



*EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT of the Calaveras Humane Society office turned into a shelter during the Butte Fire.*

Thursday – second day of the fire - Cindi Garringer and Anne Ellis got the office set up to help Animal Services with overflow cats. Our portable tables were loaded with cages and crates large enough to hold a small litter box, water, food and a cat as needed. By 6 PM that eve, county residents were registering their evacuated cats with Animal Services and started to fill our office with the first wave of evacuated cats. As the fire event went on, many people were able to come and get their pets as others were forced to evacuate, so there was a constant turnover, need for cage and supply cleaning, making sure Animal Service paperwork matched up with animals, etc. And many pets stayed for the duration, becoming almost mascots to us. This work in the Calaveras Humane Society office was just a part of all that went on at the shelter in total during the fire.

Below is an eyewitness account from Carolyn Hendrix, long time Calaveras Humane Society volunteer. Carolyn helps in the office and during the fire took it upon herself to oversee the office animal care. She, like so many other volunteers, came daily – often staying all day or coming twice – and Carolyn alone logged over 800 “commute” miles during the fire. Again, we cannot say enough about the dedication of the animal volunteers!

“We had a total of 30 cats, 16 rabbits, one silky hen and a ball python by the time we took in all the animals our little office could hold at CHS when the Butte Fire was at its worst. Out our window you could see so many people working together just to help in one way or another. Decisions were made on the spot as to who to put where, etc., but it all worked! Volunteers came from everywhere, everyone just wanting to help.

In the office we were taking calls from sun up to sun down, people donating, or wanting to give or work, walking dogs, dealing with loss and so many scared people and animals. My husband and I went in on Saturday morning and the office seemed full of rabbits as well as cats. We set up more tables and cleaned up urine and poop, mopped the floor, set the rabbits up on the tables so it would be easier to take care of them. We named it Rabbit Row. The smell was awful but these were saved animals that needed to be taken care of. That evening about 10 cats were brought in from the fair grounds and we set them up on tables in carriers. Saturday, two ladies came in with their combined pets and some “outside” cats they had saved: They brought a total of 15 cats, one bunny and five dogs to Animal Services for temporary shelter.

These two ladies, Kitty and Susan, and I worked for the next two and a half weeks taking care of all these animals. They were diligent in the work and time it took to care for all the sheltered animals in our office. We would start at 6:30 in the morning and work all day at first. We set up a table with all our supplies on it and organized it the best we could. We had a medical table with the medicine different animals needed based on instructions from the Animal Service staff and local vets. We kept records so nothing was repeated and AS staff coming in would be able to see what had been done. We used our office bathroom to let pets out to exercise each day. We would set up visiting areas for people to come in and visit with their pets, to hold and caress them and feel their love.

We saw many vets. So many were donating their time, they came from everywhere. Every day there was a vet from somewhere to help keep these pets healthy. I cannot say enough for the veterinarians. This has got to be like a front line grunt in the military. They are like the first responders who go in and see the first of all the destruction and try with all they've got to save distressed animals. One such vet found a silky chicken under 23 other chickens that perished in the fire. Although I can't recall her name she works for PAWS. Later we realized this little grey-colored silky was really white. She was so covered in soot and ashes we had no idea she was white. She was taken in to a veterinary clinic because as she cleaned herself she was getting sick. The ash was poisoning her system and she needed a special bath. We also found she had a burned foot, but she was saved and is healthy now.

So many cats, and so many stories from their owners. We came to love them all. One cat called Missy was very feisty, growly, and hissy, but really gentle. One 18-year-old cat named Mama Cat came in with arthritis and a wound on her back. She was very special and after the vet supplied her with some meds she improved greatly. We combed her hair every day and her eyes got bright. The elderly owners of both Missy and Mama sadly had to relinquish their pets as they had lost their own homes and were no longer able to keep them. We are so sorry they had to give up the only thing they saved from the fire. Mama Cat was still having some health issues as the fire ended and needed some extra tests and vet care. I am happy to say the Calaveras Humane Society paid for all this to help Mama Cat out.

There are many amazing stories behind each of these pets and I am happy that I can always say I was a part of saving the animals until they could get back with their families. This is unconditional love given from these little guys and we, as humans, need their love as they need ours.

When I looked out the window of our little Calaveras Humane Society office and saw everyone pulling together to help in any way they could it made my heart dance-human nature being kind to each other. There were no politics, no religion, no race, no color it was as life should be. Every volunteer who helped in the biggest to the tiniest effort will be rewarded somewhere down the road in life's path. Each individual made a link in a chain of circumstance that saved lives. Those volunteers made our chain strong.

So to give credit where credit is due in this one little link of the chain, thank you Kitty McWilliams and Susan Hickman for all you did and are still doing. They adopted Mama Cat and have given her a permanent home. My husband and I adopted Missy. She's very bossy and much loved."

*Carolyn F. Hendrix*

