

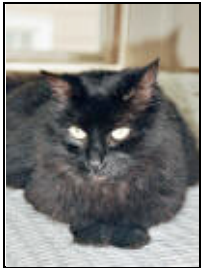


## Holiday Letter 2005

Dear Animal Compassion Network,

Happy Holidays! Wow, what an exciting year this has been. I can barely see my computer screen, because it is so covered with the sticky notes I keep of ACN happy endings. I do this throughout the year so I can sort through them and pick the best one for my holiday letter. I'll share the first three notes and you'll see for yourself why one story isn't going to begin to cover what we've been through together this year.

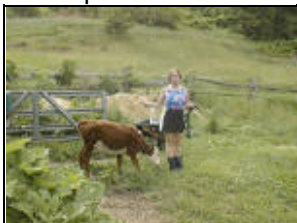
"Senior cat thrown outside - Feb 05" Having enjoyed a cozy indoor-only life for 12 years, "Kitty" was nothing short of traumatized when her family's allergic relatives moved in and she found herself moved out - outside in the middle of winter, that is - for the first time in her life. To make matters worse, she was declawed and completely defenseless. But "Kitty" must have done something right in one of her past nine lives, because her neighbor turned out to be ACN's cat coordinator who immediately intervened and, with the family's permission, placed her in an Emergency Foster home. Her name was changed to "Hedy," as her foster mom felt she deserved a new start in life. This week, Hedy was adopted into her forever home, content once again to watch the world go by from the warm, safe side of her window.



"Dog thrown from car - April 05". This note reminds me that although we can't always ensure a good start to a dog's life, we certainly can guarantee a great finish. "Oliver" is a gentle, older Boxer mix who was thrown from the window of a moving car. The car never even slowed down. Thank goodness the person in the car behind them was able to scoop him up and call ACN. Oliver recovered in foster care until the May Adoptathon, where he found a family who truly deserves him.



"Cat up a creek - June 05" This note still brings a smile to my face. I got a call from a man who said he was canoeing and had come across a cat stuck in the river. He thought she couldn't see and needed our help right away. I told him he needed to call animal control because they have the right equipment for animal emergencies, and then ACN could help him. He called back almost immediately to say that he had managed to get the cat and was on his way back home with her. I asked him if he wanted to put her up for adoption or keep her. He said he'd let me know. A few hours later, I got a call from a very angry young woman telling me that she lives in a residential neighborhood and I had another thing coming if I thought she was going to let her father keep a cow tied to a tree in her front yard. Yes, apparently the poor man had been saying "calf." And God bless him for getting her into his canoe, right? Through the wonder that is the ACN network, two of our longtime volunteers fostered her at their farm until Animal Haven found her a home in Tennessee. Rosalina, completely blind, now happily spends her days with her new best friend, an old lame cow.



This year the post-it notes abruptly end in September when Hurricane Katrina slammed into the Gulf. As we watched the live drama unfold, we were ecstatic to see the helicopters arriving to pluck people off their rooftops, only to realize in horror that they were not taking pets, too. And we all looked on in shock when CNN aired the footage of a young child, separated from his parents and clinging to his little dog as he boarded the bus, cry as an officer ripped the dog from his arms and set her back on the sidewalk. I will never forget the sight of the dog scratching frantically at the closed bus doors. In my mind's eye, I see Angel, my poodle mix, trying to get back to my four-year-old son, Jack. Not because



she was scared, but because she knew it was her job to protect and comfort her boy.

Pets who had been so recently sitting on a lap were suddenly at the mercy of nature. No food, no water, no protection. Even those who had managed to make it to the Superdome with their people soon became strays when they weren't allowed on the evacuation buses. People were forced to make a choice none of us should ever have to make. Please encourage your representatives to support the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (PETS Act, H.R. 3858), requiring that pets be included in federal evacuations plans. You may [sign a petition here](#).

Julie walked for miles to an evacuation point with her two dogs tucked under her arms. When she heard the national guardsman tell the man in front of her that he had to leave his dog behind, she panicked but managed to get the smaller of the two dogs into her purse. When the man refused to leave his dog, he offered to take other people's pets back home with him. In desperation, Julie took him up on his offer for "Cujo" and hastily scribbled down the man's address as she handed her dog over. When the ASPCA got to the man's house weeks later, the man was gone and the marks on the walls showed that the water had risen 13 feet inside the home. And there was Cujo, bloody but still alive, on the top shelf in the man's kitchen. When I called Julie with the good news that we had him, she said that she had lost her house, her job and all of her possessions, but now that Cujo was coming home, she had everything that mattered.



Cujo and Julie Reunited

I love making the calls with good news, but there is also so much sorrow. Dianna couldn't stop shouting with glee when I called to tell her we had her cat, "Bell." But her joy quickly turned to tears when I told her that her missing dog wasn't with Bell. The best advice I can pass on is to microchip your pets. Many of the callers told me their pets had tags, but few were rescued with them. Microchipping is permanent and the only way to ensure your pets will find their way home to you.

Perhaps the most vivid story was the one Doreen told me about losing her dogs, "Terror" and "Daisy." She described being in the back of the house and hearing an indescribable sound that turned out to be the water from the broken levees barreling down on her house. An instant later, she heard every window in her front room shatter as the water exploded into the living room where her two dogs were playing. The house filled with water in less than two minutes. Doreen ran up the attic stairs calling her dogs. She saw their heads bob up from the surge, but they were panicking and wouldn't swim to her. Somehow the dogs managed to perch themselves on top of a highboy, pressing their noses against the ceiling to breathe. When help arrived in a boat, the rescuers would not go in after the dogs, so Doreen called back down to her girls that she'd be back and said a prayer. The water didn't recede in her neighborhood for four days and it was another two weeks before the national humane organizations could search for survivors. I don't know how those poor dogs held their head up for four days, but they survived and soon found themselves in Asheville, NC.



Unable to just sit and watch the suffering, Animal Compassion Network had begun to mobilize. One of our volunteers joined an emergency response team from Asheville Humane Society heading for the disaster area. Others followed later, delivering supplies and bringing back the first trickle of animals released from the disaster response authorities. In one heroic instance, two ACN volunteers drove 26 hours roundtrip in a rented van to pick up 46 cats and 1 dog who were in a shelter that had been spared by Katrina but laid directly in the path of Hurricane Rita. They had originally planned to spend the night in Louisiana, but they arrived in a ghost town and had no choice but to load the animals, turn tail and run.



Back home, there was a different kind of heroism happening. ACN volunteers were scrambling to find enough foster homes, collecting food and supplies from friends and coworkers and



holding yard sales to raise money for the animal victims. Shortly thereafter, an eighteen wheeler delivered another 49 hurricane animals, this time mostly dogs. Some of them still smelled like the fetid water through which they had swum for their lives. They were hungry, scared and exhausted. Many had open wounds. All of them went home with a loving ACN foster family to heal. When all was said and done, ACN provided sanctuary to 113 hurricane-displaced cats and dogs.

The cleanup has begun in the Gulf and people are starting to get back to their lives. But here at Animal Compassion Network, we have daily reminders that the work is far from over. Everyday we reunite more pets and people; to date, we have made 12 confirmed matches. Some people want their pet back right away. Others are thrilled to know their pets are alive and safe, but they cannot take them until they can rebuild their life; these pets will stay in our foster homes indefinitely. Still others have asked us to find them another home. And there are still dozens of cats and dogs who will never find their people; we are helping them start a new life with a new family. Eighty percent of these hurricane dogs are heartworm positive and undergoing costly treatments. Almost all of the cats came to us with upper respiratory infections, and some are still in the animal hospital months later. Sure, this rescue operation has cost us more than we ever could have imagined, but it was never a consideration not to save these 113 animals from immense suffering. We have faith, especially in this season of giving, that the donations will follow.

I am still amazed that throughout the crisis, ACN continued to operate our foster and adoption program for 140 local animals without any lapse. After all, our local animals are always our first priority. In 2005, we have already adopted out 700 animals and the year's not done! That's over a 200% increase in our adoption numbers from 2004. More importantly, that is 700 fewer animals who were surrendered to the county shelter. And our spay/neuter programs have never before been in such a high demand. The typical recipient of our assistance is a pet owner who comes to us after being cited for an unaltered, free-roaming animal. These are the animals mostly responsible for reproducing and filling the shelter, so neutering them will dramatically decrease the intake and euthanasia rate at the shelter. And it's already working!

Yes, 2005 has proven to be quite a year for Animal Compassion Network - now you know why just one story wouldn't do us justice! I hope I can count on each one of you to join ACN in 2006. Memberships start at only \$15, but each one helps us save a life. Please take a moment to [complete the form](#) Your tax-deductible donation will change the world for abandoned cats like Kitty and thrown-away dogs like Oliver and any animal who needs comfort until they can find their way home.

Yours in rescue,

Eileen Bouressa  
Executive Director



Become an ACN foster home and get paid in hugs.

*PS. Need a last-minute gift idea for that animal lover on your list? Consider a gift [Pet Sponsorship](#). We will send them a picture and story of the animal you saved in their name. What could be more thoughtful?*