

UTOPIA ANIMAL RESCUE RANCH REPORT

2007

A MESSAGE FROM OUR GANDHI-LIKE FIGURE!



When an old friend and street preacher from New Orleans called just before Hurricane Katrina hit, I offered to help in any way I could. I let him live on my ranch, wear my clothes, drink my beer, and yap endlessly on my phone. But after two years of hospitality, I did what any other gracious host would do: I tried to get rid of him.

I took Goat up to Utopia Animal Rescue Ranch, near Kerrville, in high hopes that he might do some work with the animals. He shared some of their background, being homeless, stray, traumatized perhaps. I thought, "This could be a cathartic experience." These hopes were dashed quite early, however. My evacuee, so he informed me as he proceeded to decimate my liquor cabinet, did not believe in work. The credo of his flock, the

Black Mardi Gras Indians of New Orleans, was "Always for Pleasure." This did not bode well, I thought, but trying to tell a homeless person to go home is almost like trying to run for governor of Texas as an independent. In the days, weeks, and years to come, Goat seemed to become happier and happier while I began to wake up every morning in a dark, suicidal rage. But I'm getting a bit ahead of myself. Let's go back to early times, and I don't mean the whiskey. That was already gone.

If you're going to be an evacuee, I told Goat, you've got to dress like an evacuee. We went through my wardrobe of eclectic, perhaps over-the-top items, many of which I'd hung on to for sentimental reasons. Almost all of them seemed to fit Goat well, so I said, "Take what you like," and he did. He cut such a fine figure, indeed, that when the *Kerrville Daily Times* interviewed him, they put his large photo on page one, wearing all of my clothes from head to toe, including rattlesnake boots with the rattlers' heads still attached. I wasn't really envious; it was just a bit unnerving watching Goat drinking beer for breakfast in my favorite bathrobe (given to me by Miss Texas 1987) all the while singing "Big Balls in Cowtown."

Then there was the matter of the telephone. Since I've always believed the Internet to be the work of Satan, the phone remained my lifeline to the world, especially in the heated last months of the gubernatorial race. Goat was monopolizing it like a one-man Jerry Lewis telethon. Not only were most of the calls and messages seemingly for him, but he was also racking up phone bills during all hours of the night calling his many musician friends and other members of the modern diaspora.

I hated to be an insensitive host, but I needed the phone as well. Cousin Nancy and I had been working frantically with Richard Pryor and his wife, Jennifer Lee Pryor, to save 24 greyhounds trapped in a New Orleans attic by rising floodwaters. Now Goat began a frenetic series of calls to Dr. John, Levon Helm, the Neville Brothers, and many other musical luminaries, telling them Kinky was bringing 24 greyhounds out of New Orleans. As Goat yapped on and on, I confess to have been basking somewhat in the sunlight of my good works. The truth, unfortunately, did not reveal itself for several more days, when Goat turned to me in my favorite Billy Joe Shaver T-shirt and asked, "When are the greyhounds getting here?"

"We're working on it," I said. "Cousin Nancy's gotta make room at the rescue ranch for twenty-four more dogs."

"The greyhounds are dogs?" said Goat, removing my reading glasses from his nose in astonishment.

"Yes, Goat," I said patiently. "The greyhounds are dogs."

"I thought they were buses," said Goat.

Excerpted from Texas Monthly September Issue—*Getting My Goat*.

VIEW FROM THE BACK PORCH WITH COUSIN NANCY & MAMA!



Since our last newsletter so many great and exciting things have been happening at the rescue ranch!

I'll start off first by thanking Kinky. Because of his run for governor our adoptions, rescues, visitors, interviews, phone calls and veterinarian costs tripled during his campaign! And, that is why there was no 2006 newsletter—we were all too busy.

Over the years, we have wished for someone to donate a van to our rescue ranch, so we could safely haul our dogs to and from the veterinarian clinics. I am proud to announce that dreams do come true because we now have a "Hauler" thanks to our great friends over at the Medina Children's Home! And, Buttermilk, our 1996 Ford Explorer, and Trigger, our 1998 Ford F-150 pickup, are really starting to show their age and they need to be put out to pasture soon, so if anyone wants to donate a used white, truck or white SUV we would gladly accept it.

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The Nomads Rule! Last year, this group of amazing, dog enthusiasts who do all aspects of dog training, brought Cesar Millan, the famous dog whisperer, to Shreiner University for an all day seminar benefiting our rescue ranch. We were invited to be their guests and were asked to set up a table before the event so we could hand out literature about our rescue ranch! And, we did with the help of our good friends, Jim and Liz Cravotta. In fact, we came real close to running out of the brochures. The seminar was great and by the end of the day Tony and I had learned a lot!



After crossing all their T's and dotting their I's, The Nomads presented us with a really big check for \$12,850.00 at the Cowboy Steak House parking lot with The Kerrville Times covering the story! And we made the front page a few days later! I told Tony after reading the article, "Whoever took that picture must of had their camera set on wide angle."

We also wish to thank Greg Underwood and the business that he works for, the Virbac Corporation, up in Fort Worth, for providing our dogs with free flea and tick collars, and heartworm medicine. The Virbac Corporation's generosity has literally saved our rescue ranch thousands of dollars every year with their products and we love them, but not as much as our dogs do!



John with Captain Midnight

Everyone at the rescue ranch loves John Kemmerly! We met John in November '06 when he drove out to the ranch for a tour. After spending nearly a whole afternoon with him we found out that he was: forty-three years old, single, a Libra, born and raised in Lake Charles, Louisiana, former owner of a book store in Galveston, drives an old, blue Ford pickup but more importantly—we liked him and he was an avid dog lover!

Well, as fate would have it, John returned to the rescue ranch on Thursday, December 7th and proposed to me. He didn't propose marriage to me, instead he proposed the idea of us hiring him to work part-time! In a blink of an eye I hired him on the spot.

Since that day, John has been a godsend to us. He's never missed a day of work, which is seven days a week, and he has done wonders working with our dogs. He always wears a smile on his face (Libra deal) and seems to really enjoy being with our dogs and of course—they love him.

Besides working seven days a week, John has gone way past the call of duty for us. For example, on January 7th, he drove Louie, a trained service dog for epileptics, to Baton Rouge, so he could be adopted to Shannon—who had seizures and needed him desperately! The reason we didn't fly Louie was because he was a giant, Labrador / Dane mix and there wasn't a crate big enough for him to fit on a plane. And, that is why I wrote this "Dear John."

The Chicago Seven!



Mick Jagger



Harry Morgan



Gizmo



Stedman



Ava Gabor



Tina Turner



Zsa Zsa Gabor

On September 14, 2006 our good friends Bill and Dona Hageman came down from Chicago to visit us. Bill writes for the Chicago Tribune and he has written several great articles about our rescue ranch over the years for that newspaper. In fact, because of Bill's stories we have a huge following of supporters from the Windy City and surrounding areas.

While Bill and Dona visited with us they fell in love with two young mutts—Mick Jagger and Tina Turner. They even considered adopting the pair, but thank goodness they didn't because if they had Bill probably would have never hooked us up with Kristine Banks.

After returning to Chicago, Bill couldn't quit thinking about Mick and Tina and how he might be able to help get them adopted. Then he had a light bulb moment. On September 26th he made a phone call to Kristine, a volunteer for Rover Rescue, and then shot me an e-mail asking me if he could give Kristine my e-mail address. Within an hour, I received an e from Kristine telling me about herself. She and her husband, Paul owned a doggie day care center in Yorkville, Illinois and she suggested that we send her our small to medium dogs and she promised she could quickly

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adopt them out to super homes. When I contacted Bill he told me that the organization was loved in Chicago and he highly recommended her.

So, after a few more e's and phone calls with Kristine we decided to send up seven dogs and keep our fingers crossed. On Friday, September 29th after making plane reservations with Continental, getting health certificates, crates, collars and toys Ben Welch and Tony drove the seven dogs to the San Antonio airport. A few hours later, The Chicago Seven arrived in Chicago with tails wagging!

Kristine called as soon as they had picked the Chicago Seven up and told me that they all were fine and not to worry. Sunday evening, Kristine called to tell me that all seven had been adopted and litter mates Mick Jagger and Tina Turner were adopted to the same home! She told me that everyone wanted to adopt The Chicago Seven because they were from Texas, our rescue ranch and because their rabies and rescue ranch I.D. tags were in the shape of Texas!

Bill and Dona went to that event, too and he later wrote an article about the Chicago Utopia Rescue Ranch love connection and he used Gizmo's picture!

Since then we have sent many more dogs up there and they have all gone to super homes. Kristine uses our adoption forms and sends us the completed paperwork along with a check from the adopters to cover our airline costs and expenses.

If any of y'all would like to help adopt out our dogs please give us a call. We need more good people like Bill and Dona and Kristine and Paul. And, we need more adoptions!



Lady Bug

As Tony and I were walking into Pet Supplies Plus, in Kerrville, to buy treats for our dogs, Mari Bailey-Villanueva, one of the Nomads, was leaving the store with a full basket. When she saw us, she ran up and said, "Tony, Nancy, I can't believe it's you! I am so excited to see y'all!" Then she hugged us.



Shadow

"How sad, Mari," I teased, "you must not get out a lot, but I'm glad that we have made your day. What's going on?"

"I have one of the oddest requests and you're going to think I'm crazy," Mari stated. "I want to adopt an old dog. Do y'all have one in mind?"

At the exact same moment Tony and I looked at each other and said, "Lady Bug!"

"She's a wannabe chocolate Lab and one of the sweetest dogs we have," Tony said.

"Tell me about her. What's her story?" Mari anxiously asked.

"An old woman died in San Antonio and she had two old sweet mutts," I said. "Her neighbor called me and begged us to take the dogs because the woman's children didn't want them. And, the neighbor only had a few days left before the family would come and take them to the pound."

"I'm sold, I want her. I'll come out sometime this week and pick her up," Mari declared.

Well, a few days later, Mari came out, fell in love with and adopted our Lady Bug!

A few weeks later, we received a letter from Mari and I knew it was going to be good news. As usual, I was wrong. It wasn't good news—it was great news! Mari was absolutely thrilled with Lady Bug and wrote a colorful story about her latest antics. She also had changed her name to Ladybird and thanked us over and over again for putting them together.

Now everytime that we see Mari, besides making her day, she has one or two great stories to tell about Ladybird and we laugh until one of our backs go out.

As for Ladybird's partner, Shadow—our neighbor and good friend, Sally Merwyn, is fostering her and has fallen in love with her, too!

Last year in May, we rescued 11 dogs from the Kerrville pound in one clean swoop. We rescued Taylor Hicks along with his cellmate Red Rover, and Honey, with her three pups, Dusty, Sandy and Valentino. We also freed Jazz, a raggedy little Shih Tzu who cleaned up nice after a shave and a haircut. Then came Carrie Underwood who loved attention, and Salt & Pepper, a precious pair of black puppies, and Clifford Antone who had the blues, but a happy bladder. After being spayed or neutered and given shots they came to the rescue ranch with tails wagging.

Tony put Taylor Hicks and Carrie Underwood in a pen together and they fell in



Taylor

love with each other because of shared interests. They loved spending their mornings, following breakfast, stripping the bark off of the cedar shade trees in their pen. Then later in the afternoons they would spend their time sitting proudly in the trees—admiring their accomplishments!

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Our rescue ranch has some great friends down in Port Aransas thanks to Kinky! We first met Rick Reichenbach and Regina Payton who live in a lighthouse down there and they wound up introducing us to their friends, Pete Hartje and Kelly Broomfield—all big time animal lovers! In fact, the dog that Kinky's holding on page one is Pete and Kelly's rescued dog, Sophia—Rick took the picture!

Pete is a musician and owner of a storm shutter business and his girlfriend, Kelly, an incredibly great vet tech, drive up here several times during the year to clip all of our dog's nails for free! On the muddy morning of July 27, 2007, they drove up and with the help of Tony, John, Pete and me holding the dogs—Kelly clipped over 60 dog's nails within 2 hours!



"Nails-R-Us Team"
John, Pete, Kelly and Tony



We need your help! Mama, our three legged Pit Bull is one very special dog to us and she needs a super home! We have tried and tried to get her adopted, but unfortunately no one has been interested in her.

Mama has special needs. She needs to be a one house pet. She is great with children, loves to go for long walks, and is ready to be spoiled. She is a sweet, lovable dog and it is breaking our hearts that she has not been adopted. If you can help or are interested in Mama please call the ranch, 830-589-7544 for more information. She is a great dog!

The fax read: "I have three cats and four dogs that I rescued. Two days ago another stray came. I do not have the money for the upkeep of another animal. He is a puppy with an engaging smile and eagerness to please. He is going to be big and handsome. The expense of driving to Medina will affect my budget. Please accept him and give him a chance for life."

Two days later at 7:00 a.m., an elderly man showed up with the dog and he cried as he handed over the leash and thanked us. Then he drove away with us both crying.



I named this dog that was all legs with shiny, short black hair, Ben Stiller. And, as all rags to riches stories go—Ben hit pay dirt! He was adopted a couple of months later to a wonderful family from Austin who owned several Sonic Drive Ins in Austin including one in Ruidoso, New Mexico! Ben spends his time going back and forth from Austin to Ruidoso with his family and he has been spoiled rotten!

Lastly, I have some exciting personal news! I wrote a book about the rescue ranch for the University of Texas Press! It is a collection of short stories about the ranch and the animals. It took me four and a half months to write and the name of it is *The Road to Utopia: How Kinky, Tony and I Saved More Animals Than Noah* and Kinky wrote the foreword for it! It came out September 1, 2006 and I have been told that it is selling like hot cakes and am so thrilled about it! It has been a dream come true for me and was an absolute blast to write, but it did drive Tony around the bend—so to speak.

Even though Tony is a Leo, he acted more like a Gemini during those four and a half months because he was basically beside himself the entire time that I was writing it. It drove him crazy every time that he would come into my writing cabin and find me at my laptop either staring off into space, laughing out loud or crying. Not wanting to interrupt my train of thought he would anxiously wait until bedtime to ask me which story I was working on and if I was okay. He tells everyone that the day I finished writing the book and mailed it off to Austin, was one of the happiest days in his life!



We hope that you have enjoyed our newsletter and we thank you for always being there for the rescue ranch. As always we need more adoptions, more volunteers and of course, more money so we can continue to keep on rescuin' on. We love y'all!

To make a non-taxable donation please visit the **PayPal** site at utopiarescue.com or send a check made payable to:

Utopia Animal Rescue Ranch
966 Echo Hill Road
Medina, Texas 78055

P.S. Please watch our web site for news and updates about our ranch and upcoming Bonenfits!