

Hurricane Katrina Cat United with Owner

A New Orleans resident risked law enforcement to find her cat.

By Kristin Grant

Jeannie Kujawa and her cat Mikey were reunited after Hurricane Katrina separated them for several weeks. (Photo courtesy of Jeannie Kujawa) When Jeannie Kujawa left her New Orleans home the morning of August 29, 2005, she figured she would return home to her cat, Mikey, within a few days. She could not have imagined the severity of the approaching storm, Hurricane Katrina, or that she would not be permitted to return to search for him until several weeks later.

Having no car, Kujawa evacuated New Orleans with friends who had little room left in their vehicle. Before leaving, she slit the bottom of an 18-pound bag of cat food and turned her tub faucet on to a trickle.

“Like everyone else, I thought we’d be home in a few days,” she says.

Upon settling into a small, temporary apartment in a town two hours away, Kujawa finally had access to television and news of the storm. She was horrified at what she saw.

“I about climbed the walls — my thoughts started spinning,” she says. “He’s gone, I thought. He’s just gone for sure.”

Local and federal authorities ordered that civilians were not allowed to enter the city until given permission, so Kujawa frantically called every national pet hotline she could find. She put out an “SOS” for rescuers to enter her home and save Mikey, her long-haired black cat with hints of white in wispy patches. This was the cat she acquired on the heels of a difficult separation, the cat that became her close companion and first showed her the unexpected bond between cat and human.

Days passed. Weeks passed. No news of Mikey.

Kujawa made a drastic decision seven weeks after the storm. She chose to rent a car and re-enter the city even though the “all-clear” had not been granted yet.

“I didn’t know if I would be harmed or if I could even make it to the house,” she says.

Kujawa did make it to her shotgun-style house in the usually-bustling Mid-city area, and instead of the chaos she expected, she found the opposite.

“It was really, really quiet. It was the most ‘nothingness’ I’ve ever experienced. No birds chirping, no wind blowing, no signs of life. No nothing,” she says.

The doors to her house were broken down, perhaps by the animal rescuers to whom she sent the SOS. She stepped inside, and called out for Mikey in the stark silence. Not a sound. She looked under her bed and in the closets as she made her way to the back-side of the house. As she approached her kitchen, she called out again. This time, she got a reply.

“I heard this long, whiny meow, and he came in through the back door before I got there,” she says of Mikey. “I just picked him up, and he acted like he never wanted to jump down. It was like I never left. I was ecstatic,” Kujawa says.

“I had to be careful not to squeeze him too hard,” she adds.

Kujawa believes that an area food-and-water station set up by volunteers helped Mikey to weather the long days and nights after the storm.

The pair now lives happily in Kujawa’s adopted town. She says Mikey has adjusted well to his new home.

“He’s very lovable, just like before, and he still hops in bed with me every night,” Kujawa says.



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In June 2007's CAT FANCY:

Learn how heroic volunteers organized a huge makeshift shelter following Hurricane Katrina.