



Stephen with his  
dog, Benji



FROM DISCOVERING THEIR PASSION TO GIVING THEM A SENSE OF PURPOSE, RESCUERS SAY THE ANIMALS THEY'VE SAVED HAVE SAVED THEM, TOO

# mutual rescue

BY LAURA MOSS

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**MUSICIAN STEPHEN EDGHILL** is a firm believer in second chances. After running into trouble as a young adult and subsequently being arrested, he knew he needed to find a better path. And he has found it in animal rescue.

Growing up in Brooklyn, New York, Stephen saw his share of animal neglect and abuse, and what he witnessed eventually inspired him to make a positive difference in animals' lives. His foray into animal welfare started with a song called "Middle of the Pack," which he wrote to raise awareness about the cruelty of dogfighting. While recording the single in 2012, his producer introduced him to Robert Miseri, founder of Guardians of Rescue, an animal rights and welfare organization based in Long Island. That encounter changed Stephen's life.

Stephen has now been volunteering with the group for nearly six years and is a self-proclaimed "animal-cruelty interventionist." He says, "Talking people out of intentionally and unintentionally neglecting animals has become one of my specialties. As a guardian, you basically have to use all your hidden talents."

Over the years, he has been instrumental in the rescue and care of countless animals, from cats and dogs to pigs and horses.

**"Just looking into a dog's eyes once he's freed from his chain or taking an animal out of a bad environment can make your day a million times better."**

~ Stephen Edghill

But the rescue that sticks with him most vividly involved a pit bull named Morris who had a history of behaving inappropriately. The reasons for that soon became clear to Stephen.

"He was chained up in the backyard while sitting in the scorching heat. He was also picked on by the neighbors," Stephen says. "I was able to convince the owner to release the dog to us. I was told by one of our trainers that Morris probably would need extensive behavioral training, but not even two weeks after being off the chain, he made a total 180. He now sleeps on the couch in his new owner's home. He's finally getting a chance to experience a better life."

Providing animals with a better life is what Stephen says his own life is all about now. "I've gotten second chances in my life, and now I'm able to give an animal a second chance. Rescue work has changed my life," he says. "In a world where



Stephen and Benji



Stephen helps install a fence.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GUARDIANS OF RESCUE

you can sometimes feel powerless, it gives you a sense of hope. Just looking into a dog's eyes once he's freed from his chain or taking an animal out of a bad environment can make your day a million times better. I'm rescuing animals, but at the same time they're rescuing me."

So often when it comes to animal welfare work, the focus is on how we're saving animals' lives. However, talk to people like Stephen — those involved in the day-to-day efforts of rescue and caregiving — and you'll hear the same sentiment expressed again and again. In their own way, the animals are saving us, too.

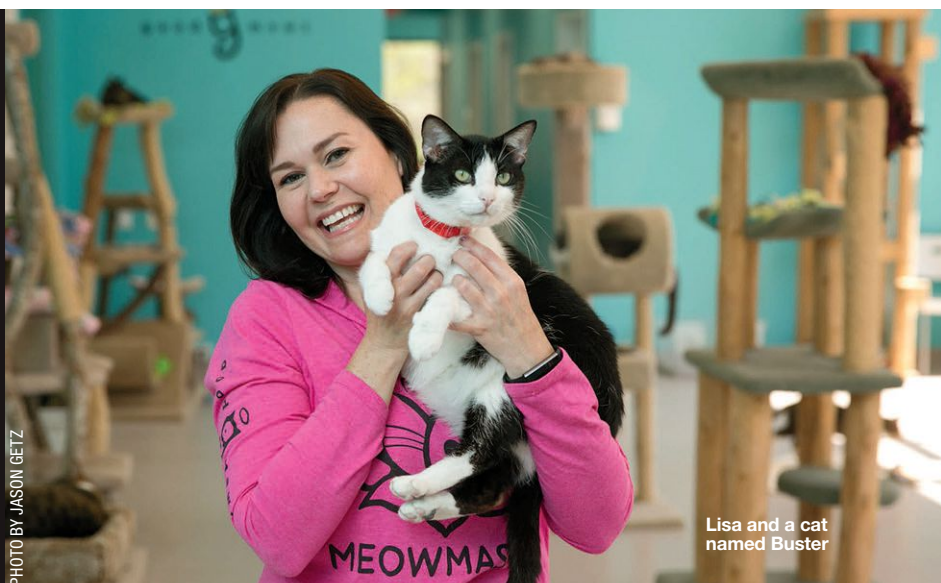
### Finding purpose

Lisa Johns has always been an animal lover, so when she moved to American Samoa to work as an attorney, it came as no surprise to her friends and family that she not only adopted a stray cat and dog, but also began volunteering with a local animal-rescue organization.

"I was just taken aback by all of the homeless, starving dogs and cats on the island," says Lisa, who was recently named the chief operations officer for Asheville Humane Society in North Carolina. "I wanted to be part of the solution, so I started working with a group that brought volunteer vets in to do spay and neuter clinics. I did a lot of fostering with bottle babies, and it was really fulfilling to take a very young or extremely sick animal, rehabilitate it and find it a home. Growing up, I never

**"It can be a very challenging profession mentally, emotionally and physically, but what I do is one of the most rewarding and fulfilling professions out there."**

~ Lisa Johns



Lisa and a cat named Buster

PHOTO BY JASON GETZ





Robin prepares a dog for transport.

**“You may be helping the animal, but in turn you get so much love and comfort back.”**

~ Robin Harmon

thought of working with animals as a career choice, but on the island I started thinking, ‘Maybe I could do this full time.’”

Two and a half years later, Lisa was back on the mainland and inspired to pursue a career in animal welfare. She found the perfect fit at Good Mews, an Atlanta-based cat rescue group, where she worked as the shelter manager for five years. Today, she says she owes it to the animals she rescued and nurtured in American Samoa for helping her discover her true calling.

“Working in animal welfare can be a difficult profession. You are going to work a lot of hours. You are going to work a lot of weekends. You have to put the animals before yourself at times. But, for me at least, all of that is worth it,” Lisa says. “I always say that I work harder in this profession than I did as a lawyer, and it’s not that I didn’t work hard as a lawyer, but I think when you have a passion for something, you’re willing to go that extra mile. It can be a very challenging profession mentally, emotionally and physically, but what I do is one of the most rewarding and fulfilling professions out there, and I’m so grateful I’ve ended up here.”

## Giving and receiving

We’re all familiar with the adage “It’s better to give than to receive,” and perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in animal welfare. Even though staff and volunteers in this field give so much of themselves to the animals, they’re quick to point out that the animals give them far more in return. “Knowing that you affect an animal’s life in a positive way is extremely gratifying,” Stephen says. “I feel he who serves almost always benefits more than he who is served.”

Robin Harmon worked with Best Friends for many years and now works with Downtown Dog Rescue in Los Angeles, and she echoes this sentiment. “You may be helping the animal, but in turn you get so much love and comfort back,” she says.

It’s not only the animals who touch Robin, but also the people she encounters — particularly the ones living in the skid row area of L.A. Here, she assists with Downtown Dog Rescue’s Pet Resource Center, which provides the area’s homeless population with food and veterinary care for their pets. “This work has



Robin and a few canine friends



**“This work enriches and humanizes those who do it in astonishing ways, if we are willing to allow it.”**

~ Betti Taylor



Betti with some feline friends



Some of the ladies of Magicats

opened me up to people and helped me recognize the bond between us and animals,” she says. “The people who I meet downtown, a lot of them don’t have anything — not even family — and they say they wouldn’t be alive if they didn’t have a dog or a cat to love. They just live for their animals and for the love that they get from them.”

This sense of purpose that animals provide can often be a lifesaver for rescue workers, too. “We have commitments that force us out of bed each morning and into the lives and needs of

animals who literally have nobody else but us,” says Betti Taylor, logistics coordinator for Magicats, a cat rescue group in Magic Valley in south central Idaho. “And there’s a time in one’s life when the need to have an important reason to get out of bed can literally become a reason for staying alive.”

Betti says that for the eight women “of a certain age” involved in Magicats, rescuing animals has given them a purposeful way to fill their days, as well as providing them with a community they all need. “This very small group has forged a sisterhood and a support network not just of us, but of those who stand with us. (It has) given us a manageable way to make a difference in a world that often seems out of control,” Betti says. “This work enriches and humanizes those who do it in astonishing ways, if we are willing to allow it.”

Allowing rescue work to change us is one of its greatest gifts, according to Stephen, who says he’s forever grateful to the animals for the path he’s on now. “Animal rescuing has made me look at life in a different way,” he says. “I could’ve taken the wrong path and ended up like some of my friends — in jail or, even worse, dead — but life has bigger plans for me. Animal rescuing has put me on a path that I didn’t foresee. I’m learning more about myself every day, and I owe it all to animals.” 🐾