

## Cat Rescue - A Herculean Rescue

**Separated from his ill owner, this now-famous fat cat made headlines.**

*BY POLINA OLSEN*

Geoff Earnest reunited with Hercules at the Oregon Humane Society. When Geoff Earnest says both he and his cat came back from the dead, the large brown tabby stares and blinks. But when the now-famous stray and the transplant survivor found each other in January 2007, news agencies around the world agreed.

Their story began when Jadwiga Drozdek of Portland, Ore., noticed cat food quickly disappearing from the dish in her garage. Then, one day, she found a huge cat running toward the garage door.

"It was hilarious," she remembers. "He got stuck in the middle of the doggie door. He was trying to pull out and broke the magnet but finally got through." The next day, the cat settled on Drozdek's porch.

With chubby cheeks and short front legs, the intact male cat looked like a Bulldog.

"At first I was scared, but he was nice. I'd rub his tummy," Drozdek says. Her own six cats, however, remained terrified. The huge cat had to go.

The Oregon Humane Society buzzed the day Drozdek brought the cat in.

"This murmur went through the organization," says marketing director Barbara Bagnon who was skeptical at first. "You know, people exaggerate. Yeah, sure — a fat cat." Then she saw him. "No — it was a really fat cat."

Technician Tiffany Noreuil says, "His head was as big as mine! He loved having his belly rubbed and wanted to be friends with everybody." They named the 20-pound cat Goliath and wrote a press release. News services called within minutes.

**Geoff Earnest and Hercules**

Geoff Earnest received his cystic fibrosis diagnosis as a child. By his late twenties, he wasn't doing well. Still, he fell in love with the giant tabby that strayed into his yard in 2004.

"Hercules was the neighbors' cat, and they didn't want him," Ernest says. "He terrorized their other cats and sprayed."

After Earnest adopted the cat, they played each day and developed a routine.

"He had five houses he went to every night, and each house fed him."

Things went downhill for Earnest. As he checked in and out of hospitals, he always kept a photo of Hercules by his bedside. Finally, Earnest required a life-saving double-lung transplant. Straight out of surgery, he asked for his robust friend.

During this time, however, Earnest's house-sitter had called his parents. A neighbor reported seeing Hercules mauled; he was presumed dead. The family kept it secret until Earnest came home.

"Before my transplant, I started building Hercules an outdoor house," Earnest says. After the surgery, he finished it in the cat's memory. "It was closure." Then, during a TV basketball game, a newsbreak talked about a chubby cat stuck in a doggie door while stealing pet food. Earnest looked up. Hercules was alive.

The YouTube video about the story got 400,000 hits. Newscasts went around the world. A cat food manufacturer donated diet food.

"Today," Earnest says, "he's 19 pounds and perfect."

Neutered before he left OHS, and now indooronly, Hercules remains a star. He often attends speaking engagements where Earnest advocates for organ donation. At night, Hercules jumps on Earnest's chest, nuzzles against his shoulder

and falls asleep.

"We are two survivors reunited," Earnest says.

Polina Olsen is a freelance writer living in Portland, Ore., with her husband Andy, Somali Koshka and Tonkinese Baba Ganoush.