

Rescue of the Month: Libby's Legacy

A local legend disappears.

By Justin W. Sanders

Libby kept the clutter in order. (Photo by Sue Woodall)
Libby did her best to help all the students with their work. (Photo by Sue Woodall)

If you have information on the whereabouts of Libby the Library Cat (pictured above), contact Sue Woodall at psuedoll@aol.com, or (812) 466-3167.

After she was rescued as a kitten from the side of a highway in Terre Haute, Ind., Libby became a therapy animal for the local high school, where she touched hundreds of students' lives. Through her service at the high school, she earned the nickname, Libby the Library Cat.

But in April of last year, she disappeared from a car that was parked at the town's Union Hospital. She has been missing ever since.

The Path for a Therapy Cat

"When my daughter and I found her, she was bedraggled and covered with fleas," says Sue Woodall, Libby's caretaker, "but it was immediately apparent she was a very special animal. She would look at you with these gold eyes as if she was checking you out and seeing if you were OK."

At the time of Libby's rescue, Woodall had been researching therapy animals to see if one could fit in at the local South Putnam High School library, where she worked as a librarian. She believed such a specially trained pet could help kids cope with the stressful rigors of academic life. Libby's calm attitude and apparent love of car travel made her a perfect candidate for such a position.

Teacher's Pet

After "acclimating her to crowds and strange noises," Woodall took Libby to work, where she was an immediate sensation and established a routine that brought her in contact with hundreds of students every day.

"The first thing she would do each morning was her patrol," Woodall remembers. "She'd walk a path on top of the bookshelves and check everything out. Then she'd greet the kids as they came down the hall to school. She learned to shake hands and wave her paw. During the day, the kids would come by and pet her in her basket, or play chess with her. They swore up and down that anyone who had her on their team would win the game."

In Her Name

In just a short time at South Putnam, Libby the Library Cat's generous, loving spirit enriched students' lives and inspired many to become active with local animal shelters. A school club was founded in her name that was devoted to fostering care and respect for all animals. As a prominent animal celebrity, Libby was featured to varying degrees in the Terre Haute newspaper, radio and television outlets. In 2005, the town's Tribune Star named Libby Pet of the Year.

Woodall, now retired from South Putnam, hopes to give workshops on training therapy cats. She hopes to work with other libraries to bring in therapy animals and has started writing a book about her experiences with Libby. Though the beloved feline might never be found, Woodall and the Terre Haute community work diligently to ensure her legacy is never lost.

Justin W. Sanders is a writer located in Portland, Ore. He lives with two cats, Squeak and Purrлина.

In April 2007's CAT FANCY:

Read a touching Rescue of the Month story about Callie.