

Phoenix's frantic cries echoed past the locked bedroom door. When the attack ended, the brown tabby lay motionless. A neighbor who overheard the scuffle intervened and took the cat and the preteen son to safety. Their first stop was the emergency animal clinic, where Phoenix clung to life by a fine strand. In addition to a critical head injury, he suffered severe eye trauma and burns around his ears.

# Hope Rises



COURTESY OF WEEMS S. HUTTO

Phoenix was rescued from a violent home.

## Helping cats and people trapped by domestic violence

The neighbor called no-kill animal shelters and rescue groups begging for someone to find a new home for the injured cat. They either didn't return her call or told her there was no room. Finally, an Animal Allies of Texas (AAT) volunteer offered to foster him until he recovered and found his forever home.

When the volunteer picked up Phoenix from the veterinarian, his 11-year-old owner was on the clinic floor, holding the cat. The boy asked if his kitty would be OK. "I'll take good care of him," the foster mom answered him. "Are you sure you want me to find a new home for him? If I do, you'll never see him again."

The boy looked at her and said, "If you take him, he won't be hurt again."

## Animals and People in Peril

Phoenix and the boy had a happy ending, but in violent homes, pets suffer alongside their people.

Not long ago, law enforcement officials ignored animal abuse. They were more concerned about "real crime." Now, they know that there is a direct link between people who intentionally harm animals and violent crimes against humans. Pets are victims-in-training, who can't report the crime.

According to a 2001 study of intentional animal abuse published by the Humane Society of the United States, 13 percent of these cases involved incidents of domestic violence, 7 percent coincided with child abuse and 1 percent with elder abuse.

Abused women are trapped in a problematic situation. They can't leave their abusers because most women's shelters won't accept pets. So, they must make a decision between their pets' lives and





PATTY CAMPBELL

their own safety and the safety of their children.

Abusers can threaten the pet's life to control the victim. For instance, "If you leave me, I'll kill the cat." Or the abuser might actually kill the pet to control the victim, sending the message, "If I killed the cat, I can kill you, too."

### **A Prayer for Ziggy**

Karin Jones of Laguna Beach, Calif., knows this pain first-hand. In 2000 she rescued a flea-covered fluff of white fur she named Ziggy, who became her soul mate.

Jones began dating a seemingly charming man, who soon after turned violent. When he learned that she planned to leave him, he beat her severely. During the confrontation, Jones saw Ziggy dash outside.

After the man was arrested, Jones made her

escape to a battered women's shelter without her missing kitty. Unfortunately, the street-naïve cat had fled into the woods. With Laguna Beach's thriving coyote population, Jones knew Ziggy couldn't last long on her own.

But the faint possibility that Ziggy could still be alive gave Jones a reason to continue.

"I prayed for her daily," Jones says. "I missed her. I wanted to give up so many times, but I didn't."

A month later a friend called. She had seen a picture of a cat resembling Ziggy on a telephone pole near Jones's home — it was Ziggy. When her rescuers learned of Jones's situation, they offered to care for Ziggy until Jones was able to live on her own.

Jones says battered women give up so much: their homes, their possessions and even members of their family. It's tragic they must also give up their cats and dogs.





**For more information**  
about setting up a PAWS  
program in your community,  
contact Allie Phillips at  
[pawsprogram@americanhumane.org](mailto:pawsprogram@americanhumane.org) or call  
703-836-7387.

plans to open a safe haven where abused women can bring their pets. In the meantime she is helping women through the Celebrate Recovery Program at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., as a co-leader of a 12-step program for victims of different types of abuse.

### Reaching Out to Shelters

"When women and children go to a shelter they have to get the animals out," says Allie Phillips, J.D., director of public policy for the American Humane Association (AHA). "People don't understand that animals are the first victim targeted by the abuser, and the most targeted. [The abuser warns his victim] 'if you tell anyone [about the abuse], I'll kill the cat!'"

But shelters that allow pets are hard to come by. That's why Phillips and AHA established the Pets And Women's Shelters (PAWS)<sup>™</sup> Program. To encourage women's shelters to help the pets, Phillips put together a PAWS manual. Within a year, the number of pet-friendly shelters doubled. Even so, today there only are eight across the country with three more in the process of establishing programs.

AHA figures say that approximately one in four women will be victims of domestic violence. And with more than 71 million U.S. homes with pets, the need for pet sanctuary couldn't be greater.

Phillips says any women's shelter can start a PAWS program. She has outlined the process in an easy-to-follow manual available free on the AHA website. She's willing to help interested shelters, volunteers or concerned individuals by phone as well.

"Even in this tough economy, it isn't an expensive program," she says. "Once

a community knows that a shelter is housing pets on site, the community will make donations and fund it completely." The manual outlines how to set up the program, different ways to house the pets, dealing with

In the last 2½ years Jones lost everything: She filed for bankruptcy, lost her relationship with her son, was involved in a wreck and lost her car.

"Mine is a story of survival," she says proudly. "I'm not a victim anymore. I was taught there is something bigger. My story can help other women." But she's quick to add, "My cat helped me through it. Ziggy was my lifeline."

With Ziggy waiting for her in the foster home, Jones was motivated to find a job and move in with a friend. "When I found Ziggy, she was homeless. I saved her."

And in a twist of fate, Ziggy's experience saved Jones.

"It was a miracle she survived," Jones says. "After Ziggy showed up, things started turning around. [I lived] one miracle after another. She showed me that no matter what, if you believe, trust and pray, you'll survive."

### Be Prepared

Jones passes her experience on to other abused women.

"You go to the battered women's shelter

when they have room," she says. "You may not have time to coordinate placement of the pets. See if your friends can take the cat first. Be proactive. Put together a plan of action. Have your personal belongings ready with a set of phone numbers including animal shelters. Include your pets in your plan. When it comes time to go, have everything for your cat ready, too."

Although women's sanctuaries are life-savers, they usually accept women and children only. Only a handful of shelters house pets.

"There were so many women who left the cats behind," Jones says. "The shelters say, 'We're going to help you, but we're not going to help your pet.'" Jones recalls one abuse victim with three cats and two dogs. "The shelter wouldn't take them. Since no place would accept her pets, she stayed in the relationship. She'd rather risk her life than her animals' lives."

Jones now is working on receiving certification to counsel abused women. She



**Women in need of refuge** for their pets can find a list of PAWS shelters at:

[www.americanhumane.org/human-animal-bond/programs/pets-and-womens-shelters/domestic-family-violence-shelters.html](http://www.americanhumane.org/human-animal-bond/programs/pets-and-womens-shelters/domestic-family-violence-shelters.html)



allergy issues, working with rescue groups and finding veterinarians.

"Some shelters focus on the problems and talk themselves out of it. If they would just focus on how many families they would save, they'd see how simple this process is," Phillips says. "We need a lot more PAWS. You can make it as simple or complex as you want."

### Be the Change

Phillips says individuals should contact their local women's shelter to inquire about arrangements for pets.

"Find out if they would consider housing pets on site. Help them. Chances are they don't have enough staff or resources to do it themselves. Offer to set up the program, and offer to foster." This movement can't advance without community involvement.

After all, a neighbor's intercession saved Phoenix's life and rescued his young owner from a life of trauma. Although his ophthalmologist wasn't able to save his eye, Phoenix



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became a favorite at the AAT adoption center at the North Texas Petco. Four months after the attack, a woman saw past his scars and gave him the peaceful, loving home he deserved. Today, he spoons with fellow tabby, Otis. With a full belly and in a house filled with love, fear of being beaten is the farthest thing from Phoenix's mind. ○

*Dusty Rainbolt is a member of the Cat Writers' Association and International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants, and is the author of "Kittens for Dummies." She volunteers with Animal Allies of Texas, which plans to start a program providing intermediate care for the pets of women seeking refuge in a Garland, Texas, women's shelter. It will be called the Phoenix Program.*



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