

SAMMIE'S FRIENDS CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF RESCUING ANIMALS ON MARCH 23, 2021, culminating in saving 30,000 lives. Sometimes it seems just yesterday when this adventure started and sometimes it seems like I can't even remember that far back. Sammie's Friends has **TRANSFORMED** the way unwanted, neglected and disadvantaged animals in our community get treated. I (Cheryl) went to the Nevada County Animal Shelter on March 23, 2001 to walk the dogs once a week. That one event set in motion all that has become known as Sammie's Friends.

The inspiration for all of this was Cheryl and Curt's Shar-pei, Sammie. Sammie came to live with Cheryl as a 7 week old puppy. Sammie was one of a kind and taught Cheryl and Curt all that a dog could be. His dog trainer said "I have trained about 7,000 dogs and I have never met one as interesting as Sammie." We haven't met one as interesting as Sammie either.

From that one event of entering the shelter and learning that 68% of the animals were being euthanized and no animal was being vaccinated, spayed/neutered or receiving medical attention, it was obvious something needed to be done. But what? So **OVERWHELMING!** The shelter staff said "Cheryl, this is the way it has always been, there is nothing that can be done." Hmm! I started a volunteer program and quickly we had over a 100 volunteers and shortly thereafter more animals were getting adopted and the euthanasia rate went down. Next Curt, my partner, got involved. He did the paper work to make us a 501(c)(3) non-profit and we began to raise funds so that animals could receive veterinary care rather than being euthanized. The euthanasia rate declined some more. Kathleen O'Sullivan, who later founded Pound Puppy Rescue began getting shelter animals spayed/neutered.

We expanded our program so that we could reduce the number of animals coming to the shelter. We began to help sick/injured animals in the community so they could get well rather than being euthanized. We expanded our spay/neuter efforts. We delivered dog/cat food to North San Juan and Washington.

We were all volunteers and had no authority to make any policy decisions that would change the lives of the animals. This shelter became "**NO KILL**" based on practice, not policy. This was based on one simple idea - **WE WILL GET THEM OUT OF THE SHELTER QUICKER THAN THEY COME IN AND THERE WILL BE NO NEED TO EUTHANIZE ANYONE.** Wherever there is a need we will find a way to "dam up the hole". By 2006 using this philosophy we reduced the euthanasia rate to 2 % from 68%, proving things **do not have to be this way.**

Our second principle was "**WHETHER YOU THINK YOU CAN OR YOU THINK YOU CAN'T, YOU'RE PROBABLY RIGHT.**" I knew that for every animal we only needed to find one person on this earth to adopt that animal. The earth's population is 7.8 billion, the U.S. has 331 million, California has 39.37 million and Nevada County has 100,249. How did we find those people? We made posters, developed relationships with many rescues, shelters and individuals. We sent animals on airplanes to other

states, Curt drove dogs to new homes in Canada. One dog went to Mexico. I would take my SUV to Vacaville every Wednesday morning filled with animals and meet Bay Area people. We worked with a woman in the state of Washington and a rescue in Texas and of course everything in between. We met people at the shelter at all hours of the day and night to adopt the animals. We screened carefully and worked very hard to get the animals into loving homes. **OUR EFFORTS AND ENERGY KNEW NO LIMITS.**

Every veterinarian helped out, many businesses raised money for us and the local media (the Union, KNCO, KVMR) helped so much to get the word out. Even some of the Sacramento TV and radio stations have done stories for us. We wrote grants, made calendars, sold t-shirts and hats and everything we could dream up to raise money to support our efforts. Over time, as people saw our efforts and results, many donors came forward.

In 2013 Joanne Castles had the great idea to open **SAMMIE'S NIFTY THRIFT STORE** to raise money for all Sammie's Friends efforts. In 2010 Curt and Cheryl finalized a contract with the county to operate the Nevada County Animal Shelter and ensure that every animal got a good home and that the euthanasia stopped completely. In 11 years we have had 3 dogs that we had to euthanize, in spite of our best efforts, they were too dangerous to do anything else with. In 2011 Beverley Ward joined us as our Dog Behaviorist and has turned many a dog around from being not a good dog to being a great dog. We built **SAMMIE'S PIT STOP** in Penn Valley to facilitate Beverley's effort to help our animals.

You have heard me say many times "**IT TAKES A VILLAGE.**" Indeed it does. We have had help by so many doing so many things. **Fran Cole was our first volunteer, who arrived about a month after I did.** She walked dogs, cleaned cat cages, walked some more dogs and helped many times with the horsey friends we have acquired and to this day provides excellent legal counsel to Sammie's Friends.

So that's our story and we hope to be around another 20 years and beyond. We know with this fabulous community that is possible.

Cheryl Wicks is the Co-Founder and President of Sammie's Friends