

Operation Santa Paws Gives to Shelter Pets

The holidays are a time to spread cheer to shelter pets, who need love, care and homes.

By Sandy Robins

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This was a week of firsts.

Fudge received her first ever holiday card sent by none other than celeburrant Matilda of the Algonquin Hotel in New York. I was flattered that she was included on this famous cat's mailing list because Matilda has many friends and fans from around the world and delivering Matilda's mail must surely keep postmen around the world busy. Thanks Matilda and right back at you!

Also this week, for the very first time, my husband Michael accompanied me to an animal shelter. We went to hand out gifts and treats to all the cats as part of Operation Santa Paws. The generosity was touching. We emptied four SUVs filled with goodies and some kind gentleman even delivered a fabulous brand new cat condo that was over 6 feet tall.

Me surrounded by gifts for the shelter Until now, Michael's only experience of an animal shelter was coverage on TV and it certainly didn't prepare him for the real experience; the constant cacophony of barking dogs that the cats in the nearby section have to deal with along with all the alien smells and sounds of other cats plus the stress and anxiety of trying to cope with why there are there in the first place.

The experience is always heartbreaking. And Mike was clearly moved. He was also enraged by how casual some people are about their "commitment" to having a pet. This doesn't come across on TV. Ever.

This visit to hand out toys and treats and dispense lots of love is an attempt to calm these poor creatures so that they are less scared and more likely to interact with people looking to adopt. My heart went out to a tiny tabby that was clearly so petrified that she had climbed under her bed and was growling from pure fright.

The face of shelter stress. I can't get this cat out of my mind. We took the opportunity to spend time with each and every cat in the shelter.

On a positive note this year there was no line of people relinquishing animals. Last year was distressing. Also there were fewer cats in the shelter than last year. But this fact wasn't particularly comforting because at the back of my mind I kept thinking that perhaps many who had not found homes had been euthanized ... This is not a no-kill shelter.

As we head into another year, I have decided that I am going to try and take as many people to visit a shelter for the first time as I can in the coming months. There is nothing like this experience and only when thoughtful people are confronted with the callousness of others can we accelerate change. It's time to make America a country of only no-kill animal shelters.

Fudge and I wish everyone Happy Holidays. I am not sending out cards this year — so please take this purrsonally.

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