



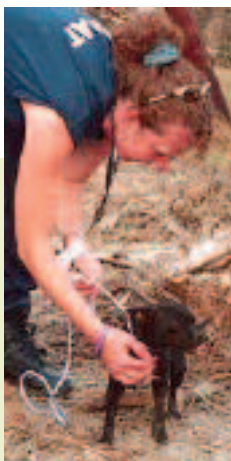
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Letters From the Gulf Coast

Lisa Radosta
University of Pennsylvania

letters

from the Gulf Coast



The devastation following Hurricane Katrina last August not only riveted the world's attention on people in the Gulf Coast region, but also made plain the vulnerability of animals affected by the disaster. Several of the School's faculty and staff were compelled to offer assistance to many of these animals in various ways. **Dr. Cynthia M. Otto**, associate professor of critical care, was part of a team of veterinary medicine specialists who joined members of FEMA's national disaster medical system in the Gulf area. In addition to providing medical care, the team helped round up animals and worked on disease prevention and public safety.

Dr. Lisa Murphy, assistant professor of toxicology in the Department of Pathobiology, led a group of 10 Veterinary Medical Assistance Team veterinarians and technicians on a two-week deployment to Mississippi. **Dr. Lisa Radosta**, resident in behavioral medicine, flew to the Gulf to help assess recovered dogs and cats. Nurses from the hospital also volunteered on the Gulf Coast, and the School sent badly needed supplies.

Below are portions of messages that Dr. Radosta e-mailed from the frontlines to colleagues in Philadelphia.

Sunday, September 25, 2005

I got here this morning and have been working ever since. There are a lot of pets here—dogs, cats, ferrets, bunnies. Many really frightened dogs and cats. Some just stir crazy.

When they found out I was with the Behavior Service, it was all over. I spent my entire day evaluating the cats for aggression, and tomorrow I am on to the dogs. The vets in charge are concerned that these aggressive animals may not be fostered or adopted out and may consequently be euthanized. Each one belongs to somebody who was displaced. It is very sad.

We have isolated the really frightened and aggressive cats now, and on my recommendation they are placing them in cages with only one open side so that they are not bombarded on all sides by the dogs, people, etc. I will start working with them 3–4 times per day tomorrow. Hopefully, they will be able to be placed based on what we are doing. People are amazed by what can be done

with frightened dogs with the help of a can of cat food. I told them that Jenny [O'Connor, Ryan behavior nurse] was coming and they have her name so that she can continue on this path. They are extremely excited about the Behavior Service being there.

There is a lot to do here. Many animals. They have to be checked in and out by a vet; the treatment sheets have to be reviewed by a vet and recommendations made; the aggressive ones are only walked by a vet or vet tech, etc. Of course, there is dirty work too. You just pitch in.

I am at the Parker Coliseum, which is primarily the holding shelter for owned animals, relinquished animals and animals cleared through Lamar-Dixon in Gonzalez. The facility will be closed on Oct 15th, and the animals have to be either picked up or off to another shelter by then. Lamar-Dixon is the primary clearing house for dogs rescued from rooftops in New Orleans. I offered to go there if need be. They are doing all the intake and

yesterday took in over 300 animals. There are thousands of animals there now; many species. They are still in need of a lot of help—especially emergency and critical care, because a lot of the animals are sick or injured.

One woman had rented a house in a neighboring parish. Her home is completely destroyed and her car was covered by water. Two helicopters came to get her off the roof, but they would not take her dog. She would not go. When the third one came, they took her and her dog in the basket to safety. Her dog has been at Parker since then. She was crying when she saw him (a golden retriever mix). He was bouncing around. We were all crying. I am really moved by the whole thing. It is amazing.

I don't know how often I will have Internet access, but I wanted to let you know that I am here.

Tuesday, September 27, 2005

On Monday, I was given the assignment of vet for the cat area. You are given an assignment and stay there until you leave. We have 200–300 cats. About 80 are in quarantine (upper respiratory), and the rest are mine. I have 1 tech and a bucket-load of awesome volunteers. They show up and work for 12 hours in the heat and no one complains. Of course, I am using color-coded index cards to denote animals that need doctor's or tech's attention, keeping track of animal transfers on my pad/clipboard combo, and we are making lists with little boxes that we efficiently check off. It makes me happy to have control of this little part of my world when the world around me is chaotic and unpredictable.



Courtesy of LSU Ag Center.

The Parker Coliseum at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge served as an animal shelter for the pets of people displaced by Hurricane Katrina.



Dr. Lisa Radosta

We spend a lot of time examining cats who aren't feeling well while in the hospital. One kitty was in the Katrina waters for 6 days. I don't think that I would want to eat either. I am glad to say that the angry-cat area (chill room) has become smaller. Just a little environmental enrichment (hide box, larger cage) will sometimes do it. Many of the cats were labeled as aggressive, but they only became that way when they could see another cat. We try to get hide boxes and cuddle boxes into every cage possible. . . We have evaluated a couple of aggressive dogs that turned out to be really scared and very trainable with a little bit of food. I think we all have pets that would not be comfortable in this type of frightening situation and would act out with aggression. It is a little more scary to enter a stall with a large dog that is aggressive, but the techniques that we use at Penn work in the Baton Rouge heat in a horse stall, too. I am looking at a dog who snapped at a tech. He is atrophied in the rear and he snapped when his back was petted. The person who wants to adopt him has a 14-month-old and a 4-year-old. We will do a physical exam and a behavior evaluation.

The reports out of Lamar-Dixon are discouraging. They have thousands of animals and they continue to come sometimes in the hundreds. They need critical veterinary care. They could use some criticalists badly. The vets sleep in the barn or on the bathroom floor. Animals are still being pulled off of houses and out of the water. Can you imagine? They have not been fed a meal or had clean water for 3 weeks. They are scared out of their minds. They are emaciated. It sounds heartbreaking. Even when Parker closes, they will still need people. I hope that the public can stay aware of the situation. Vets who would like to help should register with ASPCA.

Well, I am tired, stinky, and I need a shower. I still put on makeup each day and pull my hair back with a nice spritz of hairspray in the hopes that I will look decent, but there is just no way in this heat. We are supposed to get down to 75 degrees tomorrow.

See you guys soon.

—DR. LISA RADOSTA

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