

Pets, Pets, Pets

by Joanne Anderson BEACON 8/31/06

Henry has turned his misfortune into a mega mission of mercy. This 3-legged California cat is a therapist, literary celebrity, and philanthropist. His spunky attitude toward adversity is an inspiration to the disabled and down trodden, all because he had the good sense to step through the right doorway when he needed help. He stumbled on a therapist and a retired doctor with hearts of gold, both dog devotees who didn't really know or like cats. His courage and trust won them over as feline fans. It didn't hurt that their Standard Poodle fell in love with him first.

Two touching books- **Henry's World** and **What's the Matter with Henry?**- transcend the ordeal of a handicapped cat. His life lessons about transforming tragedy to triumph are for all of us. These not for profit books were designed to disseminate the kindness extended to Henry- a symbol of the needy- with a goal to raise a million dollars for wounded animals and souls through the sale of both titles, by word of mouth, not in bookstores. Some San Diego vets have a **Henry's World Fund**, where all monies from the copies they sell assist people who cannot afford veterinary care. The authors donate all proceeds to Katrina animal rescues, Alley Cat Allies, zoos, wounded veterans, HIV charities, and many other grass root organizations. They even send grants to small animal rescue groups so they can buy books and raise more money.

In 2004 as a stray kitten with an injured front leg dangling from the shoulder, Henry wandered into the La Jolla home of Cathy Conheim, a psychotherapist, and Dr. Donna Brooks, a sculptor and retired OB/GYN. Both are founders of the Real Women Project, a national movement aimed at promoting positive self-images for all body types, as a means of impacting women's health. Therefore, when the vet gave them the choice to amputate or euthanize, they opted to operate, and then to find the tabby a home.

As Henry convalesced, they saw that the kitten refused to be limited by the loss of a limb. He also refused to be limited by the negative "cattitude" of his rescuers. He overcame the physical barriers of their home while scaling the anti-cat walls around their hearts. When Cathy and Donna shared tales of his resiliency- via emails – with folks all over, something unique happened. Friends and strangers alike started confiding their trials and hardships to Henry. At that point Cathy took on Henry's voice to reach out to others. **Henry's World** recounts this transformation, and teaches us about overcoming challenges and prejudices with his treasury of stories.

When Cathy mailed me a copy of the new gift/children's book-**What's the Matter with Henry?** - because she saw this column listed in the Cat Writers (CWA) directory, she had no way of knowing that I had just judged children's books for CWA or that I too had a 3-legged cat who needed a leg amputated as a kitten to save his life. Her book's message and photos impressed me so that I called her that evening to find out why Henry's book had not been entered in the competition. After checking, we found that the book is in another category. I wish it had been in my mine. If I were still teaching, this would be my first day read aloud to set the tone for a new class and year.

Cathy told me that since Henry's spot on CNN in December, his inbox has been filled with thousands of letters from around the world. Henry has become a touchstone. Many find it easier to express their true feelings to Henry as a virtual *therapist*. Cathy, via Henry, spends hours each day counseling as many correspondents as she can. After 3 terminally ill boys in a Minneapolis hospital read Henry's book, one said that Henry was more like him, than anyone he had ever met.

Cathy spoke of a lady who wrote to Henry as her Siamese cat. In reality, her husband was serving in Iraq and she didn't know how to tell him that she was diagnosed with lung cancer. She confided her fears to Henry first. They became so close that her dying wish was to spend some time with her cat confidante. She came to visit for 5 days. Soon after Henry wrote her eulogy.

When I mentioned that my 3-legged cat was raised by Afghan Hounds instead of a Standard Poodle, Cathy told me about Gary, scientist, who contacted her to help publicize Henry right before his own world fell apart. He was

hit by a drunk driver, lost a lifelong partner, and was diagnosed with cancer. All he had left was his beloved Afghan, Dorji. After the recent St. Louis power blackout, an electrical surge set his house on fire. Dorji warned Gary and his newly rescued Great Dane pup in time, but perished himself. Devastated Gary wanted some recognition for his heroic dog. Henry designed an award for Dorji while Cathy contacted the St. Louis newspapers.

Henry has added our local Last Hope Animal Rescue and Rehabilitation to his charities. Last Hope will be getting a grant for books, but in the mean time, if you visit, www.henrysworld.org, and mention “Last Hope” or this column when you make a purchase by mail or PayPal, all the proceeds will come right back home. These books make great gifts. (By the way, Beluga, the black Lab, and Billy, the shy Collie mix, left Babylon Shelter yesterday to join the rescues at Last Hope.)

As the latest book says: “Henry has shown us that we don’t get to decide what happens to us in life- but we *do* get to decide how we respond to it.” Henry, the 3-legged waif, stands in front of Cathy’s stained glass windows and lets the light halo around the trademark tabby “M” on his forehead. St Henry II of Bavaria is the patron saint of the disabled and physically challenged. This courageous cat must know that.

“Maxie”, our poster dog this week, is at Islip Town Shelter (224-5660) Denver Ave. Bay Shore. A Good Samaritan found her straying near traffic and was heartened when the shelter recognized her. He was sure that a happy reunion was moments away. To his dismay, her owner decided she didn’t have time for this sweet 8 year old Shepherd mix any more and signed her over to the pound. Maxie (Tag #4002) is housebroken, loves kids and babies, and gets along with other dogs. She sits and gives her paw if you bribe her with a cookie. She would make a wonderful companion for someone who appreciates her. The shelter will spay her.

Meanwhile, “Ash”, our poster cat is at Babylon Town Shelter (643-9270) Lamar St. W. Babylon is a handsome 2 year neut. Russian blue type in C-4 who was quite patient while we were trying to pose him as a feline stand-in for the Hampton Classic Horse Show. Tally Ho! There is also an extremely gentle male tabby kitten – about 4 months old in C-7. He’s a lot like Henry the *therapet*.

Babylon Dogs: “Cappuccino”- the purebred Akita in Cage 43; “Maggie”- the Town’s goose patrol gal in Cage 91; a “Lady & the Tramp” style Cocker Spaniel in Cage 89; & a big Boston Terrier mix pup in Cage 85.