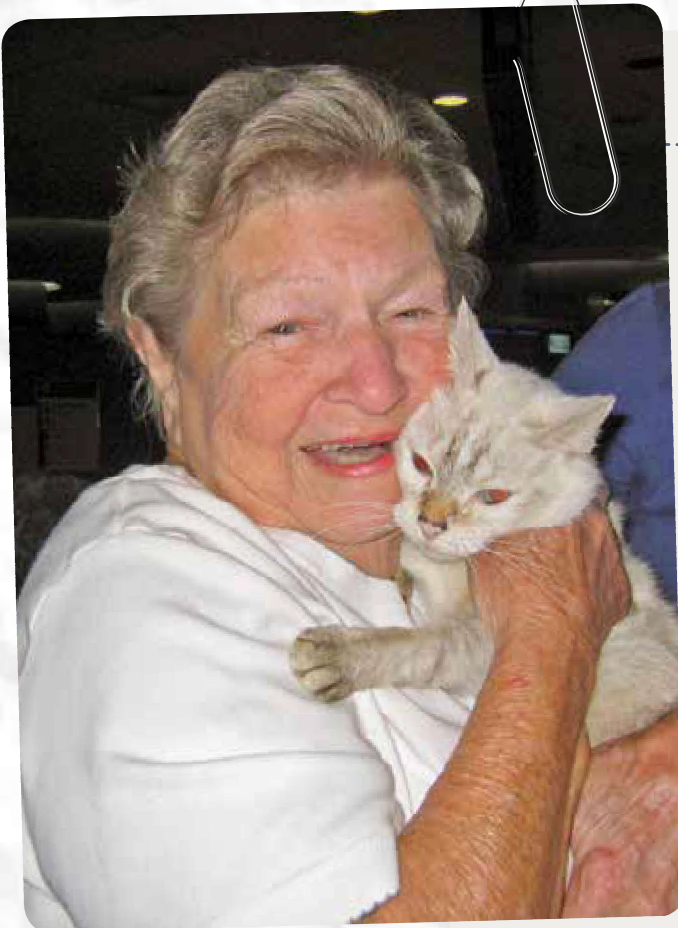


# REMEMBERING KATRINA

*It's been nearly 10 years since the storm hit, but for those on the front lines of rescue efforts, Hurricane Katrina is simply unforgettable. For many, it was a life-defining experience—one that brought lasting friendships and new perspectives, inspired career changes and renewed people's commitment to helping animals. Here, rescuers reflect on the devastating losses, the miraculous saves and the lessons learned in the aftermath of a storm that changed us all.*

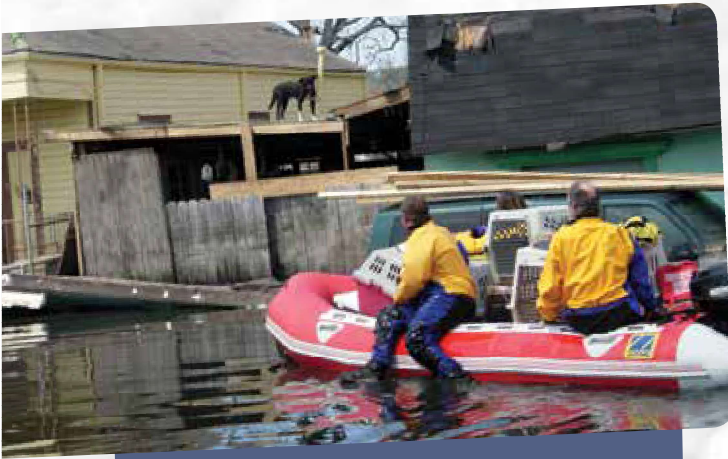


After boarding a plane in Vermont, Boo-Boo Kitty had a joyful reunion with Letha Alongi in Louisiana.

**Many cats and dogs had been brought to Vermont from Louisiana so they could be fostered until their owners were found.** The day before I was to fly to Louisiana to help with animal rescue efforts, I received a call from the rescue coordinator for Vermont Volunteer Services for Animals. “Can you bring a cat back to her caregiver in Louisiana?” she asked. “I just received a call from a woman who recognizes her mom’s cat on Petfinder.” After an exhausting ordeal with the airlines, Boo-Boo Kitty was on her way. After exiting the plane, I noticed a woman wringing her hands nervously. When this woman saw Boo-Boo Kitty, her eyes lit up but then registered disappointment. This wasn’t her precious Boo-Boo Kitty. Boo had a smoother coat and weighed more. The woman didn’t give up immediately, though, and began to inspect the cat more closely. At that point, their eyes met, Boo-Boo Kitty nuzzled her person’s armpit and magic ensued. The woman started to weep. “She always does that!” she said. This was indeed her cat. The trauma had taken a toll on her appearance, but this was definitely Boo! — *Sharon MacNair, president, Green Mountain Animal Defenders, Burlington, Vt.*

## remembering katrina

**I came from Edmonton, Alberta, with a team from the Edmonton Humane Society.** Katrina was eye-opening in many ways. It tested my abilities to work nonstop for 10 days with very little food or water or sleep. It tested my leadership skills and my skills in animal behavior and dealing with difficult people. Mostly, I saw the extreme kindness ... of the human spirit. We were posted at Lamar-Dixon, and there were people staying nearby who had lost everything. They came every day to help. — *Bilinda Wagner, Busby, Alberta, Canada*



Responders traveled by boat through flooded streets—rescuing the animals they could and leaving food and water for those they couldn't.

**Hurricane Katrina gave disaster preparedness a voice.** When we came home, agencies that we had tried to get into a conversation about disaster planning for people and their pets came to the table. The experience of Katrina [later] helped us deal with disaster in a town that was evacuated. — *Stephanie McDonald, senior consultant, Humane Society Management Services, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada*

**Working with Best Friends Animal Society, I was carrying medical supplies from Utah to Louisiana** and was asked to pick up a dog in New Mexico whose owner had been found in Florida. A young girl just out of college had rescued the dog, who showed up at a marine facility that was being evacuated for flooding. She took the dog to a vet and found a microchip. In an attempt to find the owner, she traced the name, only to discover the person had died in the flood. She called the funeral home the day of the funeral. The son of the man who had died took the phone to discover his dog had survived! He explained that his retired parents had lived in Louisiana all their lives and refused to evacuate. So he took his dog and went to stay with them. When the floodwaters hit their house, the walls collapsed and the roof came down on them. He said he thought his life was over until his dog started barking. He had found a break in the roof and was barking and clawing at it, making a larger hole. Eventually, the man was lifted out by rescuers and taken to a hospital with injuries. His parents did not survive, and his dog was left behind. He said without his dog, he never would have survived. I was honored to deliver the dog to a family member in Louisiana, who helped him get home. — *Shelley Thayer, executive director, Cat Depot, Sarasota, Fla.*



Towing a small boat full of supplies, volunteers continued rescue efforts in the devastated lower Ninth Ward after Hurricane Rita flooded the neighborhood a second time.



After Katrina destroyed its Japonica Street shelter, the Louisiana SPCA launched a capital campaign to build its new facility, which opened in the Algiers neighborhood in 2007.

**Early Saturday morning, August 27, we put into place our “trigger point” plan.** The plan outlined steps taken in the event of a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico that included New Orleans in its possible strike zone. ...

With 263 shelter animals safely loaded into climate-controlled vehicles, we made the arduous contraflow trek from New Orleans to the Houston SPCA. The staff and animals arrived in Houston late into the night. Once the animals were unloaded and sheltered, the staff waited—fully expecting to return to New Orleans in a few days.

Riding out the storm in Houston, the staff remained transfixed in front of radios and television screens. Doomsday scenarios were being projected as the storm projections increased to a Category 5 and then were reduced to a Category 3 a few short hours before reaching Louisiana. Katrina turned toward the Mississippi coastline at the last minute.

The first reports were that New Orleans had again dodged a major bullet. But soon that news would be overshadowed by a horrific reality. The levees and floodwalls, built after Hurricane Betsy ravaged New Orleans in 1965, were failing. We would learn the full extent of that damage in the coming days but from all reports New Orleans was filling like a bathtub. Neighborhoods throughout the city were becoming submerged as breaches compromised both levees and floodwalls and water poured from Lake Pontchartrain into neighborhoods via the many coastal waterways surrounding the city. Almost no area was safe including Gentilly, Lakeview, New Orleans East, Mid City, the Lower Ninth and the Ninth Ward—the LA/SPCA’s own neighborhood. The LA/SPCA’s Japonica Street shelter was so close to the Industrial Canal you might as well call them backdoor neighbors. It had been the LA/SPCA’s home since the late 50s.

Tragically, in 1965 many animals lost their lives when they were not evacuated during Hurricane Betsy. Forty-one years later, the LA/SPCA’s shelter animals were thankfully out of harm’s way, but no one could project just how many animals remained after Katrina and were now in peril. ...

The LA/SPCA was faced with an unimaginable and overwhelming task. Its shelter was destroyed. ... There was an urgent and pressing need. New Orleans has always suffered with a high stray population and there were certainly thousands of strays that were victim to the storm. For those that had survived they would need immediate rescue and shelter. The LA/SPCA also realized that there were residents who did not or could not evacuate and their animals would need rescue and shelter as well. No one however could imagine just how high those numbers would be.

— Excerpted from “Hurricane Katrina and the Louisiana SPCA,” by Gloria Dauphin. The LA/SPCA was the lead animal welfare agency responding to the emergency situation in New Orleans. With the help of thousands of volunteers and animal welfare groups from across the country, the organization rescued and provided water, food and shelter to more than 8,500 animals following Hurricane Katrina.

**Katrina further proved my belief that pets are family.** Some people stayed behind and died with their pets rather than leave them behind. I was a leadership volunteer for Emergency Animal Rescue Service [now called RedRover] at the Monroe, La., shelter. I remember one particular reunion when a little old man who had lost his whole family and everything was reunited with all he had left—his little old dog, who he was so grateful to have to rebuild his life with. — Maryann King Hasbrouck, Levittown, Pa.

## remembering katrina

**I went down [to New Orleans] for 11 days.** Because of my background in animal control, I was dispatched with the LA/SPCA to help go to various addresses to check for animals who were reported to have been left behind. We often left Lamar-Dixon at 4:30 a.m. and arrived back close to 9 p.m. What we saw was difficult to deal with since we had never seen such destruction in the past. One day when I arrived back at the Lamar-Dixon shelter, I went into the food tent to try and find something left to eat. A woman came over and sat down next to me. She said she was from the Green Cross and was there to help animal welfare people. She talked to me for a long time about what I had seen and how it affected me. It was overwhelming to see so much death and destruction, lives torn apart and animals lost. She was there to provide support to those of us out there, and it made an impact. It made me realize how important it was to take care of ourselves when we are working to take care of our beloved pets.

Katrina changed the animal protection movement forever as laws went into place to make accommodations for pets in disasters. Disaster animal rescue teams were formed across the country. This has helped us to move forward in protecting pets during disasters. During Superstorm Sandy, I was there helping and got to see the new policies in action. — *Sheryl Blancato, founder/president, Second Chance Animal Shelter, East Brookfield, Mass.*



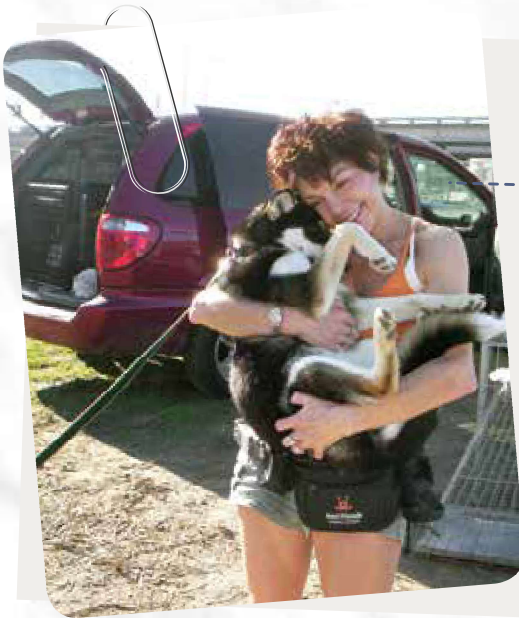
Sharon Williams hugs her horse Flash, who was rescued from floodwaters and taken to the Lamar-Dixon shelter. While dogs and cats were the most numerous of the rescued pets, volunteers also cared for dozens of equines, rabbits, hamsters and other small pets, birds, pigs, reptiles and even fish.

**I spent five days volunteering at Lamar-Dixon** in Louisiana, including one day in New Orleans searching for animals in need. This was before I became an animal control officer. My experience there definitely helped influence my decision to make animal control a career. — *Mary Ellen Wood, humane investigator, Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA, Daly City, Calif.*



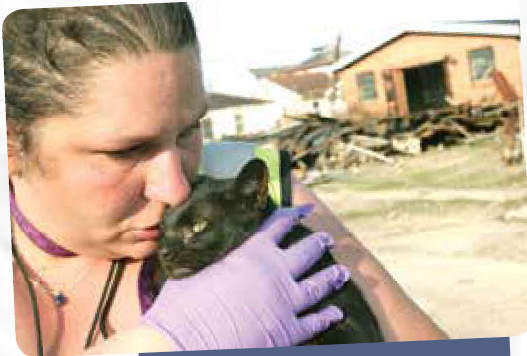
Climbing into attics, scurrying across rooftops and sifting through rubble, rescuers braved unprecedented field conditions and sweltering heat to capture animals and transport them to safety.

**Like everyone else, I would start to cry every time I saw images in the paper** or on TV of the Katrina animals. I finally got to the point where I could not just sit and do nothing. I submitted my volunteer application on Tuesday and was on a plane first thing Monday morning. Working at the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center was one of the worst experiences and one of the best experiences of my life. It was heartbreaking to watch vehicle after vehicle drive in dropping off animals every day, all day. ... But I met some of the most amazing, caring people: people who came from all over the U.S., Canada and Europe to help; who put in extremely long, hot days and basically did whatever was necessary to help the animals. And I heard the same thing time and again: "I just couldn't sit and do nothing." Once I returned home, I knew that I wanted to keep doing rescue work so I signed up for [disaster response] training, have deployed many times with The HSUS and will continue to do so as long as I am able. — *Sharon Deming, HSUS district leader, Sterling Heights, Mich.*



Juliette Watt gives an adopted dog a farewell hug at "Celebration Station." Located at a former amusement park in the New Orleans suburb of Metairie, the temporary shelter cared for pets still found roaming city streets in early 2006.

**I was deployed down to New Orleans in September 2005**, one week after the storm, with Best Friends Animal Society. I flew down in my airplane to our base camp at St. Francis Animal Sanctuary in Tylertown, Miss. One of the most memorable experiences was every night at around 1 a.m., a huge semi truck would arrive at St. Francis with dozens of dogs who had been picked up that night in the city. We would unload all these terrified animals and take them into runs that we had prepared. Each day was a 16-hour day of tending to all the injuries and dealing with the terror that the poor dogs were going through and trying to find their owners. I still can see the truck roll up and all the faces looking at us from inside the crates. It still feels like yesterday.  
— Juliette Watt, program consultant, Doris Day Equine Center, Pagosa Springs, Colo.



Volunteer Anna Strates of Maryland cradles a cat from New Orleans' devastated lower Ninth Ward.

**I deployed to Lamar-Dixon in Gonzales, La., in September and worked in Barn 1 with the cats.** I had volunteered with horses mainly up to my deployment to Gonzales. When I came back home, I began looking for a shelter where I could work with cats. I also applied for and was accepted into the [disaster response training] program and have been deploying ever since. I learned the necessity for disaster planning for animals, and as I am a CERT [Community Emergency Response Team] instructor, I make this a part of the disaster-planning curriculum.

I truly believe that every person who responded was special. I made friends with people from all over the U.S. and two wonderful women who had come all the way from France. — Bonnie Charles, South Lyon, Mich.

**I was in Venice, Italy, when Katrina hit.** I knew I had to get back to New Orleans and get my animals and do what I could to help others. I got snuck into town via back roads and [with] National Guard soldiers pointing guns at me. I said I was going to get my animals and sped off; thank goodness they did not shoot me. Got back to my house; my animals were fine. I ended up staying and rescuing, doing what I could to help. Another lady and I rode around dropping off food and water and breaking into a couple of houses when we heard barking. It was a nightmare. I fostered some puppies and kittens, and still have my Pumpkin kitty, who was one of the fosters. So many people came down to help. I am a tour guide, and people tell me often that they adopted a Katrina dog or cat. This makes me happy. There are many good people in the world, but the animals could use more. — Nita Hemeter, volunteer, Project Spay Neuter, New Orleans, La.

Receding floodwaters left a layer of muck over entire neighborhoods. Rescuers still remember the stench. At emergency shelters, bathing animals was a full-time job for several volunteers.



## remembering katrina



Boston veterinarian Debra Campbell monitors a patient at the Lamar-Dixon shelter. As more time passed following the storm, more animals arrived in critical condition.

### I was on the HSUS volunteer disaster team during Katrina.

It was my first day [in the field] with an animal control group from Florida. We were driving around Eagle Point, which was right on the Back Bay, when we were stopped by a group of people sitting out by the road in front of what was left of a neighbor's home. They asked if we could keep an eye out for their Pomeranian that they had to leave in their home when they evacuated. We asked which home was theirs, and they pointed down the street. When we got to the location they gave us, all that remained was a big pile of shredded lumber piled up like you would pile wood for a bonfire. My heart broke that day.

All the rescue groups and shelters and volunteers that came down to help ... were amazing and I can't thank them enough. — Robin Bush, volunteer, Mississippi Animal Response Team, Gulfport, Miss.

I was one of several staff members from the Animal Welfare League in Alexandria, Va., sent to assist with Katrina disaster relief efforts. Four weeks after the storm, our team spotted a chow mix with a broken leg. The dog's owner was an elderly man with a grapefruit-size goiter on the side of his neck. The dog's leg was broken during the storm, but seemed to be healing OK. I explained that we could take his dog to the Lamar-Dixon camp for free vet care. When I added that

we didn't have space in the van for the man to come with us, he politely declined. There was a brief spark of anger in my mind; he was keeping his dog from receiving medical care. But I soon realized that the man was simply being loyal to his dog, not willing to send him off with strangers, and that the way I had offered had been unintentionally insulting. This man was in an isolated area with no vehicle. He had been living for weeks in a damaged home without electricity or

safe water. He was doing the best he could, and judging from appearances, he was taking as good care of his dog (perhaps better) as he was of himself. I invented a reason to leave supplies, so as not to further insult his pride, and took from him the lesson to hear someone's story and see if I can create a better situation without devaluing what the person already brings to the table. — Suzanne D'Alonzo, The HSUS, Gaithersburg, Md.

I responded to Katrina and was at Lamar-Dixon for about three weeks helping with the hundreds of displaced pit bulls. When I returned to Arkansas, I opened a shelter specifically for pit bulls because of Hurricane Katrina. The Dog House of Where Angels Run has since saved more than 1,000 pit-bull-type dogs, including many from fighting cases. — Desiree Bender, founder, The Dog House of Where Angels Run, Conway, Ark.

Ready to catch panicked pets living on the streets or trapped in homes, an animal control officer from New Jersey walks down a New Orleans street.



**Myself, Scott Wilson and Bruce Earnest were the first HSUS disaster response strike team** to enter the city of New Orleans. On patrol, we saw a dog on an entrance ramp that was flooded. We parked and tried to work him toward us. We were close, damn close, but he bolted into the water and began to swim. We went in and searched, but he disappeared under the water. I still see his face every day.

Sandy Monterose of the ASPCA said it best: Katrina was the renaissance of animal welfare. Working with NOLA police and LA/SPCA members that gave their all cemented my life choice of animal rescue. — *Jeff Eyre, Northeast program and response specialist, American Humane, Lords Valley, Penn.*



After surviving Hurricane Camille in 1969, the city of Waveland, Miss., suffered a second heavy hit from Katrina. Parts of the city were obliterated, and rebuilding continues today.

**As a volunteer with the ASPCA, I was deployed to New Orleans to help with the animal rescue operation.** I was prepared for the emotional aspect of working with the animals. What I didn't expect was working with the people who had experienced such massive loss. I remember a woman who came in looking for her cat. She broke down sobbing. I was so overwhelmed by the magnitude of her grief for her entire life, her city, her community. I hugged her and said, "Look around. All of these people are volunteers and came to help. We care." It showed me that it is never just animals. It is the relationship between the animals and the people.

To this day I cannot think of Hurricane Katrina without crying. I think it will always be the most emotional and significant experience of my life. I was so impressed by the whole disaster operation in New Orleans that I became an emergency medical technician. I was deployed to the earthquake in Haiti and worked in the emergency room of a field hospital. I was able to help with [Superstorm] Sandy recovery. Now I am in nursing school. Katrina changed my whole life and my goals. — *Sarah La Rocca, New York, N.Y.*

A filthy and dehydrated cat gets a bath and exam at the Lamar-Dixon shelter.



**I was working for The HSUS and manned the call center** in Gaithersburg, Md., for the first month. I fielded so many calls from panicked people, people who'd had no idea what to expect with Katrina and were now worried because their pets were so unprepared. And then there were the people who were angry at the government and just wanted a place to vent their worry. After about four weeks, I was deployed to the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center shelter in Gonzales. On my last day working in Gonzales, I was paired with another volunteer to go into the city to check on a list of animals. Everyone said New Orleans looked like the set of a post-apocalypse movie, which was true, but what I will never forget is the smell. We went into one house that the cat had long since abandoned (through a hole in the window), and it was a month of rotted food, damp furniture and open sewers—and yet some family pictures still clung stubbornly and crookedly to the walls.

My most memorable moment was a reunion I witnessed. We were watching a dog for a New Orleans police officer whose family was in a no-pets temporary shelter until they could collect their dog and go up north. A lot of officers had left the city, but this one had bravely stayed. He turned up at the shelter while I was out walking his dog, and when we rounded the corner and he spotted us, he let out this gigantic sigh of relief and collapsed on his knees, his dog tugging me toward him. — *Janna Sears, Humane Society International, Gaithersburg, Md.*

## remembering katrina



Katrina-refugee Abbey was transported to a Florida shelter and eventually adopted by Kate MacFall.

I went to Hattiesburg, Miss., to volunteer at the temporary shelter. My girl Abbey was one of the last remaining dogs in Hattiesburg, and as things were winding down she was transported to Tallahassee Animal Services, where I've been volunteering since 1999. Abbey was also the very last remaining Katrina dog for adoption at our shelter. She was timid and so afraid to leave her kennel that I had to carry her out to meet prospective adopters. By January I decided she was coming home with me. Abbey has been the light of my life ever since.

My most memorable moment was [in 2013] when Abbey and I returned to the exact address in the rural, coastal town of Bay St. Louis, Miss., where responders found and rescued my girl. Abbey and I walked around the property and talked with a neighbor who had been there "during the storm." This man had lost all of his dogs during the flood and was one of the few neighbors to return home and rebuild. He said the house next to his, where Abbey was picked up, has remained vacant, bearing boarded windows since Katrina. Stepping foot on the ground where Abbey had been saved brought Katrina home for me and was my happiest, saddest and most memorable moment. — *Kate MacFall, HSUS Florida state director, Tallahassee, Fla.*

I watched the scene unfold from my living room in Southern California. I felt helpless but wanted to help. I came across an Internet group called Stealth Volunteers ... [which] quickly evolved into a team of volunteers trying to reunite the rescued pets of New Orleans with their families. We used every detective skill we could think of to try and help as many pets as possible. I was assigned a case that included three hound dogs who were rescued with a note that said "we must stay together forever." The dogs had been taken together to Miami. Luckily, I had an address from where the dogs were rescued. I was able to reach a relative of the owner, and she passed my name and number along to the owner. The man was so grateful and thankful that his dogs survived. The Miami shelter kept the dogs for him until he was able to get them back. It is still one of the most rewarding experiences of my life, and I have a bond with the core group of Stealth Volunteers that still amazes me to this day. — *Kim Hollis, Charlotte, N.C.*



Reunions of pets and owners were a highlight of volunteers' experiences. Valerie Bennett hugs her dogs as they are reunited at an Atlanta hospital a week after Hurricane Katrina hit. In the wake of the storm, Bennett had to leave behind her pets when she and her husband, a liver transplant patient, had to be evacuated to a specialist for supervision.

Louie was drowning in the water when a guardsman in a canoe paddled by him. He grabbed him out of that toxic water and put him in the canoe. A rescue brought him to Chicago, and I adopted him. I can't believe my 1-month-old puppy survived that—but he is the greatest, most people-loving and baby-loving dog ever. — *Christina Ksoll, Chicago, Ill.*