

What *Really* Happened on the Gulf

Orphans of Katrina



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RESOURCES:

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The Surprising Chain of Events, and the Many Volunteers Involved, When You Don't Spay/Neuter

How You Can Help Save America's Pets Today

INTRODUCTION: INSIDE KATRINA

Everybody was asking questions after Katrina, but nobody was asking the most important ones. Magazines, newspapers, documentary filmmakers all wanted input from animal rescuers, input they thought was revealing: “Why did you go? How did you get there? Do you have a favorite rescue story? Favorite reunion story? *Any* favorite story?”

All valid questions, but not the most significant. New Orleans after Katrina could not be interpreted by the photos and images shown to the outside world. You had to live inside the locked-down, destroyed city to know what to ask. Life inside was so desperate and traumatic that even those of us who lived it had difficulty absorbing it. It was its own unique world, with its own rules, its own code of ethics. New Orleans was suddenly a Third World country—a foreign land so impoverished, so war-torn, so devastated, that we felt like we were thousands of miles outside the USA.

The queries came, but not the right ones. No one asked what it was like to live in a celebrated, vibrant American city that had been reduced to rubble overnight. No one asked what it felt like to walk through vast suburbs, thick with homes, yet never find another person, never see a car move, never hear a bird chirp. No one inquired what it was like to sleep on the toxic hot pavement of a parking lot with armed military guards all around so that you wouldn’t be killed at night. And most importantly, no one asked what it was like to live in a city full of entombed, dying pets unseen in the houses and apartments surrounding you.

It was a citywide guessing game and we were losing. What was it like? What was it *really* like? No one asked.

I spent four months volunteering in New Orleans, then several months working on the Internet helping evacuees track down pets. As the chaos died down, I felt I had done all I could for the people and animals of the Gulf, and I was ready to get back to my own life. But if the media had been on the wrong track with its questions, I would soon discover the more disturbing issue. Books and articles written about Katrina animal rescue were glossing over too much of the truth, hiding the enormity of the tragedy and missing the all-important details that helped explain the largest animal rescue in history.

Despite some dramatic photo coverage and a handful of poignant articles, there were mostly stories about happy pet reunions and glossy photo journals showing animals swimming to safety. I realized the true story might never be told—the true story of a human and animal disaster so far-reaching and heartbreaking that the very people who lived it were burying it.

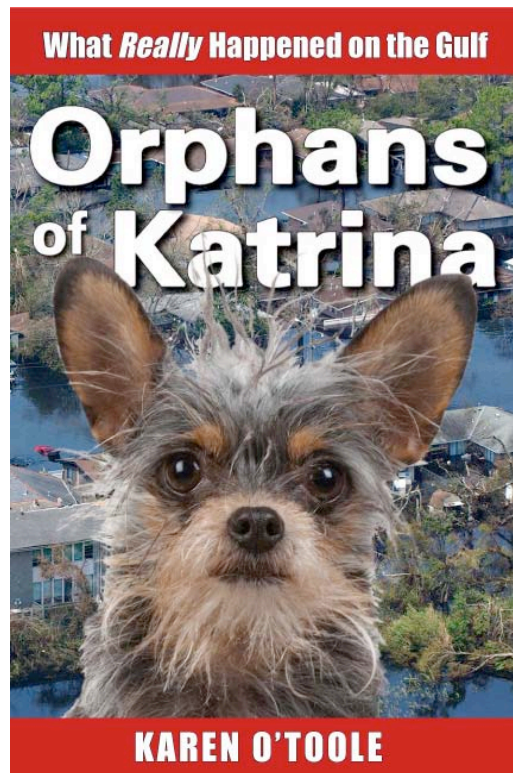
I thought back to the thousands of animals I had encountered, to the enormity of the suffering they’d endured, and I felt compelled, once again, to come to their aid. Even in their death—especially in their death—theirs was a story that needed to be told. A story of tragedy and triumph, of love and loyalty. Could I return to my own life and walk away now? Could I shut my eyes and ears to all of this? Could I slam the door on the Gulf and never look back?

No. I couldn’t desert these incredible animals that had no voice to speak for themselves; no way to tell their own story. Alone, they faced one of the greatest disasters to ever occur on American soil, and most paid with their lives. Who would tell their tale? And who would reveal the desperate plight of the hurricane survivors and the animal rescuers? The impossible challenges we conquered ... the grave mistakes we made ... the valuable lessons we learned.

This book is my humble, heartfelt attempt to remember the people and pets of the Gulf: a scrapbook of stories, observations, and photos collected from deep within the world of Katrina. It

is my ode to the brave pets and rescuers of the Gulf. With their lives, and deaths, they brought needed focus to the desperate plight of the animals we share our world with.

I have a deeper respect and more profound love than ever for the people and pets in our lives. Come on this journey with me, and I know you will too.



Order a copy of *Orphans Of Katrina*.

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