

WHEN SALLY MET GEORGIA

Sally Dowdle grew up as an only child, a child who might have found herself alone more often if not for stand-in siblings in the form of the family dog or cat. And so it is these days, at age 74 and finding herself alone again, that a cat has filled the role of Sally's beloved family.

Two years ago, the love of Sally's life — a flame point Siamese cat named Diego — suffered an inoperable blood clot that forced Sally into "the hardest decision of my life." Four months later, Sally met Georgia.

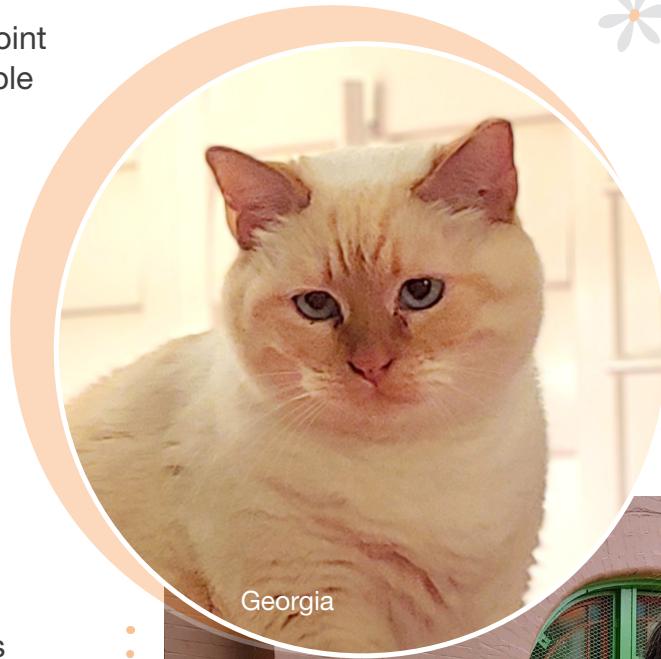
Georgia came to her new home with a notched ear and some deep-seated shyness, suggesting a rough former life on the streets. She hid as if her life depended on it.

"I don't know much about her past," says Sally, "but once I took her, I knew I could never give up on her. It breaks my heart to think of what her life was like before. It's been two years, and she's just now coming around to where she'll sit next to me. My cat sitter teases me: 'The food disappears and the cat box fills up, but I've never seen the cat.'"

Despite Georgia's enduring fears, she remains the sunny constant in Sally's life these days, as do the many animals Sally has never met but has vowed to look after once she is gone. Sally has named Best Friends as a beneficiary of her checking, savings, and IRA accounts.

"I've had some unfortunate events in my own life," says Sally. "I have no family anymore. I'm just trying to take care of my finances and what I want to leave behind, and Best Friends just seems like a good choice."

Meanwhile, Sally's life in love with Georgia continues to blossom. "I do talk to Georgia," says Sally. "Sometimes it seems like she's listening, sometimes not. But it was meant to be. Cats always find you. You put your word out to the universe, and your cat finds you."



THE FAMILY THAT SAVES LIVES TOGETHER

When Mary Louise Hollowell passed away three years ago, she left a legacy of care for the animals through Best Friends and a legacy of compassion that her surviving family expresses in spades — and strays.

"All my family takes in strays," says Mary Lou's daughter, Heather Hollowell. "We were all raised to be compassionate to animals and to see that their lives are every bit as precious as ours — and even more so because they don't get the advantages that we humans do."

Mary Lou grew up in western Manitoba, the daughter of a nurse whose career path of service she was determined to follow. When marriage and the duties of raising a family eventually sidelined her nursing ambitions, Mary Lou rechanneled her nurturing instincts toward saving every stray animal she happened upon.

"That was where her compassion for animals came from — her desire to nurture," says Heather.

The majority of the Hollowell family pets were from the streets or countryside. There were cats; there were dogs. Mary Lou took in box



Chloe



turtles about to be run over by cars. She took in an injured gull. She once rescued a dog from a river, found him a home, and named him Moses.

Mary Lou was practicing the Best Friends playbook before there was a Best Friends. "Mom was fierce about neutering animals," says Heather. "It always bothered her to see people bringing kittens into the world."

And as the saying goes, the fruit doesn't fall far from the tree. Heather, for her part, started a foster program for her local shelter, a shelter that has since gone no-kill. And it was Heather, who herself recently included Best Friends in her estate plans, who gave her mother the idea of naming Best Friends as a beneficiary of her financial account.

"Mom always felt that animals were of a different quality than most humans," says Heather. "One of the last dogs she took in was a dog my brother rescued. Chloe was a hunting dog that somebody had set free. You could count every rib on her body. A beautiful dog. Mom fed her and gave her a warm house and a bed. She treated that dog better than her children."

It sounds like her children turned out pretty well, too.

JESS CASOLA, PLANNED GIVING OFFICER

In hindsight it seems preordained that Jess Casola would eventually find herself serving as planned giving officer for Best Friends. Growing up in a family with dogs, working several years as a planned giving officer with World Wildlife Fund, and even adopting a dog from a Best Friends Network Partner — it all adds up. So what took so long?

Blame it on all those missed turns at Angel Canyon Road. Three times before ever learning that Best Friends existed, Jess made cross-country road trips to the canyon country of Utah. And three times Jess drove right past the entrance to Best Friends Animal Sanctuary without a clue.

It wasn't until interviewing for her eventual job at Best Friends that Jess finally visited the enchanted Sanctuary. "I was blown away," says Jess. "I immediately knew I wanted to be a part of this mission."

Jess now lives with her husband, Dan, and pup, Pablo, in her hometown of Charlotte, North Carolina, and finds herself endlessly inspired by Best Friends' donors. "It's such a breath of fresh air to work with donors planning their legacy with such passion for the mission," she says.

Glad you finally took that right turn, Jess.





Rusty

THE SECOND-CHANCE COCKATOO

"Cockatoos are some of the most challenging of all parrots," says Elle Greer, supervisor of Parrot Garden at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary. "They thrive on chaos. They spend a large part of their day destroying things. They pull on other birds' tails. They have a 140-decibel scream that's like an airplane taking off. They have a bite that measures 600 pounds per square inch. Cockatoos are the most challenging and hard to adopt out."

And then, in a chaotic class all by herself, there's Rusty.

"Rusty was the most touching of all," says Elle.

Raised in an abusive home, Rusty the cockatoo had arrived at Best Friends throwing screaming fits and raging rants, plus plucking and mutilating herself, all despite years of rehab. But then came a parrot whisperer named Maureen Newman.

Maureen had once been a parrot breeder, with as many as 500 birds under her care, until she discovered the dark underbelly of the parrot pet industry.

"I gave up bird breeding as soon as I realized people treated birds as if they were disposable," says Maureen. "No animal deserves that."

Maureen turned to repairing the damages of the industry she was once beholden to. She started taking in birds who'd been abused, neglected, abandoned, or — as so tragically happens to birds who can live for decades — orphaned after their people died. She developed a skill for reading these intelligent birds whom so many others struggle to understand.

"I just stand back and watch and let the birds tell me what it is they need," she says. "I try to give them as much freedom as possible to just let them be birds. These are very intelligent creatures. These are kids with feathers. What we really need to do is take care of them the best we can as long as they live."

Maureen was searching for her next bird to save when she came upon a special case posted on the Best Friends website: a cockatoo whose adoption bio came with a warning — in the form of a video of the bird in the throes of a temper tantrum. Maureen eagerly answered the call. And soon after, Rusty was heading home with

Maureen to begin the long road back to a place of trust in her human company.

"She had come from a very abusive home," says Maureen. "Her cage was dented. Her vocabulary — well, I'm glad she doesn't speak more clearly or she'd make a sailor blush. Everything she does or says sounds like an angry person, like somebody yelling and screaming, banging her head, spreading her wings."

For Maureen, Rusty was an extreme and tragic version of the species whose character she had loved from the beginning. "For most people, cockatoos are considered difficult. I just happen to like their personalities. I don't know what it is. Compared to other parrots, they're quite frequently referred to as Velcro birds. People are attracted to them because they're so cuddly. But then they realize they're really, really loud."

In addition to Rusty, Maureen has now adopted five other cockatoos with special needs from Best Friends, some of whom had been at the Sanctuary for more than 10 years. And should any of them outlive her, Best Friends stands ready to welcome them back with the best care possible for the rest of their lives.

"Rusty was the most touching of all," says Elle.

As for Rusty, Maureen's patience is finally drawing out the lovable, huggable bird she was born to be. "She still has some of that temper," says Maureen. "But she's a lot calmer than when I first got her. Happier." Once reluctant to step beyond the safety of her cage, Rusty is now letting Maureen take her to play stations around the house. "She's made it quite clear she wants to be close to me."

And Maureen has made it quite clear that she'll be there for Rusty as long as she lives — and then some.





Photo by tbmerritt



Photo by Sean T. Smith

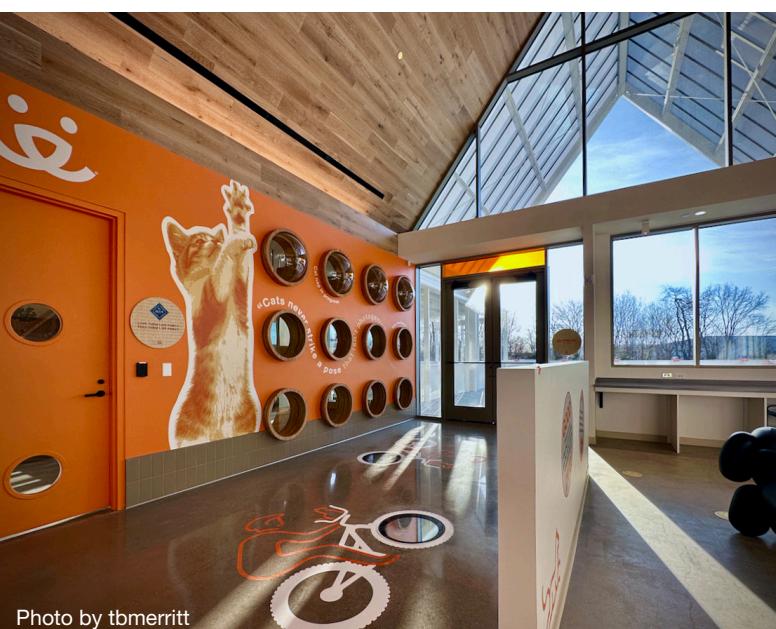


Photo by tbmerritt

THE SHELTER OF TOMORROW, TODAY

It is perhaps a bit ironic to announce that the future of animal sheltering has just opened its doors. The new Best Friends Pet Resource Center in Northwest Arkansas is not about doors but about openness.

The new center, which opened to the public on March 11, is a first-of-its kind, fully reimagined shelter that breaks the mold. Designed to transform the way homeless pets are cared for, the center is a community destination with something for everyone who loves animals.

This is a place where the animal companions are an integral part of the community, and the community is encouraged to gather and engage. It's a place that supports families and their pets, offering services and events for both ends of the leash.

A brief glance reveals a shiny new standard of care: 20,000 square feet of bright, open spaces where visitors, volunteers, and potential adopters can interact with the animals as well as with each other — where glass-walled rooms replace kennels and cages. There's an inviting café and lounge for hanging out with adoptable pets; a veterinary clinic offering low-cost services to income-qualifying families; volunteer programs; a kitten care center; a comfortable waystation for pets hitching rides to other locations for better chances of adoption; foster-care services for pets with special needs; mini boot camps offering training and education for animal welfare leaders in Arkansas and surrounding states; and more.

The community-centric shelter of tomorrow is here today, and it's on display at the Best Friends Pet Resource Center.

Plan a visit yourself, or take a virtual tour at
bestfriends.org/northwest-arkansas/pet-resource-center.



JOSH NUNEZ, SETTING SPIRITS FREE

“It is not how we die but rather how we live. In life, we should strive for balance.”

So begins another blessing as read by Josh Nunez, manager of Angels Rest, the final resting place for Best Friends Animal Sanctuary animals and cherished companions of Best Friends members and staff.

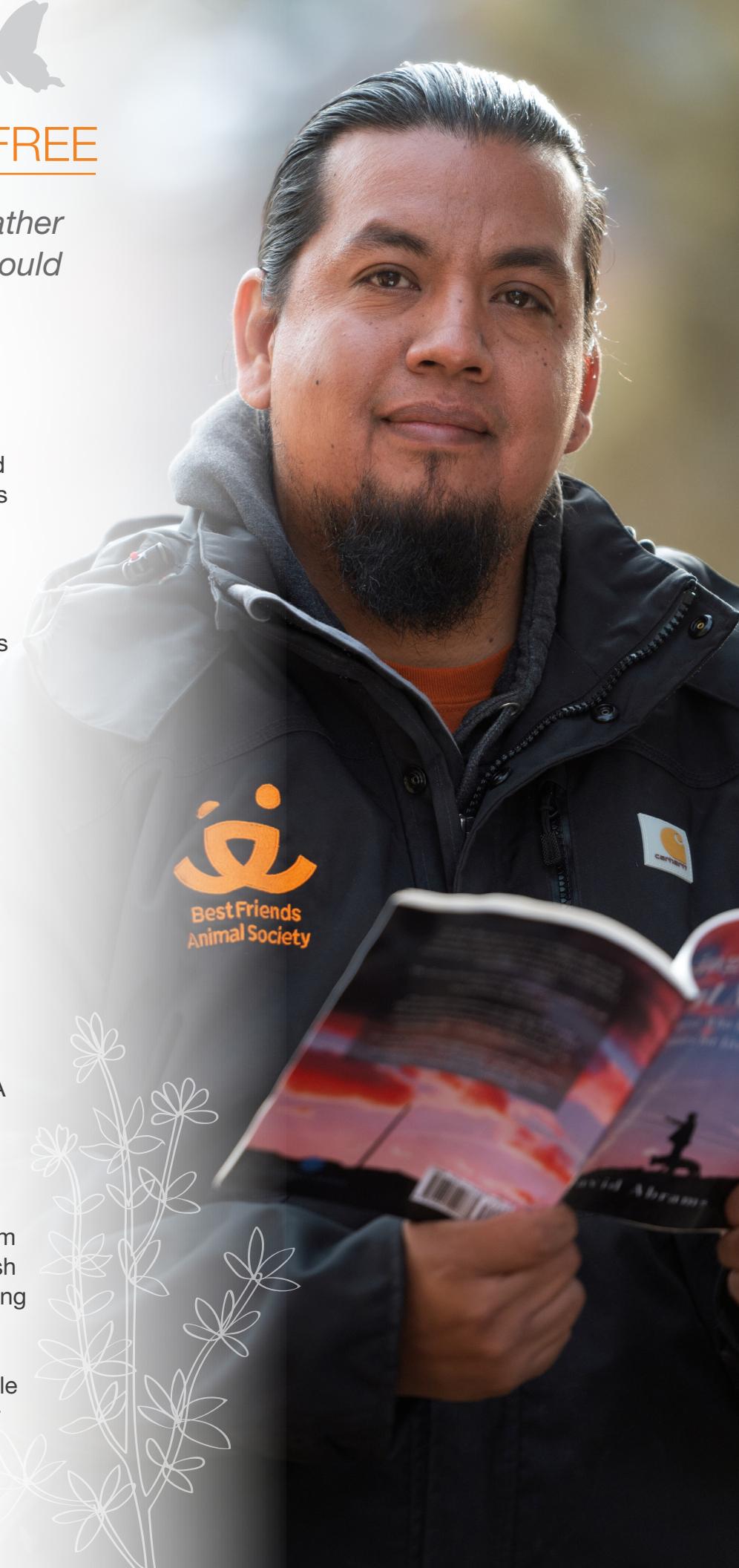
For six years now, Josh has been placing pets at Angels Rest. And as somber as the task may seem, there is no other place in the world that Josh would rather be.

“Animals are everything to us,” says Josh, who hails from the Oklahoma Seminole tribe. “Animals and caring for them just goes with our nature. It means a lot to my people to have this relationship with nature and animals.”

When Josh first toured Best Friends seven years ago with his daughter, the fit was immediately obvious to both. “My daughter said to me, ‘Hey Dad, I could see you working here.’” A year later, Josh was doing just that as caretaker of Angels Rest.

Josh has since presided over placements of all sorts of animals, from dogs and cats to birds, lizards, and fish — “tucking them in,” he calls it, “tucking them into their final resting place.”

Thus ends another blessing: “The circle complete, your spirit set free, only our memories and love do we keep. We love you,” he says. “Aho. Amen.”



IF THERE'S (NOT) A WILL, THERE'S A WAY

If you've been putting off the task of updating your will but still want to save lives long into the future, there's a way. And it's easy. It's as simple as going online to your financial institution and designating Best Friends as a beneficiary through your financial accounts, life insurance policies, 401(k), IRA, donor-advised fund, or health savings account.

And don't forget to let Best Friends and your institution's executor or attorney know of your plans. Because now, thanks to The Legacy Challenge to Save Them All, when you let us know that you have included Best Friends in your will or trust or as a beneficiary of a financial account — or increase your current planned gift to Best Friends — a kind donor will make a gift of \$2,025 to help bring the entire country to no-kill by 2025.

Need help designating your beneficiaries? Please contact us at legacy@bestfriends.org or [435-359-9227](tel:435-359-9227). Or visit bestfriends.org/plannedgiving.

