

COOL CATS

Henry the Healer

A three-legged cat and his friends change the way people view life's circumstances.

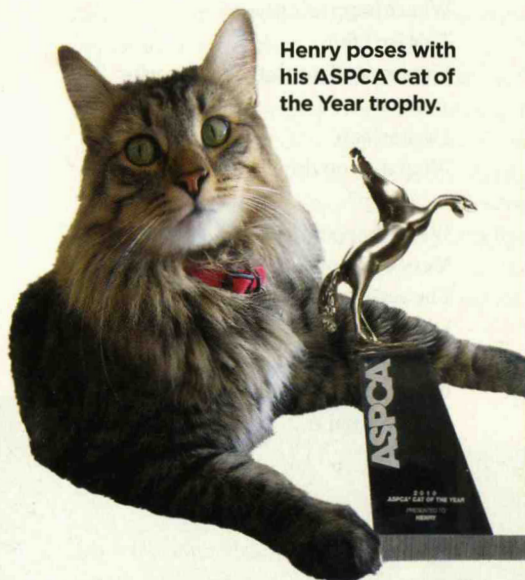
HENRY THE CAT HELPS PEOPLE HEAL.

This once-feral three-legged cat — and recipient of the ASPCA's 2010 Cat of the Year honor — welcomes people into his world, Henry's World, a place where human "paw-pals" across the country learn how to turn obstacles into opportunities.

Through his e-mail correspondence, his website and his growing library of books and workbooks, Henry's innocent and trustworthy voice allows him to connect with individuals of all ages, something his guardian and official spokesperson Cathy Conheim envisions as a national healing project.

"We want people to learn that it's not the events of your life that will dictate what happens to you, it's your response to those events," Conheim says, quoting one of Henry's "Kibbles for Thought," which are sprinkled throughout the cat's books.

"Animals are our trusted teachers about our hearts and spirits, so we're using the animals to try and focus the attention on what really matters," she says.



Henry poses with his ASPCA Cat of the Year trophy.

A Surprise Gift

Henry's story begins in 2004, in the small mountain town of Julian, Calif., where a litter of feral cats came to Conheim's land to live. One day, a child who lives on the land told Conheim that one of the kitties had a hurt paw. A lifelong dog-only person, Conheim found the injured animal and took him to the country veterinarian, who told her, for the cat to survive, his leg would need to be amputated. Euthanasia or amputation were the choices.

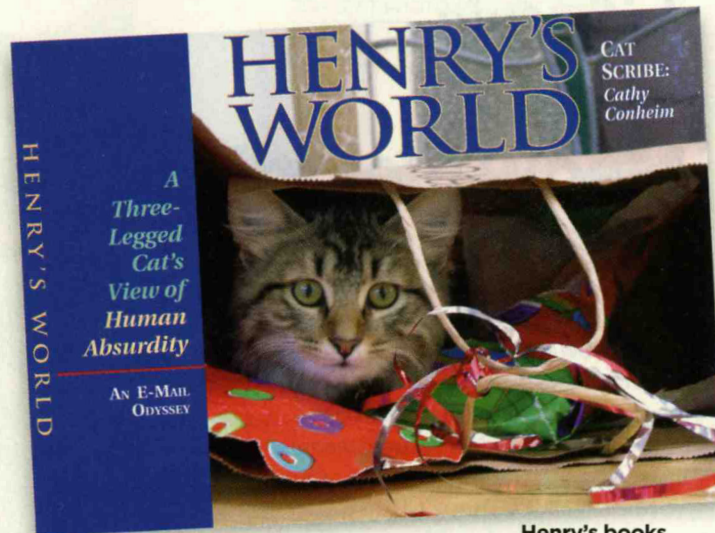
"IT IS NOT WHAT HAPPENS TO US THAT MAKES US WHO WE ARE, IT IS HOW WE RESPOND TO THOSE EVENTS AND WHAT WE CHOOSE TO DO ABOUT OUR FEELINGS. WE ALL CHOOSE OUR RESPONSES."

— Henry the Cat

The tabby, unabated by his new circumstance, found a home with Conheim, her friend, Donna Brooks, and a resident Poodle named Dolly. He even found a girlfriend — a two-legged Dachshund named Tink. Somewhat unwelcome by the dog-friendly household, the cat's tenacity and

LESSONS FROM HENRY

- Hate is learned.
- You are not defined by what happens to you.
- Play the paw you are dealt.
- Just because you can't do everything doesn't give you permission to do nothing.
- Be the best you that you can be.
- Play to your strengths.
- Accept mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Connect to what you care about.



Henry's books

courage quickly won over the family and all of their dog-only friends.

So began a journey that has since inspired thousands across the country.

"It moved from this accidental event, where the cat landed in the lap of people who didn't even like cats, to a national healing project," Conheim says.

Conheim, a retired psychotherapist, wanted to share Henry's inspirational tale, so she started composing and e-mailing his lesson-filled stories to friends and family, who then forwarded them to others. Soon, Henry's tales circled the cyberspace globe, touching recipients'

lives everywhere — from soldiers in our two wars to young children in hospitals in Haiti.

At the same time, e-mails to Henry started pouring in. People wrote to the cat daily, sharing secrets and expressing deep-rooted emotions. On the other end, Conheim responded with the wise cat's innocent voice, helping Henry's paw-pals transform trials into opportunities for growth.

To date, Conheim has responded to more than 50,000 messages.

"Henry is their touchstone for hope and trust and resilience and self-esteem, which amazes me," Conheim says. "He's just an outdoor feral country cat who landed in the home of people who hated cats. So he belongs to nobody; he belongs to the world."

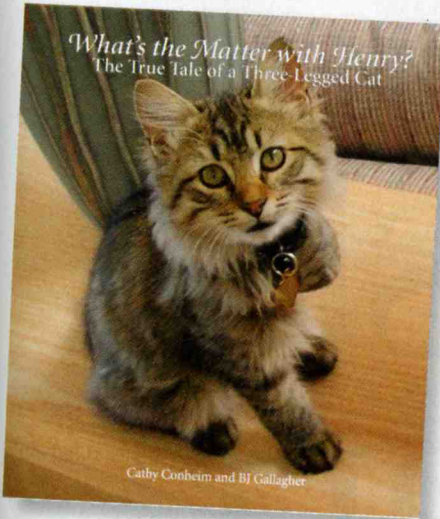
A New Vocabulary

When Conheim realized the power behind Henry's message — of responding in a positive way to life's challenges — she developed a website, HenrysWorld.org, and a series of books and workbooks that encourage

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humans to think of themselves beyond their circumstances, Conheim says.

"Animals don't ever look backward to what they had; only humans do that," she says. "Animals wake up one day and figure out how to do life with what they have. They're great teachers."

The self-published books, including *Henry's World*, *What's the Matter with Henry* and Dolly's book *What's the Matter with Me? I'm Here, Too*, help readers develop a new vocabulary for healing, Conheim says. The materials have been distributed to schools and hospitals nationwide to help people overcome stigma and see themselves as more than their disabilities.

Conheim recalls one touching letter.

"One gal from Maryland wrote, 'Henry, if you want to know why your life was saved, he's 8 years old and his name is Jose. As he was on his way to have his leg amputated, he held onto your book because he wants to have the heart of a lion like you.'"

Eight weeks later, Conheim says, the little boy drew a picture for Henry, illustrating his new prosthetic. He asked Henry why he didn't have a prosthetic, too. "Henry wrote back, 'I had an extra leg. I had four and I didn't need four. I can do fine on three,'" Conheim says. "So there ensues correspondence."

That correspondence helped give the young boy courage and confidence. It helped him heal, Conheim says.

Whether a person is coping with cancer, struggling with tragedy or simply looking for a place of trust, caring and unconditional love, Henry is there to help.

"He's become the country's thera-pet," Conheim says. "I would never have guessed that a virtual pet could become so endeared to literally millions of people who have read about him." 🐾

Wendy Bedwell-Wilson is an award-winning writer who has been writing about pets for nearly 10 years. Author of *Boston Terriers for Dummies* (Wiley, 2007) and *Yorkshire Terriers*, (TFH/Animal Planet, 2006), Wendy shares her Oregon home with her husband, two rescued domestic shorthair cats and a Pointer-Greyhound mix.



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