

Second Chances

► By Cathy Scott

You met them in our magazine and on our website. Red. Petey. Himie. Marina. More than 4,000 of them survived Hurricane Katrina with the help of Best Friends.

Where are they now? Here are a few of them today.



One Tough Beauty

In just 10 months, Goldie has gone from being too weak to walk to chasing squirrels every chance she gets, reports Marianne Baugher, her new person, in Laytonsville, Maryland. Goldie was featured on the cover of the November 2005 issue of *Best Friends*.

The farm where Goldie lives today is a far cry from the congestion of New Orleans. Marianne and her husband, Clark, keep their front door open so their four dogs can come and go. "Goldie can do pretty much whatever she wants," Marianne says. Sometimes, Goldie sits on the deck and suns herself. Sometimes she flies out of the house with Shady, one of the Baughers' other dogs, and runs through the woods. "Goldie is such a tomboy."

A happy dog, Goldie is also tough. Katrina taught her courage. "She's not afraid of anything," Marianne says. "We had a thunderstorm come through here. My other pets were inside hiding under the furniture, and Goldie was outside barking at the lightning."

But she's also a cuddly dog. "I don't want to say she owns the house," Marianne says, "but she does sleep on the bed at night. When we wake up in the morning, she's at our feet."

"I can't imagine life without her. She belongs here."



No Place Like Home

BayBay was trapped in a storage shed for nearly a month. Yet this bouncy English cocker spaniel seems none the worse for it.

Dwight Fitch had stacked concrete blocks and wood to make a staircase to the ceiling of the shed in case the area flooded. He put dog food on the steps for BayBay. Then he and his wife, Connie, evacuated New Orleans.

"I still don't know how she survived in that storage shed," Connie says. "It had at least five feet of water in it."

Before Katrina, BayBay spent a lot of time outside. Now, she spends her days and nights in the family's house in the Gentilly section of New Orleans. "At night, BayBay likes to sleep underneath the dining-room table," Connie says. "There's a tablecloth, and it's like a tent. She goes under there, and she's out like a light."

When BayBay was rescued, a police officer who knew the Fitches gave the rescuer their cell phone number. He called them as soon as BayBay arrived at the Best Friends center. A week later, the Fitches drove in from Arkansas.

When BayBay heard her name, she didn't realize who was speaking. She sniffed the ground and didn't look up. "BayBay, it's me," said Connie, who knelt to greet her dog. Then BayBay's entire body wagged. She threw herself against Connie and licked her face.

Ten months later, BayBay is still wagging her tail. "She's so happy now," Connie says.

Best Friends Forever

Heather Taylor is so grateful to have Buddy back that she now lets him sit wherever he likes in the house – even on the furniture.

When she couldn't locate Buddy after the storm, Heather wouldn't take no for an answer. Her six-year-old son, Allen, was despondent over losing his dog. The two had been inseparable. Heather lives in San Antonio with her two children, but when the hurricane hit, Allen was with Buddy in New Orleans, visiting his dad. Allen's father, thinking they'd only be gone a couple of days, left Buddy in the house with food and water.

When Heather learned what had happened, she got on the Internet and sent photos of Buddy, along with the address of the house where he was left, asking that he be rescued. But when someone checked the house, Buddy was gone.

Just when she was ready to give up on finding Buddy, Heather got a call from the Best Friends rescue center. "They sent me photos of the dog they thought was Buddy, and I almost fell out of my chair," Heather says.

In late September, Allen and Buddy were reunited. Allen looked at Buddy and said, "I thought the hurricane washed you away."

Buddy spent this summer with Allen, playing ball and swimming together in their pool. "They're still inseparable," Heather says.



A "Message" Worth Repeating

On the last Saturday of August 2005, Gary Karcher sent his 82-year-old mother out of New Orleans. "What about the dogs?" Ethel Karcher asked her son.

"They'll be OK," he told her. "I'll stay with them." And he did.

A couple days later, when the levees broke, the water rushed into Gary's house. For a week, he braved the floodwaters with Himie, his Rottweiler, and his mother's two dachshunds.

Eventually, though, Gary was ordered to leave – without his dogs. He penned a quick note, hoping someone would read it and return the dogs to him. "If you find them," Gary wrote, "please let me know."

Gary found a bottle with a screw-on lid. He folded up the note and put it in the bottle along with Himie's eye salve. He taped the bottle to Himie's collar. Then Gary slipped out of the house quietly.

The note worked! A few days later, all three dogs were picked up by Best Friends, and within just a few hours, volunteers on the Internet had located Gary at a camp in Oklahoma. Nine months later, when the Karchers finally had a house where the dogs could come, the family was reunited in New Orleans.

Himie greeted Gary by licking his hand. Gary dropped to his knees, hugged his dog, and said, "Himie, you're home. Look around you, boy, you're home." He tossed a basketball in the front yard. Himie chased after it, and then dropped it at Gary's feet – just like old times.

Gary was given Himie's original collar and the original bottle. But instead of the note, the bottle contained a wad of money. It had been passed around at a Best Friends post-Katrina get-together, and stuffed with \$400. "I'll never forget this," Gary says.

Ethel Karcher says, "Himie loves Gary so much. He won't let him out of his sight. He doesn't want to lose him again."

"There won't be a next time," Gary says. "I ain't leaving them again."



Closer Than Ever

John David couldn't take another day without his chow mix, Sadie. So when he learned she was in a foster home in northern California, he drove all the way from New Orleans to pick her up.

His two other dogs, Nicky and Andy, were at home the day of the hurricane. But on August 29, John had taken three-year-old Sadie to work with him. He left for an appointment in Mississippi, and Sadie stayed at his flower shop in New Orleans. John tried to drive back to New Orleans, but was turned away. Later, on CNN, he saw a military officer climb over the fence to his home near the French Quarter, and rescue Nicky and Andy. John says, "I knew they were OK."

But in the chaos of the hurricane, Sadie had gone missing. John heard about Best Friends and went to the rescue center. "I was so amazed when I looked in a book [of photos], and there was Sadie," he says. She'd been sent to a Best Friends foster home in California.

When Sadie saw him for the first time, John says, "She came running up to me, put her paws on my shoulders and started licking my face. She is just a big ol' baby."

Sadie still goes to work each day with John. And now, she goes along on business trips, even out of state. "She doesn't leave my side," he says. "Since she's been back, we're even closer. I just don't know what I'd do without her."

A Happy Little Girl

Time spent at her new person's workplace is all play for a once-balding poodle named Marina.

Marina had been rescued from St. Bernard Parish after 21 days on the street. When two Best Friends rescuers spotted the poodle darting across a side street, they nearly missed her because she was the same color as the ground.

The temperature was 105 degrees. They carried her to a waiting transport van, where a volunteer veterinary technician started giving the dog fluids. When the van arrived at the rescue center, Mary, a volunteer with Animal Ark, was waiting to help.

Mary carried Marina the 20 or so yards to the medical area. "I will never forget those eyes," Mary says. "It was like she was telling me her story." For the next few days, the poodle mostly slept. Then Marina left with Mary for Minnesota, where she slowly gained weight and her fur grew back. She is now a happy, healthy dog who lives with two other canines.

A typical day in Marina's life starts with a morning walk. "When we get back," Mary says, "she is usually so charged up that we play with her pile of toys until she is good and tired." Marina often goes to work with Mary at the Animal Ark shelter, where the still-shy dog visits with new people.

Mary cherishes her miracle dog. "I am amazed she has blossomed into a healthy, happy, fully furred little girl. She is one special gal, and I can see to the depth of her soul through those precious eyes."



Nothing Can Stop Him

Red, a pit bull, made it through Katrina only to be hit by a car. He's paralyzed from the waist down, but Red doesn't know he's handicapped. He approaches each day as if it's a new adventure.

At the Best Friends rescue center, doting volunteers put their sleeping bags in his playpen and stayed with him at night. One donor sent him a set of wheels. When Red got in the cart for the first time, he maneuvered it effortlessly.

When CNN's Anderson Cooper featured Red on his show, Diane McDermott of Boynton Beach, Florida, applied to adopt him.

A typical day for Red includes a walk around the lake. "Once," Diane says, "he nearly dragged me into the lake chasing a duck." She stopped him just as he was about to hit the water line. "He'd go in if I let him, cart and all," she says.

Taking care of Red means extra work — cleaning soiled bedding and throw rugs, and replacing the belly-belts around his middle four times a day. But it's no sweat.

"We need each other," says Diane, who lost three family members to illness over a couple of years. "Red takes care of me, too."



The Miracle Dog

Rex, an older Chihuahua, now lives in Jefferson, Louisiana, with Jeanette Althans, her 12-year-old daughter, Emily, and two cats. "He tries really hard not to chase them," Jeanette says. "But he can't resist." That's okay with Jeanette. "It's hard to imagine not having this happy little guy."

Life before Katrina was good for Rex. He lived in uptown New Orleans. But after the storm, the house partially collapsed, and Rex's elderly person moved to a rest home. Four weeks later, a Best Friends rescue team found Rex in the abandoned house.

In January, Jeanette, who had been replenishing food stations for pets still out on the streets, stopped by a Best Friends rescue center. Emily spotted Rex and asked if she could walk him. "We weren't going there to adopt a dog," Jeanette says. "It was fate."

Rex has had medical issues, including a low blood-cell count, now back to normal. "My vet calls him the miracle dog," Jeanette says.

For now, Rex's health is good, but both Jeanette and her daughter cherish each moment with the little guy. "I would adopt an older dog again," Jeanette says. "[But] I certainly hope we can enjoy Rex for a few more years. He is the perfect little dog."

Back to His Old Cranky Self

When they evacuated, Sandy and Lane Ikenberry left Petey, their orange tabby, in their home with plenty of food and water. When a friend checked the house a week later, Petey was gone. A few weeks after that, the couple located him at the Best Friends rescue center.

Petey was sleeping in a kennel when he heard Lane's voice. He lifted his head. When Sandy called his name, the cat bolted up and started meowing over and over. "I'm sorry, Petey," Lane told him. "I'm so sorry."

After their reunion with Petey, the Ikenberrys stayed in uptown New Orleans for a while because their house was such a mess. Lane says, "I spent the first few months gutting the house and cleaning up the trash. When we finally took Petey out there, he and Enkidu [a semi-feral cat that the Ikenberrys care for] were glad to see each other. They were together during the storm."

Before Katrina, Petey was a cranky cat. But afterwards, Lane says, "His personality really changed. He was just the loviest guy, but now he's getting back to his old self again." A good sign! 🐾

