

When You Wish Upon a Star...

By Jennifer M. Brauns

Every once in a while you meet someone with a truly incredible tale to tell. This is one of those stories. In 1987, Lorraine May told a group of friends that she was ready to get a small dog. A woman said that she knew just the perfect dog and arranged to bring her over so they could meet. When Misha arrived, she was not the small dog that Lorraine had envisioned, but within moments that small dog vision vanished into thin air. Misha stuck her entire head into the cat's water bowl and shook it furiously, spraying everything in sight and sending Lorraine's cats running. "She captured my heart in minutes," recalls Lorraine. Misha, who had been on her way to a shelter, was saved and became Lorraine's inspiration and best friend.



Misha

Misha lived a long and healthy life until 1999, when she suddenly suffered a seizure. Her vet had done a checkup just a few months before and had found her to be in good health. After a blood workup and other evaluation, it was discovered that Misha had a malignant tumor in her bladder. The vet estimated that Misha had about 30 days to live.

"A friend told me about Dr. Gurney at Aspen Park Veterinary Clinic and how he works with cancer and last chance patients," said Lorraine. Following Misha's visits with Dr. Gurney, she got along very well and lived another two quality years beyond what the original vet had predicted. She had just returned from a trip to Alaska with her family

where she swam, hiked and was quite full of energy. A month later, Misha suddenly slowed down and Lorraine knew it was time for Misha to say goodbye. Misha was euthanized in her home with Lorraine by her side

Shortly before Misha passed away, Lorraine had found a stray. "I found his owner, but he kept coming back to me," she said. She would not have gotten another dog if this stray hadn't kept coming back to see her. She spoke to the owner who agreed to let Lorraine keep the dog. With Misha gone and a new dog in her life, she suddenly had incredible cravings for more dogs. "I started volunteering with rescue groups and realized that I had my own ideas for a more holistic, whole-life approach to rescuing dogs," Lorraine said.

She soon realized that she needed to start her own rescue organization, one that would ensure rescue for a lifetime for each dog. Lorraine had volunteered for

W.O.L.F. Sanctuary and other rescue groups and had learned a lot about behavior. She decided to follow her instincts and start a new kind of rescue group, one she dedicated to her dearly departed Misha. Misha May Foundation was founded by Lorraine, Anne Burdick and Ann Cowan and is funded mainly through local fundraising events.

Since they don't have a boarding facility, they are limited to the number of animals that they can save. They started slowly with one foster, then two, always sticking to the mission and ideas while being open minded. Today, Misha May Foundation operates with a two-tier board, ensuring the board will carry on her vision when Lorraine is gone.

Katrina Changed It All

When Hurricane Katrina hit, Lorraine knew they had to help the animals. They quickly got vehicles, volunteers and money together and set out to rescue as many animals as they could. On the first trip they rescued 50 animals, followed by a second trip with 30 more. "We targeted shelter animals that we knew would not be adopted otherwise. So many people made so many sacrifices," she recalls.

When their caravan arrived at shelters, they took whichever animals needed rescuing. They arrived at one shelter late at night and were told that all that was left were two rottweilers and four chows. "They were big and intense

The story of Misha May Foundation

dogs, but we took them. That's who we are. When a dog is falling through the cracks, I'll take anyone," said Lorraine. Every single animal they brought back was treated and adopted and each animal's progress will be followed throughout its life. If someone adopts and then later cannot care for the animal for any reason, Misha May Foundation will bring the animal back into foster care until another permanent home can be found. Once animals find their way to Misha May Foundation, they are guaranteed care for life.

"Before Katrina, our rescue work was done on the side, but after Katrina our efforts were full blown," said Lorraine. Those animals needed advocates to really step up for them. "At the time the Katrina animals came us, we were literally flying by the seat of our pants. It was a steep and fast learning curve. We didn't have microchip equipment and other basics that a rescue organization needs," recalls Lorraine. They drove 80 dogs back to Denver in two trips with four vehicles and many drivers. When they arrived the first time, there were 50 people waiting for them.

These and other fine dogs are currently available for adoption



Shasta



Blue (no kids)



Holly



Teddy

"Goldenview Veterinary Clinic donated heartworm tests, meds, vaccinations and gave the animals whatever they needed upon arrival. Dr. Kris Ahlgrim didn't even know us and said she would do it," said Lorraine. "We had an amazing operation of crates, food and volunteers. We worked 24/7 and the animals were never left alone. It took 80 foster caregivers, one for every dog, and another 150 volunteers. The dogs and volunteers slept in a donated space at Alameda East Storage, next to Alameda East Animal Hospital where the animals were given free care," said added.

All of the dogs were fostered. They also had a trainer and behaviorist assess the dogs and provide whatever help they needed to become adoptable. A few of the Katrina dogs were really traumatized and one took two years to find a home. "As long as it takes and whatever it takes," said Lorraine. That is their promise. Dogs go through stages of grief just like humans do. Sometimes they go crazy with grief and become angry or withdraw and are deemed unadoptable at shelters. It takes a lot of love to help these dogs feel safe

and cared for enough to come around, but they do. Just as humans are grief-stricken when they lose a pet, so too are pets when they lose their humans.

Sanctuary

The foundation is determined to open a Sanctuary, Training & Adoption Lodge; a place for dogs to unwind, rest and rejuvenate with 24/7 staff and volunteers living in a home-like environment. Why should dogs waiting to be adopted wait in a holding cell? In a home setting dogs will remain adoptable or become adoptable. The foundation works very hard every day to raise money to build their sanctuary.

What they need the most is more volunteers and foster caregivers, self-motivated people who love animals and want to make a real difference. If this sounds like you, please volunteer. If not, please help with a financial contribution if you can. To learn more, visit www.mishamayfoundation.org or call 303-239-0382 and check out Misha May's upcoming fundraising events on page 11 of this magazine. 🐾