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PETS MAGAZINE

Valentine



FEBRUARY/MARCH 06

What You Need to Know
About Heartworm Disease

A Couple of Lovebirds

Bonding Bunnies Tips & Tricks

Cathy Conheim

How a Three-Legged Cat
Inspired a La Jolla Woman
to Begin Yet Another
Labor of Love

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Cathy Conheim & Henry

Turning
Tragedy
to Triumph

How an Unlikely Duo is Helping Change Lives around the World

Cathy Conheim's desire to help others is contagious, and she knowingly (quite purposefully, in fact) affects those she meets, and ultimately achieves the most remarkable results. Helping people has been Cathy's calling all along; for the past 33 years she has worked in private practice as a psychotherapist. "I am a change agent," Cathy explained. "I am trying to help people achieve outcomes that they have been unable to attain in their lives before. It's a privilege and it's my passion. It never ceases to amaze me. It's such an act of courage and trust to turn to a stranger at a time of crisis and put your life in her hands." As co-founder of Focus, a management consulting company, she has worked for major corporations, developing strategies to help with communication, conflict management, and leadership. She has authored books, hosted her own radio talk show, promoted educational curricula, and volunteered her time and effort to support causes close to her heart. In her lifetime, she has birthed miracles. And now, in what she thought would be her "semi-retirement," she is fanning the flame for yet one more. She acts surprised at the reception her latest book, *Henry's World*, is receiving, but with her history of instigating powerful change it seems she should have been ready. Whenever Cathy Conheim reaches out, she grasps not just one hand, but entire families, complete towns, whole states even - and now with Henry's help she's found a way to make a difference around the world.

She can tell you many stories of isolated incidents where reaching out made a big difference. Cathy's quadriplegic friend Chris was unable to afford a replacement for her 23-year-old accessible van and shared her



worries with Cathy; Chris was a teacher and relied on having a van to get to work. Cathy (in only 9 weeks and without using a single stamp, mind you) rallied the support of a thousand people and raised more than \$100,000 to purchase a fully-equipped "Freedom Van." Another time, after a dinner conversation had posed the question, 'If there were one way that we could impact women's health in the next century what would it be?'. Cathy teamed up with much respected ob/gyn Dr. Donna Brooks and Dr. Barb Levy to start the Real Women Project which has since become a national phenomenon, promoting positive self images for all body types and healthy living, including mental and emotional well being, for women everywhere. 25,000 volunteer hours and seven years later, the project that Cathy helped produce has reached over 50 million people. The website, www.realwomenproject.com, continues to share her efforts to positively change people's perceptions around the country.

"Some of the most wonderful things that happen come about accidentally," Cathy said. Quite literally, that's true for Henry. After the devastating Julian fires in 2003, many families were left with nothing. Thankfully, the house and surrounding property Cathy and Donna owned had survived mostly intact. Naturally, they generously welcomed many families to stay with them. A family of four, the last remaining, was invited to stay as long as need be. A year later, when the family's youngest daughter found a litter of kittens, Cathy and Donna allowed the girl to keep them on the property. A self-proclaimed, *exclusive* dog lover, Cathy nonetheless purchased an insulated place for the kittens to sleep, bought them cat food, and insisted on giving them each a name. It was during one of her weekend visits that



she noticed one of the kittens, Henry, was missing. When he was found with his left front leg severely damaged, dangling awkward and useless, he was taken to a veterinarian. The staggering price for surgery wasn't an issue but what to do with him afterward certainly was; it seemed obvious what poor Henry's fate would be. Cathy was not at all fond of cats - they killed the birds she loved - and she knew that Dolly, their standard poodle, wouldn't take kindly to sharing her home. And yet...seeing something in Henry's innocent and trusting eyes on the way to the doctor changed her mind. There was no explanation, no rational thought behind the decision; little Henry underwent surgery (amputation at the shoulder of

his left arm) and then moved to La Jolla, where Donna (who Henry calls Dr. Mom) could help Cathy nurse the kitten during his recovery. Cathy still hadn't fully committed to the idea of owning a cat even then, telling herself that the arrangement was temporary. It took some time before her mind caught up to the decision her heart had already made.

full of life and love and so trusting when the world had practically killed him." The next day the replies started, mostly reassurances about Henry's health and that life with a cat would be great, even in a former dogs-only home. But there was one email, different from the others, which started, "Dear Henry, you don't know me but I am a survivor, too..." and it began what has become Henry's email correspondence phenomenon.

Only four days after sending her first email to announce Henry's arrival, Cathy stopped writing *about* Henry and started writing *as* Henry. The next email to family and friends ended prophetically with, "I think I will like it here. I hope you like me. Keep your spirits up. After all there are many wounded souls like me who need love and kindness. I'll write again soon." That night, half of the emails Cathy received in reply were written to her, but half were written to Henry. Punkie, who would become an important kitty in Henry's life, wrote to tell Henry that she too was a tripod and that life with only three legs would be just fine. She gave Henry some helpful tips about

living with a dog and offered her friendship and support. Henry later told Punkie, "I'm glad there are others like me." Henry's adjustment not only to a new, indoor lifestyle but also to living with one less limb amid inexperienced cat caregivers led to many funny and sweet anecdotes. "Had he not been seriously hurt, I would never have had a cat in my home," Cathy said, then added reflectively, "Henry has turned out to be a healer for many."

The next day, on the 11th, Henry received an email from Puffer, a country cat with much insight and a flair for the dramatic, who would also turn out to play a vital role in

Henry's understanding of the world. Cathy, who was quite skilled at analyzing her actions and reactions through Henry's eyes and creating a voice for Henry, captured the hearts of her readers -- so much so that they couldn't resist sharing these emails with others. Henry's emails were forwarded from friend to friend across the Internet and soon, within a week of his first email, Henry had received over one hundred responses from around the country. "Having



dr. mom taking care of henry



dolly sympathizing with henry



there's no slowing me down!

It started November 6th. Cathy innocently sent an email

to family and a few friends, recounting the unlikely events which had brought Henry to the La Jolla house. Watching Henry and writing about him were meaningful to Cathy. She had been dealing with personal losses of her own and wrote, "There was something strange about this wounded animal. He was so

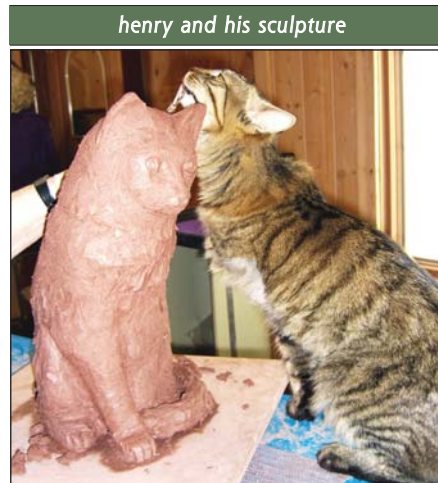
Cathy Conheim

exhausted myself with the Real Women Project, I vowed to go back to doing therapy one-on-one. The response Henry got shocked me. How it traveled to so many and the power Henry had was a great surprise," Cathy recalled. "But what really surprised me was my short term memory loss of how much energy it takes to birth a project and then finding myself so deeply immersed in another one!"

It is difficult not to love Henry, even if you're not a so-called cat person. Though he is a cat and definitely has what Cathy refers to as the "awww factor," there is much, much more to him. Henry is a role model. He focuses on the positive and remembers to keep an open mind. "Life is more interesting for me since I became different," Henry wrote in one email. People struggling with a loss, be it physical or emotional, were finding comfort from this little La Jolla cat and how he was dealing with the obstacles in his life. "Life is filled with trade-offs," Henry realized and concluded that, "accidents can be a good thing." He wrote about how "some days are better than others," thereby giving sympathetic readers permission for their own pain, anger, frustration, and confusion, but he also wrote about how he overcomes those less-than-terrific times by turning to those around him for support. While Henry describes Dr. Mom as gentle and smart and says that Mom Cathy guards him and keeps him safe, when he is feeling low he chooses to snuggle with his dog, Dolly,

because as he puts it, "fur feels more comforting than skin." Apparently Henry is right. Hundreds of people are reaching out, not to their friends and family or even to Cathy, but to Henry. "I have used my energy in the past ten years to try to teach on a broader level than I can in my office. The truth is that very few people can afford private therapy. I adore doing it but there are millions who need help who will never get it," Cathy said and now with Henry and the Internet, she is able to reach past her office walls.

Henry encourages dialog and storytelling; the 4,500 emails in his In Box hold many touching stories. By helping Henry make sense of his world, people started to open up and help themselves. Many who opted to write to Henry with the voice of an animal were forced to look at their own situations through the eyes of their pets. It became easier to share intimate details from a detached perspective, making unbearable issues somehow less frightening, as if it weren't happening to the author, but to someone the author knew. One cat, Emmy Lou, even wrote to Henry about her mom who had been diagnosed with lung cancer but hadn't told anyone yet. "Healing is a heart experience and Henry gets in on a heart level," Cathy said, then laughed, "It's hard to resist an animal saying that he wants to help you. It's easy to resist a helpful mental health professional!" So Henry began helping his Internet friends, whom he calls his Paw Pals, learn to trust, to confide, to ask for



henry and his sculpture

graphic designer Timothy Brittain, *Henry's World* was created. Over 250 color photographs and an easy-to-read format make this book not only gorgeous but entertaining. The book only covers Henry's first two months in La Jolla and includes just a few of his more "regular" correspondents - with over 3,000 emails

it was difficult to choose. Meeting Rhett Butler (a black cat in Los Angeles), Punkie (also missing a limb), Puffer (a Maine Coon living in the countryside), Emmy Lou (a Siamese in Washington state), and Henry's human Aunt Mariam (in Philadelphia) and reading their stories which are engaging and delightful makes *Henry's World* one

of those fantastic books you feel compelled to finish in one sitting and that leaves you wishing it hadn't had to end.

"Henry's is a story of trust, community, resiliency, overcoming prejudice, enemies becoming friends, challenges becoming learning experiences...he is a symbol of beating the odds," Cathy said. She decided that in addition to the book's potential to help people that it should also help animals. She decided early on that all profits from *Henry's World* would go directly to helping animals and so she refuses to sell it in book stores. "People need the stories," Cathy said. "They are heartwarming and healing. At this stage in my life I am not working personally for profits or for commercial entities to make money on Henry. That is why you will not find it for sale in stores, except in his hometown of Julian, and those merchants have agreed to donate their profits to families still challenged by the fire of 2003 and whose pets need help. It was a challenge, not using a publisher, but instead using people who believe in Henry to help book by book. But that way we increase the profits that can help animals." Cathy has donated books to children with chronic illnesses, to organizations for use in fundraising, to wounded soldiers returning from Iraq, and to pet



having a ball at home

help, and to accept his help and unconditional love.

Cathy was urged to compile Henry's emails and, with the help of friend and

Cathy Conheim



at work with mom cathy

owners in dire situations. "I had to find innovative ways to get Henry's book out," Cathy said. "And I want to show that one person's passion can make a difference and that people joining together can make a **huge** difference. Not being able to do everything does not give you permission to do nothing. One book, one dollar...everything makes a difference. In three months the first edition (2,000 copies) sold out!" People began hearing about the book from friends and sales began to grow. Postcards conveniently printed on the last page of each book also helped spread the word - as the book passed from reader to reader there was a way for people to order their own copies as well as copies for friends. Cathy said, "I think Henry's pals have been the perfect distributors."

Recently, Henry's book was spot-lighted on CNN and has now caught the attention of people around the world. The day Cathy was interviewed, Henry's website www.henrysworld.org was bombarded with hits from over 36 countries. So many hits, in fact, that the website crashed and took four hours to get back up. But Cathy's wish to help people in need was realized on a global scale and Henry's list of Paw Pals became international.

"Nobody expects to get sick, or lose a limb, but unexpected life-changing events happen. Henry reminds us that we are

defined not by our misfortunes, but by our responses to them," Cathy said. "One of the most touching comments I've heard was from a terminally ill 10-year-old boy who, after reading the book, told his mom, 'I am more like Henry than anyone I have ever known in the world.' That's what Henry does. He reaches out his paw to help his friends." Cathy Conheim is a truly generous person. How lucky we are to have her, and Henry, here in San Diego.

You can order the second edition of **Henry's World: A Three-Legged Cat's View of Human Absurdity, an E-Mail Odyssey** by regular mail at Breakthrough Press, Box 135, La Jolla, CA 92038 or go online at henrysworld.org and use PayPal to make your purchase. The book is \$32 (includes tax and shipping). The Cheshire Cat Clinic in Pacific Beach (1945 Garnet Avenue) has graciously offered to distribute Henry's book. You can save yourself the postage and handling fee by purchasing your copy there. The new edition includes a wonderful music CD as well.

Cathy's pet peeve?

People who lack common courtesy. "When a sales person interrupts my sale to answer the phone and talk to another customer," she said. "After all, I'm the one who bothered to come to the store!" Something else Cathy finds annoying...call waiting.



One of Henry's latest Paw Pals is Chance, a stray cat who was hit by a car. Horrified at what had happened, the man who was driving did the only thing his heart would let him - he rushed the cat to the hospital and paid for expensive surgery he couldn't afford. Chance lost her right eye and had her jaw wired shut for six weeks. Her new dad took care of her, with her stomach feeding tube and all, and Chance is now recovering in her new home. Henry and his Paw Pals have contributed significantly and if you would like to as well you can send a donation to:



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