

# Carrie On

*Dancing with the Stars*  
judge steps up for animals

**Carrie Ann Inaba** was working as a Fly Girl on *In Living Color* in the early 1990s when a stray cat walked through the door to her Los Angeles home and decided he was there to stay. Inaba didn't know it at the time, but the long-haired black and white kitty she named Shadow would influence the course of her life.

"I think that he was absolutely my soul mate. I've never had a connection even with another human being as much as I've had with this cat. Some people might say that's crazy, but anybody who's had it knows exactly what I'm talking about."

Over the years, as her career began to take off, Inaba sensed her calling was to help animals, but she wasn't sure what her role would be. So she volunteered with local rescue groups. She attended The HSUS's Genesis Awards and learned about a variety of animal protection issues. She stopped eating poultry and red meat. A few years later, she returned to host the Genesis Awards gala.

Shadow's death in 2011 prompted the *Dancing with the Stars* judge to "really assess what I'm going to do in this world." She adopted a 10-year-old boxer with a heart condition, a Chihuahua-basenji mix, and two more cats. She co-created and hosted a web series focused on finding homes for special needs shelter cats. Feeling that she still had more to give, she began educating herself about the business side of nonprofits.

In 2012, Inaba launched The CAI Animal Project Foundation: "I saw that there was a need for a foundation that could support the numerous smaller animal rescue organizations out there that were struggling with funding but did not lack for compassion and the willingness to go the extra mile to save a furry friend," she says. "And I thought I could create some fun fundraisers while doing so."

In this edited interview with senior editor Julie Falconer, Inaba describes how a love of animals has inspired all the right moves in her life.

## Have you always cared about animals?

I grew up on a wildlife sanctuary in Hawaii. It taught me at an early age to respect the animals. We always had two dogs and two cats. I was a shy girl, and I went through my share of problems growing up. Somehow being able to talk to my animals or just receive their unconditional love helped me make it through my life, not only as a child but as an adult. All of us out there in this world, we struggle; life is filled with ups and downs. Animals have such an



amazing healing power. I want to share that with people.

## What is it about cats in particular that tugs at your heartstrings?

I think that cats are underappreciated. A lot of people fear them because if a cat doesn't like you, he lets you know. Dogs tend to be a lot more trusting. I had a bit of a rougher childhood, and I didn't trust people, so I've always related to cats. I have two dogs, and I love them so much. It's a different type of love; it's just as strong, but it feels different. I understand cats. I can feel what they're thinking.

When I was 18 and a pop star in Japan, I got my first cat. She came back with me from Japan, and it became this tremendous friendship. She was there in Japan when no one else was. She knew all these parts of my life that no one else did. Then I got Shadow, who was probably the biggest catalyst. He

taught me pure love the way animals do, and after he passed away, I realized I had so much more love to give. I thought, OK, this is the time to start the foundation and really dedicate myself to this cause that is so dear to my heart.

### What has The CAI Animal Project Foundation accomplished so far?

Since our launch in October 2012, I'm happy to say that we have sponsored free spay/neuter clinics and helped shelters and rescues build rooms to house more special needs cats, along with our daily efforts of assisting in financing rescues of individual animals. My foundation's No. 1 goal is to raise money for the animal rescue community as a whole. I work on a wonderful show that has an audience of 15–20 million people. I feel I have a really wonderful platform, and people trust me. I want to do right by the animals and by the people who donate their money. I want to help them find the right organizations to get the money out there and make sure it's doing work for the animals. The mission that we're all on is huge, and it takes collaboration. We all need each other to do this.

### This year you hosted The HSUS's Genesis Awards Benefit Gala for the second time.

#### How is Genesis different from other awards shows?

The HSUS is such a wonderful organization. They're the true crusaders. And their reach is so far and wide. When they asked me to host Genesis, I was jumping up and down. The Genesis Awards are amazing because they really matter. This isn't about ego. What I love the most about it is being around other animal lovers, people of like mind and who have similar souls. It makes me feel very comforted to see all these people and how much they love the animals and how much they want to do. There's a warmth that's not as present at some of the other awards like the Emmys, Grammys, and the Oscars. It's almost as if it doesn't matter who wins; it's about celebrating the work that's being done, everybody's work.

I'm a voice now for the animals. And part

of that is because of The HSUS allowing me to host at the Genesis Awards and teaching me from attending previous events. Without The HSUS, I don't even know that I would have had this dream.

### Of all the things you've done to help animals, what are you most proud of?

Just raising my animals the best way I can. Being a mom to them. I'm very fortunate.

I'm in a really good place in my life, and I think a lot of it was from making the commitment to my animal work. I've found my place in this world. I have a wonderful job that allows me to continue my love of dancing and expressing myself and helping other people express themselves in dance, and in my free time after my job, I get to do what I love, which is helping animals and helping people.

## And the Genesis Award Goes to ...

At its **Genesis Awards Benefit Gala** in March, The HSUS honored artists, writers, and others in the news and entertainment media who contributed their talent in 2012 to help raise awareness of animal protection issues.

Global pop icon Ke\$ha received the HSUS Wyler Award—named after the late entertainer and Genesis Awards founder Gretchen Wyler—for bringing worldwide attention to the plight of street dogs, trophy hunting of endangered lions, shark finning, and more. "I don't understand how anyone can justify abusing or exploiting animals, and as long as it continues, I intend to keep talking about it," she says.

### Here are some of the night's other winners.



#### FEATURE FILM

*Big Miracle* (Universal Pictures)

#### TV NEWSMAGAZINE

*Nightline* (ABC): "The Ugly Truth Behind High-Stepping Horses"

*Rock Center with Brian Williams* (NBC): "At What Cost?," "Ken & Rosie," and "Last Stand"

#### DRAMATIC SERIES

*Harry's Law* (NBC): "Gorilla My Dreams"

#### TV DOCUMENTARY

*Ivory Wars* (Discovery Channel)

#### REALITY (STANDALONES AND SERIES)

*Wild Justice* (National Geographic Channel)

#### NATIONAL NEWS

*World News with Diane Sawyer* (ABC): Downer cow video

#### MORNING SHOW

*CBS This Morning*: "Shark Tagging"

#### CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING

*Nick News with Linda Ellerbee* (Nickelodeon): "Animals? Show Me the Money!"

#### SID CAESAR COMEDY AWARD

*The Colbert Report* (Comedy Central): U.S. Rep. Steve King on dogfighting

#### LOCAL TV NEWS

*KNBC 4 News* (Los Angeles): "Bunny Trafficking"

#### PRINT MAGAZINE

*National Geographic*: "Cheetahs on the Edge" by Roff Smith, "Ivory Worship" by Bryan Christy, and "Rhino Wars" by Peter Gwin

*Time*: "Beasts of Burden" by Bryan Walsh

#### COLUMNIST

Roy Exum, *TheChattanooga.com*: Multipart series on Tennessee walking horse soring

#### NEWSPAPER SERIES

*The Sacramento Bee*: Three-part series on the USDA's Wildlife Services killing program by Tom Knudson

#### BRIGITTE BARDOT INTERNATIONAL PRINT

*South Asia Magazine* (Pakistan): "Animal Welfare in Islam" by Aiman Reyaz, "Law of the Land" by Anees Jillani, and commentary by Syed Rizvi

ON THE iPad: Watch a video from this year's Genesis Awards gala.