team from the AVID company – one of the two principal makers of microchips – is at Tylertown to help inject the tiny chips that will make sure they have a permanent ID.

A mobile clinic has also arrived from the Spay/Neuter Assistance Program of North Carolina to offer their services.

The different areas of the sanctuary all have friendly names. There's Toyland, where the little dogs are housed; Pit Alley, the haven for pit bulls, mastiffs, and the like; Uptown, where new kennels have been installed for recent arrivals; Midtown for pregnant moms, their pups, and other dogs who need special care; a TLC Cat Club; and the M.A.S.H. veterinary center. For the new arrivals each night, their first glimpse of the relief center is (what else!) Ellis Island – a big, grassy area near the entrance, where the rescue trucks unload their precious cargoes.

In another area, the grooming team is busy decontaminating and bathing the dogs who arrived last night. One of them is a poodle-terrier mix we named Goofy. Rescuers on a boat in the devastated area of the Ninth

**"I lost all my possessions, but the only thing I cared about in the world was Baby, so I haven't lost anything."**



*Three weeks after the hurricane, we picked up this poodle mix the day we entered St. Bernard Parish to do an official assessment of the needs of the animals.*



## Reunion!

Aggie Liccridi knew that Baby would be waiting for her at the Best Friends Hurricane Relief Center. Jefferson Parish animal control director Bert Smith and his team had promised that the golden retriever would be there.

"I wouldn't let go of her until the rescuers told me where she was going," said Liccridi. "I lost all of my possessions, but the only thing I cared about in the world was Baby, so I haven't lost anything."

Liccridi had escaped from her flooded home, with Baby in tow, through a second-floor window. After being evacuated, she was transferred to five different shelters. "Every time I moved, I thought I was a step further from finding her."

But 12 days later, Liccridi was able to come to Tylertown. A couple of hours later, she drove out of the sanctuary with Baby next to her.

"We're headed for Texas," she said, "and a new life."





## An Attorney's Tale

► By JoDee Favre

How does one begin to describe a life-changing experience? Mine began at the Best Friends/St. Francis sanctuary.

I knew about this mission through my former law partner, Laura Allen, and her lawyer husband, Russ Mead, now employed by Best Friends, who was heading to Mississippi to set up a huge home base for the rescue operations. I hurriedly cleared my calendar and advised that I, too, was on my way.

When I arrived, I was stunned by the mountains of donations towering dozens of feet in the air—dog leads, food, mosquito repellent, and other items mixed in with granola bars on the wet grass. Small, worried children arrived with their mothers to deliver little baggies of dog food, efforts that were appreciated as much as the 1,000-pound deliveries. It became my mission to start getting these supplies organized. Chain gangs were formed to move thousands of pounds of food under cover.

Dog handling at the camp was led by Sharon, the master of all dog handlers, along with Cody, a young man who helped with anything and everything. I will never forget the smooth, effortless manner with which Sharon handled some very difficult dogs, nor the patience and love shown by our two “pit bull girls” whose job it was to water, feed, and walk these scared, unpredictable little guys several times a day.

“Hot Lips” Sherry, one of our vet techs, ran

the MASH area for injured pups, tending to the sickest of the sick, matching up motherless puppies with new moms who had lost their babies. In the midst of administering fluids to many of these dehydrated dogs, twice Sherry had IV fluids administered to her personally, just to keep going 20 hours a day in that heat. Our resident nurse, Kit, was forever watching over us, noticing when our faces became beet red from heat exhaustion and forcing us to rest when we simply didn't want to.

In the early days, we didn't have enough pens for the dogs. So Mimi and I toiled in the fields, inserting fence posts into the hard ground and building awnings out of bright blue tarps to protect the little guys from the heat. The beagles and bassetts (“bagels,” as Sharon called them) were certainly appreciative. It was so rewarding to watch their progress. When they arrived, they were shaking and whimpering. Within a day or two, they were frolicking together and licking us with gratitude.

The animals weren't the only victims. Several of the volunteers had lost everything, too. One, a young woman named Kimberlee, had been rescued but not permitted to take her three cats with her. She worked so hard at camp, always on the verge of tears for fear of her animals' fate. Miraculously, our rescuers located one of the cats, a large feisty male named Jezebel, and he and Kim are now reunited.



*Our resident nurse, Kit, was always watching over us as well as the animals.*

Every day, our two lead rescuers, Jeff and Ethan, trudged through contaminated waters delivering frightened, displaced animals in desperate need of help. I accompanied the group to a location at the end of an exit ramp surrounded by chest-deep waters and helped my new friend Tracie set crates up and down the garbage-infested highway while we waited for the animals to come in. The stench of our surroundings was incredible. The quiet was eerie. Somewhere in the distance, you could hear the weak bark of a dog and the hum of one of our boat motors. Our dedicated vet, Dr. Deb, waited anxiously for the animals—as she had done 21 hours a day, day in and day out.

Later that day, I went out into the neighborhoods myself with Larry, Jamie, and Shirley. Though I had been watching from the “shore,” the reality of boating through

## How does one begin to describe a life-changing experience?

a flooded ghost town and wading through those conditions on foot was something else entirely. Homes were marked with orange paint to reflect the body count inside. Soldiers told us to be careful, as some homeowners had returned and were inside ready to shoot anyone who entered. By nightfall, convoys of military personnel could be seen barreling into the deserted city making it clear they meant business.

The animals who were recovered on those missions made it all worthwhile. Some were so frightened, they needed extra care and love. One, a Siberian husky named Meisha, was so distraught that we had to move her to an area where we could give her constant reassurance. Her person has been located, but has lost everything and can't come get her. So she attached herself to Ethan, who often slept in the grass beside her.

I have now returned to my comfortable home in Illinois with my family and my own dearly loved pets. Though I am battered with deep scratches, bruises, and a small puppy bite, I have never felt more proud. Keep up the good work down there, my new friends for life! I will try to sleep tonight in my comfortable bed if I can get the roar of barking out of my head. I will be dreaming of all of you.

*JoDee Favre is a lawyer, practicing in Belleville, Illinois.*



Ward picked him up from the hood of a car in his backyard. He was listed as gray on his admissions form last night. Now, after getting a bath, it turns out we can change his official color to white!

### Day Seventeen

It's really eerie driving around on deserted freeways. You can drive on the wrong side, use off-ramps as on-ramps. The only people here are military and rescue groups.

Joining one of the rescue teams today is a crew from *National Geographic*. They're particularly interested in the boat rescues, and this may be their last chance, since the water is beginning to recede now, and we're mostly wading through mud – up to our knees and thighs.

While waiting for the boat team to return to the ramp, Best Friends staffers Mike Bzdewka and Elissa Jones see two dogs running around like maniacs. They pick up the two shih tzus and bring them back to the van. One of them has a soft belly but no milk. Back at the boat ramp, Dr. Debbie says, "She has babies. *You have to go back for the puppies!*"

With momma dog in tow, Mike and Elissa head back to the neighborhood where they found the shih tzus. They put the momma dog on a leash, and she leads them to a porch where two pups are now whimpering.

Suddenly, a huge Rottweiler shows up. Could be trouble. But no, it seems the Rottie was lured by the sound of the pups – she's been nursing puppies herself. She leads Mike and Elissa back to her own litter, but it's too late. Well, at least we saved one family of newborns. And, back at Tylertown, the Rottie will be able to adopt and nurse some orphan pups herself, and be a mom again.

Back at the relief center, a team arrives from Petfinder.com. They hole up in a computer office with a satellite uplink, plugging in information from Best Friends admission forms and uploading photos of each animal. Petfinder is setting out to visit all the rescue organizations, in hopes of being able to compile a single lost-and-found database.

### We Still Have Hope!

#### Day Eighteen

Seventeen days after the hurricane devastated New Orleans, Best Friends receives an invitation to enter St. Bernard Parish officially and to assess the needs of the animals there. That's good news, but it's frustrating that it's taken so long, and we're worried



*Ethan Gurney and Jeff Popowich, the two lead Best Friends rescuers, braved indescribable conditions to rescue animals. They were true heroes of the day – every day.*

### From Texas with Love



It's just before 7 p.m. on September 13th, and a convoy of adoption vans is rolling into the parking lot of the No More Homeless Pets offices in Salt Lake City.

They're back from a trip to San Antonio, Texas, where they've picked up 120 dogs and cats from city shelters in order to make room for pets rescued from the hurricane.

The dogs and cats will be on parade the following weekend at a Best Friends Super Adoption day. And yes, by the end of the event, every single one of them will have been placed in a good home.



*At the Super Adoption in Salt Lake City, the line of people waiting to adopt dogs and cats goes all around the block.*



about what we're going to find.

The situation is somewhat better than we feared. The assumption that, after almost three weeks, most of the abandoned animals must have drowned or otherwise perished turns out to be incorrect; thousands are alive – albeit in desperate conditions. Animals are on the streets, locked in houses, everywhere.

Once again, the military troops have been a blessing to the animals. They've been doing their best to look after them on an unofficial basis, and feeding them MREs. But these animals are emaciated and dehydrated. They need urgent medical attention.

Today we're joined by a crew from NBC TV's *Dateline*. Producer Olive Tall-ey and correspondent Rob Stafford want to tell the story of the animals. Rob and his camera crew follow Ethan Gurney and Jeff Popowich as they tramp through the mud, entering houses that look like they've been bombed. Many animals are still alive. Some, sadly, could no longer keep going.

One of their rescues is a terrified cat who darts out of a closet and down a passageway. Jeff grabs him and bags him. He's wearing a collar and rabies tag, and Rob calls in the details to the *Dateline* newsroom in New York, where Olive sets about tracking the tag. The cat belongs to a man named Bart Siegal, who's been evacuated to Dallas and has been calling other rescue organizations to see if they have his cat.

Bart tells *Dateline* that he and his daughter were rescued from the roof of their house not long after the hurricane hit. They were taken to a makeshift shelter in a bank, then evacuated days later to Dallas, where they've been waiting for permission to go back home. The news crew arranges for Bart to come to Tylertown tomorrow.

## Reaching Out, Digging In Day Nineteen

Bart Siegal arrives from Dallas, after driving for 10 hours through the night. The happy reunion is captured by the *Dateline* camera crew. "I've never seen anything like it. You guys are doing some job here," he says, hugging Romeo, the kitty we rescued yesterday.

Next, Rob himself starts filling out the paperwork so that he can take home a beagle-mix puppy to foster.

Our foster/adoption policy, incidentally, is that animals are available to be fostered for three months from the time their names are posted on the Internet. If a pet's family claims them within that time, they must be



*This all-skin-and-bones little guy was afraid to come out of hiding. But Mike Bzdewka and Ethan Gurney lure him out with some tasty chow.*



*John Hoenemier, a Best Friends volunteer from Los Angeles, coaxes out a scared kitty.*



*Hiding in the rubble of a high school in St. Bernard Parish.*



*Volunteer Suzie Duttge with a dog the team has just rescued.*



# The Angels I Never Knew

► By Russ Mead

I was part of the Best Friends team that went out to the St. Francis Animal Sanctuary in Mississippi to set up our relief center. I've been wanting to say thank you to so many people. But I can't. They were like angels: You could feel their presence, but they disappeared when you went looking for them again. I'm talking about all the anonymous donors from those early days.

In the first few days, we were feverishly building dog runs to house the animals that arrived each night. We'd finish building a run just before midnight when the dogs arrived from the day's rescue efforts.

While I was talking on the satellite phone one day, trying to arrange for more fencing materials, a woman came up, pried open my left hand, shoved a gangster wad of bills into my hand, and simply said, "Hire some local people to help." We did.

People would walk up and hand me cash and tell me to use it for the animals or to buy a particular item they knew we needed. I can tell you what we used it for, but I just can't tell you who donated it or thank them.

With temperatures soaring into the 90s and humidity at an equal number, we were losing a volunteer an hour to heat exhaustion. And then, three ice chests appeared, along with a stack of Gatorade four feet high. I didn't see it arrive. I don't know who to thank for it, but it was exactly what we needed at the time.

And there was the woman in Wal-Mart about a half-hour away in McComb. She looked at my shopping cart and asked why we needed to buy the entire store's supply of hand sanitizers! I explained that dogs were coming in covered with bacteria from the floodwaters, and our first line of personal defense was near-constant hand washing. When I got to the front of the line, she handed me her American Express card and simply said, "Let me get that for you."

Of course, there are people whose names we do know. They sent supplies and cash, or just appeared from all over the country, from all walks of life: business owners, nurses, students, veterinarians, physicians, store clerks, truck drivers, mechanics, waiters, contractors, architects, retirees, lawyers, firefighters, executives, EMTs, housewives, and a Ph.D. in Chinese literature. They worked side by side in sweltering heat to build shelter for these animals and to clean, feed, and comfort them. They were all willing to do any task that was asked of them. Their only purpose was to save the animals.

Today, like yesterday and every day before that, Ethan, Jeff, and many courageous volunteers are in New Orleans, rescuing still more animals. I know they can hear the cries of these dogs and cats as they walk or boat along the city streets. For all the animals we have rescued, I thank all of the volunteers, including those whose names I never knew.



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returned. After that, the adoption is final.

Rob will take his foster pup home to Chicago. She doesn't have a name yet. "My daughter wants to name her," he says.

More teams have gone into St. Bernard Parish, and since there are far more animals than they can ever hope to bring out, they also load the trucks with dog and cat food, which they will pour strategically onto streets, sidewalks and porches that are now dry. The food is a lifeline for the animals they haven't been able to catch yet.

With the arrival of more plastic kiddie pools, the little dogs at the relief center get to go swimming today to cool off. Some go in the pools on their own, splashing and jumping all over. The hesitant ones are gently introduced to the water. Jana Morris, a volunteer from Charlotte, North Carolina, takes a shy Chihuahua into the pool. After their swim, the dogs snooze on the grass in the shade.

Once again, late into the night, the relief center springs back into action as the rescue teams return. Tonight they bring 30 dogs, five cats (including a three-week-old kitten), a turtle, and a cockatiel.

### Day Twenty-One

We're now entering the fourth week of the relief effort. How can any animals still be surviving? But they are, and rescue teams are headed out to the city as usual this morning. Last night's arrivals included a badly injured pet pig and an emu.

### Day Twenty-Two

Washington, D.C.: A meeting in Congressman Tom Lantos's office at the Capitol in Washington.

Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) and Christopher Shays (R-Conn.) chair the bipartisan Congressional Friends of Animals Caucus. They have invited Best Friends, the Humane Society of the United States, the ASPCA, and the Doris Day Animal League to discuss the text of an official letter to Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff and the draft of a bill requiring the federal government to include animals in future disaster relief efforts.

All agree that the policy of separating people from their pets is badly flawed.

### Day Twenty-Four

Hurricane Rita is now bearing down on the Texas coast, and Paul Berry, who's been back at Best Friends HQ for a few days, heads out to San Antonio to assess the needs

## The PETS Bill

**On September 22, Reps. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) and Christopher Shays (R-Conn.) introduced the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act into Congress. The PETS bill would require the government to include animals in future emergency evacuation plans.**

**Prior to introducing the bill, Reps. Lantos and Shays, who co-chair the Congressional Friends of Animals Caucus, met with Best Friends Animal Society, the ASPCA, the Humane Society of the United States, and the Doris Day Animal League. They also sent a letter to Secretary Michael Chertoff, Department of Homeland Security, asking him to consider the needs of animals in current rescue efforts.**

**After the meeting, we asked the congressmen about these initiatives.**

**Best Friends:** Are you optimistic about the PETS bill getting passed?

**Shays:** This bill has wonderful grassroots support and deals with an important issue of safety, so we're hopeful we'll see movement on it this congress. We have support from the Chairman (Don Young, R-Ala.) and Ranking Member (James Oberstar, D-Minn.).



Rep. Tom Lantos

**Lantos:** And that's a good sign that there will be bipartisan committee support for reviewing the bill soon, approving it, and sending it to the House for a vote. Many other members will want to sign on as co-sponsors of this terrific legislation. How long it takes to get through the legislative process depends on the House leadership.

**Best Friends:** Things went much better for animals, as well as people, in Texas during Hurricane Rita. One major difference is that people were encouraged to take their pets with them when evacuating Houston and other cities.

**Shays:** We learned lots of tough lessons from Hurricane Katrina that we applied to Hurricane Rita, including the need to accommodate pets to ensure their owners' safety.

**Lantos:** And the media have embraced the story of people who were separated from their household pets and service animals such as guide dogs in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. We raised the issue right away with Secretary Chertoff once we heard about it. But we are [also] interested in affecting policy over the long-term.

**Best Friends:** What role do you think the federal government can best play regarding animal rescue in disaster situations?

**Lantos:** I do not want the federal government getting involved in emergency plans for every little town along the Mississippi River. Local authorities know their assets better than a bureaucrat in Washington would.

**Shays:** Every local community has to have an emergency preparedness plan in order to qualify for FEMA money. We're asking the communities to decide how they can best accommodate pets and pet owners in that plan.

**Lantos:** And through our role in the Government Reform Committee, Chris Shays and I will keep an eye on FEMA and what plans they approve.

**Best Friends:** How does the caucus function? Does it include Senate members?

**Lantos:** The caucus's primary role is to keep its members informed of upcoming animal-related and humane legislation. It also tries to be a clearinghouse for animal and pet information for Capitol Hill staffers. At the moment there is no Senate equivalent of the Congressional Friends of Animals. I imagine that after seeing what happened in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and taking note of our PETS legislation, a compassionate senator's office will start a caucus on that side of Capitol Hill as well.

**Best Friends:** Anything else our readers should know about the work of the caucus?

**Shays:** Over 60 percent of American households have pets. Humane treatment of animals is a great concern for many Americans and I'm grateful to have the opportunity to work with Tom Lantos and wonderful grassroots organizations working for animal safety.



Rep. Christopher Shays





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of the animals in the region as millions of people begin evacuating the Houston area.

Clay Myers, former marine and now a Best Friends photographer, who's been at Tylertown, visits the Lake Charles area to assess possible needs there.

In Texas, state and federal authorities have learned some of the lessons of Hurricane Katrina and are not about to make the same mistakes in relation to animals.

Nonetheless, there are still problems. In San Antonio, where evacuees from Houston are landing, shelters are seriously unprepared for the influx of people and their pets.

"I met one family who couldn't get into a shelter with their dog," Paul recounts. "They were thinking of heading for Mexico, but were worried they wouldn't be able to get back into the U.S. without a health certificate for the dog."

Another family is nursing their injured retriever, who fell out of their truck on the way to the shelter and was hit by a car, breaking a leg and injuring his head. Back at Best Friends HQ, it takes several hours to locate a San Antonio veterinarian. Many are at a conference in Dallas. Others say they have no space. Eventually, one agrees to take in Rocky, but only after we ask the Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights to intervene. Rocky needs a day to stabilize before surgery, but it turns out his head injuries have not affected his brain.

At Lake Charles, Clay reports that the animals suffering most are livestock. We arrange to send 20 tons of feed. There's no "leave your pets behind" rule. For one man, the very opposite is the rule. While his Harley and other prized possessions remain in the garage, his five dogs and four cats fill the back of his truck. "They're all that matter to me," he says.

\* \* \*

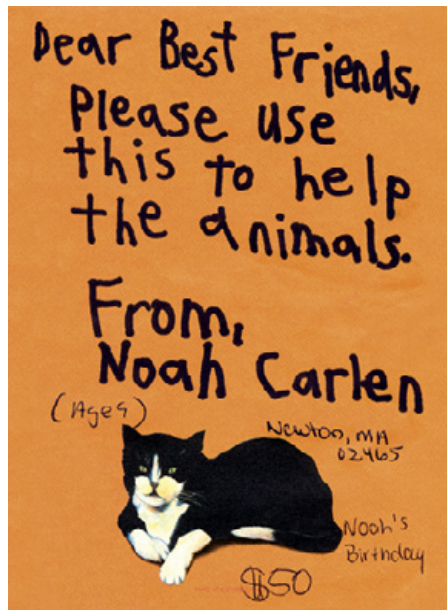
### Week Seven

It's now the middle of October, almost two months since the devastation began.

Every day, the rescue teams continue to bring more animals out of New Orleans. Some of these helpless creatures have not eaten in weeks. Others have been scavenging and scrounging. Somehow, they have clung to life despite all the odds.

Efforts are under way for local animal care and control officers to take control of their own parishes – especially since the big, official animal rescue center at the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center at Gonzalez not been accepting any more accepting animals

My friend Carol and I were at Best Friends in Mississippi on Saturday delivering supplies and an ICU that were donated. We saw a posting on your website where a shelter is in need of people to transport and foster animals ... or else they are going to be euthanized! Carol and I are trying to contact those folks as we have found 5-7 people here in Tallahassee willing to foster. Hopefully, we can get to the shelter this Saturday.



I was in Waveland this morning. (I'm a news reporter.) There are dozens of injured and emaciated dogs and cats roaming the streets and the beach, and no animal rescue is doing anything for them. The Waveland shelter is closed, the animals have no food and water. When I stopped my car, I was immediately surrounded by friendly dogs looking for help since seven days now! I took two of the most seriously injured to the shelter in Gulfport, but they are already at capacity.

I will bring a trunkful of dog and cat food and water tomorrow morning, and will try to help those pets as good as I can. But I'm basically on my own. I intend to bring out two more injured dogs/cats on my way back to Mobile. Is there anyone [there] willing to take one or two and foster them back to health? I'm from Phoenix and have to return Friday.

Gene is the man stuck in the French Quarter with 2 goats, 40 chickens, 12 parrots. His only means of transport is a Volkswagen, so he won't leave with some of the animals because they won't let him back in for the rest. He claims that there are at least 12 other people in the same situation, some taking care of several other people's animals. Won't evacuate without permission to move their animals.

KCAL-9 just ran a story on their noon broadcast about a man who has stayed behind in New Orleans because he has nowhere else to go. There was a beautiful black Lab foraging for food next to him and he told the reporter that the dog was a stray and had saved his life by pulling him from the floodwaters while he was drowning. The reporter praised the dog and convinced the man to get into the news van so that he could be taken to a shelter. The news van then drove off and left the dog behind to starve in the street! I couldn't believe it! Please e-mail the station and plead for them to return to that block with an animal rescue organization.

Maura

A caravan of rescuers will leave Queens tomorrow night and rent vehicles in Nashville and continue on to the Katrina-ravaged areas (an 18-20 hour drive) to pick up animals that need relocation.

If you can give your time to be a driver, please contact Companion Animal Network.

13 cats at [address], Chalmette, LA 70043, in St. Bernard Parish, cross street is Madison Ave., and Carmack runs parallel to St. Bernard Highway and Judge Perez Rd.

Owner is D.C., and Best Friends already re-united her brother with his dog. She is now in Florida.

Cats will be hard to catch, so please put out large quantities of food and water. If possible, re-check in a few days.



Ellen Linker  
Samuel Staples Elementary School  
515 Morehouse Road  
Easton, CT 06612  
September 13, 2005

\$22.02

Dear Bests Friends:

My third grade class and I are very concerned about the animals who have been lost or abandoned due to the hurricane. We would like to help in any way we can, and have decided that collecting money is the best way for us. We are too far away from Louisiana to be of additional assistance.

Please accept our first week's collection of \$22.02. Thank you for helping the animals.

Sincerely,  
Mrs. Linker's 3rd grade class

JP  
Harrison  
Malec  
Sahil Garga  
Andre  
Emily  
Lia S.  
Danika  
Sam  
Clara  
Hayley  
Edward  
Gallies  
Noah  
Olivia Kaufman  
Hristu  
Ciara  
Devon  
Marigot  
DeLorenzo

I read from your website that one rescue group estimates there are over 3,000 animals still stranded in homes or on rooftops. Why can't the government send the National Guard or some other large group in there to help with this rescue effort of the animals? I understand Michael Mountain went to Washington, D.C., to get things changed for animals in future disasters. Let him know that a lot of people agree that the government needs to help with this.

Here is information regarding access to New Orleans for animal rescue. My daughter is a nurse there and said there is a desperate need to rescue these animals immediately.

Take I-10 as close to New Orleans as possible. Pull over and call [this contact number] (paramedics). There are people that care about the animals there and will get you in. They are expecting our help.

Please help. Working together, we can do this. Contact everyone you can.

M.J.

To:  
Best Friends Hurricane Relief  
5001 Angel Canyon Road  
Kanab, UT 84741

From:  
Ruby Higgins

Dear Best Friends

Hi my name is Ruby and I am eight years old. I would like to donate my birthday money to help the ANIMALS that GOT hurt in the hurricane.

I am a lover of animals. I hope you can buy food and help the animals get homes. If there is any else that I can do just tell me

Your Friend  
Ruby



A puppy ripped from a little boy's arms causing him to cry till he throws up? These people have lost enough. Let them bring their pets. If FEMA, Red Cross, whoever, won't grant these people the biggest act of compassion they possibly could by letting them keep their pets (possibly the only comfort and meaningful thing in their life at this point), can you get some buses in there to evacuate people with their pets? If I had suffered all these people have in the last three days but had managed to cling to my cat all the way to the point of reaching those bus doors, my hope and my will to continue would end right there if you ripped him out of my arms too. Those pets may well be the only reason these people have to keep living right now. M.S.

Second floor of a bank in Chalmette that was serving as a shelter for people. I have a call in to a couple of people to try to pin down this location. A number of animals were left there when the people were evac'ed, and some other animals were taken by a Fisheries and Wildlife boat. Owners want to know where that boat went, and where the animals ended up.

Thanks, Beth, currently in Metairie

## Message in a Bottle

Vietnam vet Gary Karcher wrote a message, put it in a bottle, tied it to his dog's collar, and said he was going to the local V.A. hospital, not knowing that it had flooded. We found the dogs, and dozens of Best Friends members on the Internet worked together to find Karcher - locating him in a camp in Oklahoma. Here he is, with photos of Himie and his two dachshunds, which we faxed to a Red Cross volunteer for Karcher to identify. We'll be keeping the dogs safe until Gary has a new home.



HIMIE he a big babby

Hi I'm Gary Karcher, and this Himie. He is two years old and has been on heart worm med the two years. He is well train, and loves kids and other dogs, and house train.

I risk my life to save the three dogs, the other two are winnerdog and they have been on heartworm med also.

I stayed with them high & dry for a week on a 2nd floor. The water went down to about 1 1/2. I'll put all the waste that in the water heater in pans and all the food that left, and hope they make it. It like leaving your kids. I hope they stay with each other.

If you find them, please let me know. You can find me at V.A. Hose.

KARCHER. Last Four --> 9128

P.S. Here his eye med three time a day to clear up.

HIMIE he a big babby

Hi I'm Gary Karcher, and this is Himie. He is two years old and has been on heart worm med the two years. He is well train, and loves kids and other dogs, and house train.

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KARCHER 9128  
P.S. here his eye med three time a day to clear up.



since the end of September.

Three of the national humane organizations are each offering particular help to the three main New Orleans parishes:

St. Bernard Parish is getting support from the ASPCA in rebuilding its shelter and caring for the animals who come there.

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) is working with the Louisiana SPCA, the animal control agency for Orleans Parish, to open a new shelter – but it's still not ready.

And Best Friends continues to work with Jefferson Parish, taking animals from their shelter to our relief center at Tylertown.

Best Friends also continues rescue operations in all three parishes, plus Plaquemines Parish, and is working with grassroots rescuers and organizations across the state.

### Day Forty-Two: October 9

It's Sunday evening, and at the Best

**After all this investment of love and caring, "euthanizing" the dogs cannot be considered an option.**

Friends relief center at Tylertown, we take a call from David Meyer, a volunteer for HSUS, who's caring for about 100 animals still being cared for at the about-to-close center at Gonzalez. David is concerned that a considerable number of pit bulls may be about to be put down by officials there.

"There are about 80 of them," he tells our Francis Battista at Tylertown. "I can get some of them to a shelter in California. Can you take the rest?"

Bringing what will be another 27 pit bulls into our already full center will be something of a challenge. There are still several days to go before the official October 15th deadline. But David is clearly urgent to get the dogs out now, so we scramble to create a new area for them. And the next day, David brings his convoy to the Best Friends center.

Part of what's so heartbreaking about situations like this is that these dog and cat survivors have fought off starvation and dehydration for weeks on end. Their will to live is part of what has inspired totally exhausted volunteer rescuers to keep going back for more, day after day, paddling or wading to a house, risking serious injury

# Mission Control

## Up the street without a paddle

► By Francis Battista



I'm in the operations center for the Best Friends relief effort: six offices and a conference room at the sanctuary that have been stuffed with staff, volunteers, phone lines, and computers. It's Day 10, and we've already received more than 75,000 e-mails. Phone calls are coming in at the rate of 100 an hour.

I'm holding two phones, and a third one on the desk rings. A woman named Suzanne had to evacuate by boat and chopper from the American Can Company, an apartment complex converted from an old can factory. It's near Bayou St. John, and something of a New Orleans landmark. Hundreds of apartments ... stories of lots of animals left behind ... rumors of animals in distress, including reports of 150 dogs on the roof ... hard news in short supply. Suzanne says she left three cats behind because she was afraid (rightly so) that she'd be forced to abandon them somewhere along the refugee trail. She says she has keys to several apartments but access to the building is a problem. A boat is needed, along with permission from the building manager.

Arrangements are tangled and communication difficult. A fragile three-way phone link between us here in southern Utah, the rescue team in New Orleans, and the guide they'll be meeting to get into American Can is the best we can do.

I feel like I'm brokering a deal for a blind-date service: "You're going to meet Paul Berry at the second on-ramp after the Louisa Street exit. He's in a SUV with a boat trailer. He's wearing blah, blah ..."

Logistics will involve boating a mile from the on-ramp launch point, carrying the boat over some high ground, then boating to American Can with the apartment owner in tow, and then doing the whole business in reverse with crates of animals. Suzanne's animals turn out to be in surprisingly good shape. And, thankfully, there are no dogs on the roof.

This is just one of 100 surreal episodes as we connect the team on the ground with information, supplies, volunteers, and foster homes. Next door, Jason is wheeling and dealing for food, supplies, storage space, and fencing. Sherry is screening volunteers for skills and availability. Jill is matching families with their left-behind pets. Amy and Kathi are working with other rescue organizations. Barbara and Dave are fielding calls from the media. Molly is posting news on the website. A phone bank of staff and volunteers are returning calls and matching offers of help with requests for help.

Across the room, Anne and Rebecca are figuring out who else from the sanctuary can be spared to go to New Orleans. So far, 70 staff members have been reassigned from our regular jobs. (Thank heavens for the people visiting Best Friends who are caring for the animals here at the sanctuary as more and more staff members depart for the disaster area.)

It's virgin territory for all of us. When Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast, there was no operations center at Best Friends at all. Now the support team here is



working 20-hour days in lockstep with our colleagues in the south.

The deluge of support in the form of funds, supplies, and volunteers is awe-inspiring but chokes our system. Suddenly we are a trucking dispatch, air traffic control, and emergency response team rolled into one.

On the other line, I'm on the phone to Lt. Gen. Russell Honoré's office. He's in charge of federal rescue ops, and we're trying to organize a permit for one of the teams to get through a particular checkpoint. "Best Friends?" says the switchboard operator there. "Your members are all calling to thank us for helping the animals, but they're jamming our switchboard." Turns out someone has just posted the general's direct number on our website message board, inviting members to call and thank him for declaring that pets will now be evacuated as part of the family. (Molly posts a new message on our website: "Thanks everyone, but please stop calling!")

The military have been a huge help to the animals. Indeed, if it weren't for the Guard and the 82nd Airborne feeding strays MREs and rounding them up in unofficial holding areas, as well as protecting rescuers around the city and leading them to houses with animals, many more pets would have perished.

One of the toughest assignments in the operations center is receiving these types of requests for help to rescue left-behind pets:

*"Two cats, Pearl and Jack, one old terrier named Barkly. Barkly needs heart meds which are in the closet above the kitchen sink. Left three days worth of food. Please help."*

*Or: "Home filled with water in 10 minutes. Fish & Wildlife boat took me and my cats to temp shelter at Regions Bank. No food or*

*water. Evacuated but they wouldn't take my cats. Had to leave them behind. One is diabetic ... please save them."*

Hundreds of requests like these represent the pets their people cared about. But on our way to these addresses, the dogs and cats our rescue teams see the most of are the ones perched on windowsills or clinging to life on a porch or car roof, where they've now been standing for weeks under a blazing sun. These are the ones nobody cared enough about to call in a rescue request. Yard dogs, guard dogs, pit bulls, Rotties and their mixes. On a normal day, they would threaten and bark or wag and smile. Now they are desperate for human contact. Some dive into the toxic waters to get to the boats; others whimper, weak from a two-week vigil of sun and starvation. So, do you pass by the dogs to go to the addresses of those requesting help? Or do you save the dogs and hope the cats and Barkly can hold out for another day? How do you sleep?

You don't. You can't do enough. The team here is working on the same concoction of caffeine and adrenalin as the St. Francis team and the rescue teams, except that we have air conditioning and beds and showers – first-world luxuries that our colleagues in the apocalyptic landscape of New Orleans can only dream about.

But every life saved is a victory, and a system soon emerges that is as professional as any military operation as we keep juggling supplies, offers of help, requests for help, e-mails, phone calls, worry, and reward, and the hundreds of people working to help the thousands of animals waiting for their people to return. 🐾

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and braving toxic waters that could literally burst into flames at any given moment, to bring in these animals who are clinging to life by a thread. After all this investment of love and caring, “euthanizing” the dogs cannot be considered an option.

### Week Eight

It's October 16th, and at the Best Friends relief center at Tylertown a quick celebration is in the offing. Any moment now, Cathy Scott will ring the big bell outside the cat building. Every time there's a reunion on-site, someone clangs the bell. And the next time it rings will be for the 100th reunion at the center.

Off-site reunions are gathering steam, too, as families now in one part of the country connect up with pets currently in foster homes. For example, the first two dogs we brought out to the Best Friends Animal Sanctuary (our headquarters in Utah) for special care have just been identified by their families and will be reunited this week.

### Other plans going forward include:

**Critical Care:** Best Friends will keep our center open at Tylertown as long as necessary for rescues needing critical care from any of the New Orleans parishes. (Special thanks to the St. Francis Animal Sanctuary for continuing to make their land available for this.)

**Jefferson Parish:** We continue to support Jefferson Parish Animal Control, taking from their shelter animals who need special care. (Special cheers to animal care director Bert Smith and his staff for their tireless courage and perseverance – and for feeding our volunteers and providing showers for them!)

**Transport, Foster, and Support:** We'll be working with local groups and individual rescuers who need help getting animals to foster homes. And we'll be supporting them with supplies, equipment, finances, etc.

**Building the Best Friends Network:** The thousands of people who have given up so much to be part of this work of love, whether on their own or as part of Best Friends or other rescue organizations, are the continuing heroes of Hurricane Katrina. You have worked miracles of love.

For continuing news of the rescue effort and the Best Friends Network, visit the website at [www.bestfriends.org](http://www.bestfriends.org). 🐾

## One Man & His Blog

In his day job, Eric Rice manages BulkRegister, an Internet domain registrar. When the hurricane hit, like hundreds of other people across the country, he simply took time off and set off for New Orleans, where he worked for three weeks rescuing animals and helping to find their families. His daily exploits are chronicled in his web log at [www.ericdogblog.com](http://www.ericdogblog.com).

### What's it like being back home?

It's difficult. I didn't sleep enough ... didn't eat enough ... and it's still hard to be back with people who don't understand the magnitude of what we saw. Something weird is going on with time. I'll find myself working on something for what I think is 20 minutes, and then I realize it's been three hours. It's getting better, but very slowly. Other rescuers are having much worse symptoms.

### Why did you decide to go down to New Orleans?

Pictures on TV and some previous knowledge of how animals get left behind in evacuations. I got time off from our CEO, who had been in the Peace Corps himself. We rented a cargo truck – that was me and an old buddy – and realized too late that it didn't have air conditioning.

### How did you live?

First we went to a YMCA where another group was set up. We helped and learned. When they left we took over, but after a few days it started to be really unsafe. Most nights we slept in the truck. Billy slept on top of it. Then we set up at a Rite-Aid just outside Jefferson Parish, and started working the lists of known addresses where animals had been left behind. We also picked up about 50 or 60 dogs off the streets. When they had tags, it was usually easy to find their families. Then Dorothy Pizzuti from [www.dogdetective.com](http://www.dogdetective.com) found us and started sending down volunteers. We ended up with vets and all sorts of supplies. Someone donated some cots, so then we slept outside at the Rite-Aid with the dogs in a circle around us.

### What are the things that stand out now that you're back home?

The worst feeling has been the knowledge that many of these pets will never find their owners. You could see they were depressed ... that many were well cared for. They knew they were lost. You could see it in their eyes. It is almost too sad to think about.

### Are you still finding families?

Oh yes. There are probably about 100 of us in our group of volunteers working on reunions and making calls to shelters and people who took dogs from the main animal shelter at Gonzalez.





# View from the Front



Within 24 hours after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, Best Friends' director of operations, Paul Berry, was on the scene in New Orleans to assess the damage there and determine what kind of help could be offered through the Best Friends Network of members and volunteers.

Berry set up the Best Friends hurricane relief center outside Tylertown at the St. Francis Animal Sanctuary and organized Best Friends rescue operations there for the first three weeks. He then spent a few days in San Antonio, assessing the needs of the animals during the evacuation of Houston as Hurricane Rita was approaching the Texas coast.

Berry is a native of New Orleans and one of the founders of the Southern Animal Foundation, through which he managed a mobile spay/neuter and medical clinic and organized relief efforts in relation to earlier hurricanes in the region.

***Best Friends Magazine:** What did you see in New Orleans that first day after the storm?*

**Paul Berry:** The storm blew through on Monday, and we were in downtown New Orleans by 9 a.m. the next morning. We saw significant wind damage in the city, but no damage that would be considered catastrophic. At that point, the flooding in New Orleans was only in isolated areas and not considered a long-term threat to people or animals.

***B.F.M.:** So when did the situation in New Orleans become catastrophic?*

**P.B.:** There were two catastrophes in New Orleans. The first was the mass flooding, obviously. And the second was the catastrophic official response to that mass flooding.

The flooding took us all by surprise, but only in the sense that the levee failed well after the storm had passed. But, listen, I was born in New Orleans and raised in that area. All my life, I heard folks talk about what would happen when "The Big One" hit and the levee failed. It was local legend that the streets of the city would fill with water for days and weeks, etc.

So, absolutely, we should have known what to expect, and there is just no excuse for the profound lack of preparedness and poor execution by those who are responsible for the planning and execution of emergency management.

***B.F.M.:** By emergency management, are you specifically referring to how officials handled the evacuations of people and their pets?*

**P.B.:** Yes, there were two major failings in these evacuations: The first was that the transport of folks from emergency shelters should have been carried out in collaboration with official animal rescuers. Everyone has heard about the little boy who was boarding an evacuation bus when his puppy, Snowball, was pulled from his arms by officials and just left behind. We found many more pets left behind at these shelters, and we're still trying to reunite them with their families. Whenever there's a hurricane anywhere, shelters are set up and people always show up with their pets. Again, knowing for decades – generations – that the Big One was coming, it is stunning that emergency officials did not properly plan for this most obvious of outcomes.

***B.F.M.:** You said there were two major failings.*

**P.B.:** Yes, so the first was the failure to coordinate transport of sheltered evacuees and their pets with animal rescue officials.

The second was on the search-and-rescue of people and pets stranded in their homes from the flooding. These are the folks who couldn't make it to the emergency shelters. Initially, the search-and-rescue ops were organized and carried out by military personnel by boat. But again, no coordination with official animal rescue was ever planned. And, same thing, people were told that if they wanted to be evacuated by boat (or helicopter), they'd have to leave their pets behind. So the people rescue should have been fully coordinated with the animal rescue.

***B.F.M.:** In the second week after the storm, we did hear of many animals rescued by boat teams. Were these part of official rescue efforts?*

**P.B.:** Best Friends was actually the first national group to get rescue boats into the water in New Orleans, but we were not part of the official response.



In fact, we had to sneak our boats in while animal rescue officials argued, for days, over who was in charge of which bureaucracy. After a few days, we did encounter some ad-hoc efforts organized by local residents, but nothing official and certainly nothing anywhere near sufficient to rescue the tens of thousands of animals stranded by the flooding.

**B.F.M.:** *Realistically, what resources could have been deployed that would have been “sufficient” to accomplish the search-and-rescue of tens of thousands of animals?*

**P.B.:** Very simply, all the resources that were necessary should have been deployed. Period. I don’t mean to over-simplify this, but the failed response was the result of nothing more than an over-complication of the situation by a Bureaucracy of Dunces that were in way over their heads because they failed to do some fundamental planning.

Consider this: In a three-week period, the military managed to search every household in the City of New Orleans flood zone, by boat, trying to rescue any residents still stranded in their homes. All that was needed was for official animal rescuers to coordinate boat rescues alongside those military efforts. We’re only talking maybe a hundred flat-bottom boats with small motors, so maybe \$50,000 worth of boats? That’s a drop in the bucket compared to the \$20-million-plus that was raised by the top national animal organizations in the first two weeks of the tragedy. There was no shortage of money, just very poor planning. (Plus, there were hundreds of experienced rescuers, with their own boats, ready, willing, and waiting ... and waiting ... to be included in the rescue.)

**B.F.M.:** *Who, then, is responsible for the official planning process? Who shares the blame?*

**P.B.:** I don’t want to point out specific individuals or organizations. At this point, we should all share the blame going forward – all of us in the work of animal protection. We all need to tune in going forward and demand from our elected officials that proper talent be involved in the planning process and that sufficient resources be maintained and readied if, heaven forbid, we ever have to go through another of these.

**B.F.M.:** *You did rescue work for the first several weeks after the storm in some pretty awful conditions. How have those experiences affected you personally?*

**P.B.:** So many ways. I was very impressed with the military folks. They were not under direct orders to rescue animals, but they saved thousands of animals in makeshift shelters that they organized near their own encampments or along their patrol routes. Soldiers shared their MREs and water rations, keeping many alive till we were able to transport them out to our shelter in Tylertown.

And folks from the media were also genuinely and earnestly involved in animal rescues. They always seemed to know where to find us, and often they’d show up where we were staging our rescue work to drop off a dog or cat they’d rescued while covering a story or put down their cameras and help out.

And the faces of the animals who knew they were in merciful hands. They trusted us, and we trusted them – it was very moving and inspiring.

And all the people there who were working together from so many backgrounds, all just wanting to save some lives. You didn’t know people by their profession or their status. You just knew them as people who wanted to help. It’s very emotional to recall all that. 🐾



## Katrina’s South American Sister Was Catarina an omen of things to come?

For people along the Gulf Coast, Hurricane Katrina was an unimaginable disaster. In meteorological terms, however, she was not unusual – a major storm for sure, but not atypical of what comes across the North Atlantic at that time of year. The one thing experts did note was that ocean temperatures in the Gulf of Mexico are especially warm these days.

For hurricane watchers, however, the real shocker had come 18 months earlier. And her name was Catarina.

Catarina came ashore in Brazil on March 28, 2004 – a category-one hurricane that damaged 30,000 homes. Scientists were baffled. Brazilian meteorologists didn’t even use the term “hurricane” at first – not until they looked closely at the satellite images. Why? Very simply, no hurricanes had ever been recorded before in the South Atlantic. Conventional wisdom was that cool ocean temperatures and atmospheric differences made it impossible for hurricanes to form there.

But here was Hurricane Catarina, and, indeed, a couple of months earlier, on January 19th, a smaller tropical storm had also developed off the coast of Brazil.

The entire phenomenon was unprecedented. Conspiracy theorists had a field day suggesting that eco-terrorists were learning how to manipulate the weather. More likely, Catarina was just another harbinger of climatic change. Is it another indicator of global warming? Researchers say that any such analysis is, at this stage, speculative. Regardless, it might make sense to plan for the worst, rather than continually hoping for the best.





After Sal Dominio's bypass surgery in November, he credited Buttons with keeping him alive. So when he and his wife were forced to leave Buttons behind after New Orleans was evacuated, his world fell apart.

"She means so much to me," he said about the four-pound Chihuahua. So much so, his son Gregory said, that it threw his father into a deep depression.

After the family relocated, they began searching for Buttons, going to shelters all over the state before coming to Tylertown.

"I had already given up," Sal said. "I told my wife, 'I'm not going to look any more.'" But when he arrived in Tylertown, he learned that Buttons had been here and had then been placed in a nearby foster home. The family said having Buttons back in Sal's life will make all the difference. "Buttons gives him a reason to live," his son said.



John Steinwinder, his three children, Johnny, Philip, and Jean, and their dog, Goldie, lived in Chalmette, a suburb of New Orleans. Most of the town was wiped out. During the family's six-day ordeal to get out to safety, Goldie became their guardian.

Worried about his daughter's safety, John dressed her as a boy to protect her. He and Goldie stayed up all night to keep her and the boys safe, then napped during the day. If anyone came too close, Goldie would bark, and those who were up to no good would immediately go away. As the family waded to safety, Goldie swam with them.

The family was eventually required to give Goldie over to Jefferson Parish Animal Control when they were evacuated. Bert Smith and his team assured them that Goldie would go to the Best Friends relief center. A few days later, they came to get her. It was one of the first reunions.

**Just a few of the great reunions made possible by the tireless work of members of the Best Friends Network.**



The Ashfords with Prince, who was picked up on the streets by a Best Friends rescue team.



Petey had been understandably grumpy, and didn't want to talk to anyone. But the moment Sandy and Lane Ikenberry arrived at the Best Friends relief center and called out his name, he jumped up to greet them. "I'm sorry, Petey," said Lane as he lifted him out. "I'm so sorry."

The couple had left Petey and their two other cats in their house when New Orleans was evacuated. When they were allowed back in, they found one of their cats with a fatal gunshot wound to his head. The other, whom they described as a "wild cat," was outside in good shape. But Petey was gone.

A couple of weeks later, they located him on the Internet. And the next morning, they drove to the relief center at Tylertown to pick him up.





Myra and Michael Burchaell with Roscoe, one of the first dogs rescued by Jefferson Parish Animal Control and brought to Tylertown.



Suzanne O'Neill and Cem Cakir with Boo (left), and Kimberlee Lauer with Jezebel (right). Both cats were rescued by our teams from the American Can Company apartments.



"Heineken likes fresh mustard greens and fresh strawberries," Angel Parker said about her iguana when they were reunited at the Best Friends center. She explained that she gave him the name three years ago because of his color.

Angel had left her menagerie of pets with a friend, who eventually turned them over to the Jefferson Parish shelter, and we brought them to Tylertown. Angel's

other animals are a pit bull named Cornbread, a Rottweiler named Mary Jane, and a Maltese called Miko, along with cats Oddball, Alicia, Sassy, and Pretty Boy.



Bart Siegal drove 10 hours through the night from Dallas when *Dateline* producer Olive Talley located him and told him that Romeo was with Best Friends at Tylertown.



Photo by Ron Ivy

Disabled veteran William Morgan reunites with his poodle, Morgan La Faye. William, a double amputee, had to swim from his flooded house and hang on to a tree. It took three hours for him and Morgan to climb from the waters onto the roof of his house. William was rescued from there, but was told to leave the dog behind. She was taken to the Jefferson Parish shelter, and we brought her to Tylertown from there.

Volunteer Randi Bildner searched the Internet to find Morgan's person. Then she saw an article in the *Miami Sun Sentinel* about William, and she figured: "That's the guy with the poodle!"

When William was well enough to greet her, two volunteers took Morgan down to the V.A. Hospital in Miami. (We took two poodles, as you can see, to be sure we had the right one. Morgan La Faye went running straight up to William. And her travel pal is now in a foster home.)



# At the Grassroots

**Patty Hegwood is owner and manager of the Ark Animal Hospital in New Orleans. She and her family weathered the storm with their friends at the Jefferson Feed, Pet, and Garden Center.**



I was looking out the window at the garden store, watching as the storm filled a koi pond shell. Suddenly the wind picked up the pond and hurled the whole thing, full of water, at the gate. It was terrifying, like something out of a poltergeist movie.

When the city began filling with water, and with more than 100 animals at our hospital, plus our own pets, we knew we had to get out. My SUV looked like the animal version of the Beverly Hillbilies. There were dogs tied to armrests, cats in carriers stacked to the ceiling. We made it to a hotel in Lafayette but they wouldn't allow animals. So we went to the kennel and slept in front of the building, waiting for it to open. Once those animals were secure, it was back to New Orleans to start the huge animal rescue job.

“In New Orleans, you can accomplish anything as long as you have a Bloody Mary to keep you going!”

The most frustrating part of the rescue effort was that everybody who was part of the official operation had a clipboard, but nobody had a plan. There was no direction and there were power struggles everywhere. I ended up deciding to be a renegade! If you played by the rules of the state vet, you would lose up to four hours of rescue time every day. It was like common sense had been washed away. There were hundreds of owner-surrendered animals who should have been shipped out first. They were eligible for adoption immediately and there was almost no paperwork that needed to be worked out. But that wasn't happening.

I started making trips to the big staging area out of town and pulling out the owner-surrendered animals and sending them out with all the rescue groups I could find. Between those trips, I worked in triage with my friends at Jefferson Feed.

Many of the vets we worked with were heroes. But there were others who left the animals behind in their clinics. Many animals died. It was a real disappointment. Veterinarians and pet stores should be legally bound to evacuate their animals.

In New Orleans, you can accomplish anything as long as you have a Bloody Mary to keep you going. We stored the Bloody Mary mix in the fish tank to keep it cool. We got lots of vegetarian MREs from the troops, and we ate by candlelight and even picked through the rubble to find some cactus plants to put on the table, Martha Stewart style!

**Lynn and Ginger Morvant run the Jefferson Feed, Pet, and Garden Center in New Orleans**

Local rescue groups have always used our store for their adoptions. So, since we had 20 cats at the Adoption Center here at the store, and 15 pets of our own, we decided to weather the storm at the store, rather than try to evacuate 35 animals.

Although the power was out and trees down, the building withstood the storm and everyone was fine. Then, with the city now flooded, we decided to turn

the whole store and garden center into a staging area for the animal rescue groups.

For our first rescue, we had to wade through five feet of water for six blocks to get to our local vet clinic. I went with the vet and her assistant, and we picked up six cats and a dog. It was a surreal experience, wading through the water while watching a house go up in flames and helicopters flying by, dropping water on it.

Rescue groups from all over the country were going into the city and bringing animals back to our store for care. We had five vets caring for them, and then we'd take photos and details of where they were found before sending them to the big staging area at Gonzalez. We used up all the food in the store, and people arrived from out of town with supplies to keep things going. We also fixed lunch for the volunteers.

Army trucks were dropping off animals with us. Police were also bringing them in. One dog, called Snoopy, who lives happily down the road on Central Avenue (and likes to snoop around during the day), was "rescued" three times. Thank heavens we knew not to send him off to the big shelter!

About 2,500 animals went through our place. We didn't stop until the Gonzalez shelter stopped taking animals at the end of September. Then we switched to simply providing water and food for the homeless ones. We're also now the delivery point for supplies going to the new shelter over in St. Bernard Parish. The ASPCA is working with them and is having all deliveries sent to us at Jefferson Feed since the new shelter doesn't yet have a mailing address. 🐾

**The main shelter for animals being brought out of New Orleans was the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center – a private facility in Gonzalez, made available to the State Veterinarian of Louisiana.**

**Organizations working out of there included the Louisiana SPCA, the State Vet's office, the Veterinary Medical Assistance Teams, the Humane Society of the United States, FEMA, United Animal Nations, the Doris Day Animal League, and the American Humane Association.**



# The Last Survivors

“It has been tough, but we view our task as holy.”

**David Meyer is a martial arts instructor and founder of 1-800-Save-A-Pet.com, which helps place shelter animals in good homes. Meyer, who lives in San Francisco, went to New Orleans to volunteer with the Humane Society of the United States and ended up leading their pet rescue efforts from the shelter at Gonzalez until October 11, when the facility closed.**

## By David Meyer

All the animals are now gone from Lamar-Dixon. I took the last ones out myself – these pets that I and so many others had been working tirelessly for weeks to rescue.

It all started when I was in Mexico City on business and my friend Pia Salk, who does our Save-A-Pet TV show, called me and said, “You’ve got to come now.”

I arrived at Gonzalez late at night on September 15th, and the weather was so steamy that my glasses kept fogging up. There were stacks of dog food everywhere, but not nearly enough people to get the food to the pets in need. I joined with Jane Garrison who was coordinating the search-and-rescue efforts.

One dog we rescued reared up on her hind legs, put her paws tightly around my neck, pressed her chest hard against mine, and hugged me with her cheek pressed against my cheek. For 20 minutes she stayed like that.

But many others have drowned or simply starved to death. In one house, I entered a back room, which was a total shambles. On the bed, I saw a cute little Benji-like dog on his side, dead, with his eyes open, looking not unlike the many stuffed



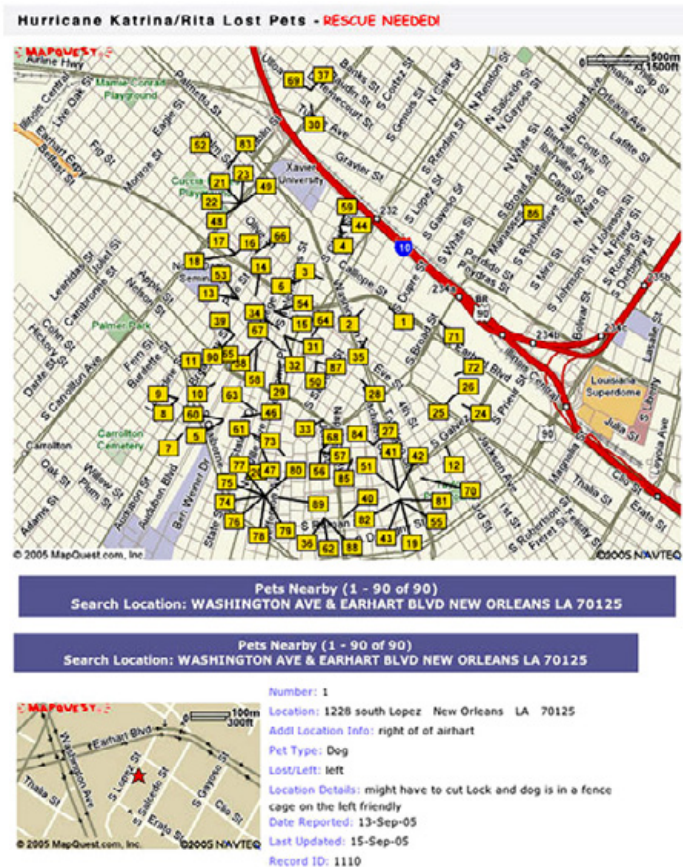
animals strewn around the room. No words can describe what our team of people has witnessed and experienced. No words.

The only way for us to find pets in closed residences was to listen for dogs barking. We didn’t have enough people or the legal authority to go into every home. I knew we were missing the cats because they could not call out to us like the dogs did.

I was ecstatic when I discovered that there was a database of people who had called to report their pets left behind, but this list had never been given to us, the rescuers! So, along with Dorothy Pizzuti from Dogdetective.com and the folks at Mapquest, I was able to turn that list into a database with mapping features that the rescuers could actually use. This should have been done on Day One of the crisis, but people were so overwhelmed by the enormity of it all, and the pet tracking database often does not have complete info on what humane society pets were taken to.

All told, I would guess the rescue effort out of Gonzalez saved maybe 10,000 pets. We could have saved so many more had there been better organization earlier on. I regret that I did not get involved sooner. It has been tough, but we view our task as holy. The people I have met are unstoppable.

On the final day before the Lamar-Dixon center closed, there were still over a hundred animals, mostly pit bulls, there who we were afraid were going to be put down unless I could find a place for them. These were the last of the pets at Gonzalez – the last survivors. They had survived Hurricane Katrina, the flood of New Orleans, Hurricane Rita, starvation, toxic chemicals and all the rest, and we were not going to leave them behind. I was able to send 27 pit bulls to the Best Friends facility in Tylertown, and 100 dogs and cats to Los Angeles, including 36 pit bulls. Every single one is healthy and in good care, and not a single one has turned out to be aggressive. 🐾



Example of database with mapping features for rescuers.



## Working together to help the animals

Organizations, as well as individuals, came together from all over the country. Best Friends staff and members worked with many groups, and vice versa. Here are just a few.



**Bert Smith**, animal care director, Jefferson Parish:

*"Our evacuation plan for animals at both our shelters worked very well. We got them all out the day before the storm. But after the storm, there were animals in need all over the parish. That's where Best Friends stepped in, taking custody of the animals we had evacuated, and then more every day as our shelters kept filling up.*

*"I heard of the problems that other agencies encountered with the bureaucracy and infighting among groups, but we avoided it. We got to know and admire the rescuers from Best Friends. They did what they promised, and focused on the work, not the politics."*



**Major Townley Hedrick**, U.S. 82nd Airborne 3rd Battalion, with Best Friends' **Paul Berry** and veterinarian **Dr. Debbie Rykoff**.

*"The military came in with a mission to help people, and it took us a little bit to be able to start transporting animals. We didn't have the right equipment, like pet carriers.*

*"I would like to have had the animal rescuers embedded with the military units."*

As well as being manager of Horse Haven at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, **Paul Tharp** is also the Utah state coordinator with the United Animal Nations' Emergency Animal Rescue Service (UAN/EARS).

When Hurricane Katrina hit, Paul went to Lufkin, Texas, to join an EARS team that was taking care of horses and cattle rescued from the storm.

He then went to New Orleans, to the St. Bernard Parish shelter, and helped with the rescue and transport of large animals who had been rescued, sick and starving, from both St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes.

During the relief efforts, EARS deployed 200 volunteers, had two shelters, in Louisiana and Mississippi, and worked with the ASPCA to assist St. Bernard Animal Control.



**Rob and Katherine Glover**, and **John Edmonds** from the Hernando Emergency Animal Response Team (HEART) with Michael Mountain at Tylertown.

HEART has long-time experience working in emergencies and disasters, and their team was invaluable in helping Best Friends develop a proper way of tracking the animals as they came in and went out.

*"Best Friends didn't have the disaster experience," writes Glover in her report, "and the paperwork wasn't following the animals, which has to happen. But what was right about Best Friends versus any other disaster relief effort experiences we have had is that the priority was always to try to reunite the animals with their families. This was more important than any other disaster I've been involved with."*



**Aimee St. Arnaud** is a former Best Friends staff member and founder of Humane Ohio, now working with the ASPCA.

Part of Aimee's work with the "A" has been to establish a major support program for St. Bernard Parish as they struggle to rebuild their animal care and control services. Not only was the animal shelter destroyed, but the staff, like the animals they cared for, were also scattered and left homeless.