

# Witnesses to Devastation, Compassion

## MEMORIES FROM THE FRONT LINES

**IT'S BEEN 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 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 so many.

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Evacuee Valerie Bennett reunites with her dogs Oreo, left, and Lady at Emory Hospital in Atlanta. Bennett and her husband, a liver transplant patient, had to evacuate without their pets so he could receive medical care.



### WORKING WITH BEST FRIENDS

**ANIMAL SOCIETY,** I was carrying medical supplies from Utah to Louisiana and was asked to pick up a dog along the way. A young girl just out of college had rescued the dog, who showed up at a Gulf Coast marine facility that was being evacuated for flooding. She took the dog to a vet and found a microchip. She traced the name only to discover the person had died in the flood. The day of the funeral, she called the funeral home. The son of the man who had died took the phone to discover his dog was alive! 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, FLORIDA

**I VOLUNTEERED** at the Hattiesburg, Mississippi, temporary shelter. Abbey was one of the last remaining dogs there, and as things were winding down, she was transported to Tallahassee Animal Services,

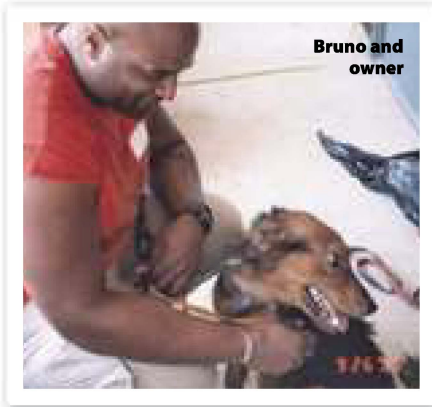
where I've been volunteering since 1999. Eventually Abbey became the very last remaining Katrina dog for adoption at our shelter. She was timid and so afraid to leave her kennel that I had to carry her out to meet prospective adopters. By January I decided she was coming home with me. Abbey has been the light of my life ever since.

In 2013, Abbey and I returned to the exact address in the rural, coastal town of Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, where rescuers had found her. We walked around the property and I 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

## OUR SUPPORT AFTER THE STORM

Here are a few of the ways The HSUS has helped pets in the Gulf Coast since Hurricane Katrina:

- Provided more than \$8 million in recovery and reconstruction grants to 45 local humane organizations. These funds helped build new facilities for the Humane Society of South Mississippi, the Louisiana SPCA and the St. Bernard Parish Animal Shelter, buildings now cited as examples for shelters around the country.
- Gave \$5.8 million to support pet health and overpopulation initiatives through direct service and awareness campaigns.
- Committed more than \$2 million to the shelter medicine programs at the veterinary schools of Mississippi State University and Louisiana State University.
- Partnered with the Jefferson SPCA to establish a Pets for Life program that brings affordable vet services to underserved communities.
- Contributed \$750,000 to Pen Pals, Inc. to operate the nation's first shelter behind prison walls at the Dixon Correctional Institute in Jackson, Louisiana, a pioneering collaboration between The HSUS and the Louisiana Department of Corrections.
- Participated in 23 animal rescue and disaster response deployments in Louisiana and Mississippi since 2006.
- Generated more than \$2 million in donated media, in partnership with Maddie's Fund and the Ad Council, for Shelter Pet Project adoption PSAs in Louisiana and Mississippi.
- Pursued a full-scale public policy agenda in both states via full-time state directors working on issues such as carbon monoxide gas chambers, animal fighting, puppy mills, animal cruelty and prohibition of roadside sale of dogs and cats.



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, FLORIDA

**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 a 1-month-old puppy survived that—but he is the greatest, most people-loving and baby-loving dog ever.

— CHRISTINA KSOLL, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

**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, Louisiana, 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, whom he was so grateful to have to rebuild his life with.

— MARYANN KING HASBROUCK, LEVITTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

**I MANNED THE CALL CENTER** at HSUS headquarters for the first month. I fielded so many calls from panicked people who'd had no idea what to expect with Katrina and were now worried about their pets. And then there were the people who were angry at the government and just wanted

a place to vent. After about four weeks, I was deployed to the Lamar Dixon shelter. 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, 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, MARYLAND

**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, the rescue coordinator for Vermont Volunteer Services for Animals asked me to bring one of the Louisiana cats along; she'd received a call from a woman who saw the cat in an online ad and believed it to be her mother's. Upon exiting the plane, I noticed a woman wringing her hands nervously. When she saw the cat, her eyes lit up but then registered disappointment. This wasn't her precious Boo-Boo Kitty, who had a smoother coat and weighed more. But then the woman began to inspect the cat more closely. 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. The trauma had taken a toll on the cat's appearance, but this was definitely Boo!

— SHARON MACNAIR, PRESIDENT, GREEN MOUNTAIN ANIMAL DEFENDERS, BURLINGTON, VERMONT

