

MANDY'S HEART:

MASTER'S PROJECT

Submitted to the faculty of

The University of Houston-Clear Lake

By

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in

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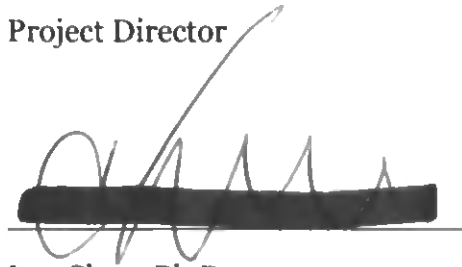
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We the undersigned, certify that we have read this project and approved it as adequate in scope and quality for the Master's Degree in Digital Media Studies.



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Monica's Capstone Project: Mandy's Heart

Several years ago my mother and I were faced with a dilemma. We had five very tiny and rather furious kittens in a cage sitting in the middle of our living room. With some luck, we had previously managed to lure all five kittens into the cage with food; we could clearly see even from a distance that they were starving. It was at this point, my mother and I standing around the cage of hissing little kittens, that we were faced with the question of what to do with them. After calling our local shelter, we learned that since these were feral (wild) kittens, and the shelter did not have the room or the ability to tame them, these babies would be euthanized. Euthanized, simply for convince of the shelter. Needless to say I was sick to my stomach at the thought. So the plan was formed, my brave mother and I would tame these little balls of hissing fluff.

Weeks were spent on these kittens. Everyday we took out one kitten at a time held and cuddled it until eventually they were no longer scared of us and they soon welcomed the attention. Once these beautiful kittens were purring and vying for our attention, we knew that we could give them to loving homes. On a Saturday morning we loaded up the kittens, drove them to Pet Co, where Second Chance Pets is located and within two Saturdays all the kittens had homes.

Of course, there was one who stole my heart from the get-go. Her name is Miranda. She was the runt of the litter, the smallest of all the kittens and also the most terrified. During the first weeks she was at the bottom of the hissing pile of kittens scared out of her mind. It took the longest for her to begin purring and to enjoy being around us. I soon realized that the Second Chance Pets pet adoption Saturdays would not produce a home for her since she was so timid. My heart melted the first time she purred in my lap so I kept her. It is her story that I want to tell. She is so loved here and her siblings are much loved in their homes but how quickly they could have lost their lives. My goal is to write a children's book, Mandy's Heart, to teach parents and children what they can do when faced with this type of problem.

One of the most important issues to me is the welfare of animals, mainly cats. If you look in an animal shelter the majority of the animals that are in desperate need of a home are adult cats. Cats are not the favored pets of American's, dogs are, and I believe that some of the disregard we have for felines stems from Hollywood. In many children's movies, Disney's Cinderella, for

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example, cats are casted as the villains glaring at the main characters with evil eyes. There are several reasons I feel compelled to write this children's book. I want to try and dispel the myth that cats are evil creatures. I would like to give children an entertaining story that will also teach them to help cats. Lastly, I want to inform the parents reading to their children what to do if a litter of feral kittens are born in their bushes.

To make sure this is a visually beautiful book I will need 30 pages of illustrations and text to tell Mandy's story. I have created a very colorful book sleeve that will be eye catching to both children and parents. The last few pages of the book will be coloring pages for the children and parents to enjoy a simple activity together. I am envisioning this book being rather wide and thin. Each page should look as colorful as a magazine and just as glossy!



For the characters I will be using Adobe Illustrator and InDesign, to create all of the artwork as well as arranging them on the pages. I have created a few sketches of the main characters on paper that I have scanned into the computer, trace in Illustrator and then fleshed out using various gradient meshes. From these original sketches and designs I will create the other characters by using various body part symbols, for example; tails and legs, that I will make changes to create a new character.

This project is a merging of several passions of mine. I am a firm believer in the great benefits obtained by young children when their parents read to them, as well as helping animals. It is a dream of mine to work in the publishing industry as a book cover designer, and this book

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would certainly show that I have the skills to do just that. Not only would this project show to future employers my creativity and design skills, but it also has the potential to save the life of a kitten or two born feral in someone's bushes.

Walk into any animal shelter in America, and you will find the most depressing scene. Companion animals, of various types, sizes and ages all cramped into small cages eagerly vying for attention. Some have been shuffled from one home to another until they manage to hopefully find a permanent home or their wretched lives are finally ended by euthanasia. Adult cats in foster care are possibly the most difficult pets to find life-long homes for. Feral, or cats born wild, are almost impossible to adopt out and most shelters will not take them at all or if they do it is only with the intent of immediately euthanizing them. It is for this reason that I am compelled to spread the word of the Feral Cat Assistance Program and their Trap/Spay/Neuter/ Release program and to create something that helps to further convey that message. I have personally rescued several kittens and adult cats and placed them in great "forever" homes, but there are still millions more cats and kittens out there suffering. This project is my way of trying to make some small improvement in the lives of an ever-growing population of felines without homes or love. I wanted to get my message to young children and their parents, and the best way to do that is put it in a colorful picture book.

Throughout the years, cats have been demonized in popular children's movies and great example of that is Cinderella, which happens to be one of my favorites, but it gives a bad impression of cats as some sort of malicious, sneaky and evil creature. To combat this storyline, I wanted to make my story center around a cat that is both an innocent victim and the heroine of the story. My reasons for writing this children's book are two-fold: to help give young children a positive image of these lovely creatures and to teach them, along with their parents, how to deal with a litter of feral, or wild, kittens if they happen to show up on their doorstep. Many pet owners abandon unwanted kittens or cats, assuming they can fend for themselves, but the truth is they simply cannot. In many instances they breed out of control, creating feral cat colonies which will grow larger with each passing generation. The trap, spay/neuter and release message needs to get out to

more people as a viable method for dealing with feral cats and I hope to spread that message a little more with this book. I also hope to spread the message that it is possible to successfully tame feral kittens with plenty of patience, love and commitment and such kittens make as good (or better) pet as any kitten not born wild.

My motivation for teaching children and their parents how to tame feral kittens is due to the horrible ^{experience I had} revelation I made when I was placed in such a situation. Five kittens, and their mother, began making their presence known to myself and the other members of my family late in the summer three years ago. The kittens had grown too big for their mother to adequately provide for them, and you could see they were on the verge of starving. To add to the looming danger for them, the neighborhood tom cat was lurking around and it is well known that an unneutered male cat will kill kittens he did not sire. I was desperate to save all of their lives but not really sure how to go about it. I spent several days leaving food and water out for them on my front porch. With the help of my family, we devised a make-shift trap out of a dog crate (cage) and heavy fishing line which we set up on the front porch one morning. We baited the cage with food and threaded the fishing line through our front door, tied to the cage door and waited patiently. Once all five kittens were inside, we pulled the string attached to the door of the cage tightly, holding them all securely inside until we could get out the door and fasten the cage latch. We then set a humane "Have A Heart" cage for the mother that we had rented from our local city. The mother was trapped several hours later. I was thrilled and terrified! Now what? I called several local shelters and they all informed me that the kittens along with their mother would be immediately euthanized. The shelters did not have the staff available to tame five kittens and an adult feral cat generally cannot be tamed. I was devastated. I had no idea what I was going to do with these kittens, who were hissing and spitting every time anyone approached the cage. They were clearly terrified of everyone. All I wanted to do was help them but there was no training guide that explained how to tame five wild little kittens!

Luckily, I got in touch with Second Chance Pets and The Feral Cat Association. They instructed me on exactly what to do and what to expect. The Feral Cat Association representative, Susan Stevenson, came and took the mother cat to be spayed at a reduced cost, which my family paid for. The animal control officer for our little city of Taylor Lake Village, Mrs. Betsy Verbsky, is a board member of Second Chance Pets and she loaned us a huge cage to house the kittens in while we fostered them and worked on taming them. Mrs. Verbsky owns a horse barn out in the country and she allowed several feral cats to live out at her horse barn. She offered to take the mother cat to live out her life there after she was spayed. This was the best possible outcome for the feral mother cat. She would at least have a home and be fed regularly so I eagerly agreed to this arrangement. With the mother successfully placed, I was faced with the task of taming these angry little wild kittens. It only took a few days of letting them see that I was the one feeding them, providing water and cleaning up their cage, until eventually they became less wary of us. As instructed by Mrs. Stevenson, we then began handling them frequently by bundling them up in towels and holding them several times a day. At first they did not like being held, and fought or shied away from us. But after a couple of weeks, one by one they started purring and enjoying human contact. It got to the point that they were climbing the cage walls meowing loudly to try to get the attention of anyone that walked by to come and play with them. Within three weeks we had them sufficiently tamed to where they were ready to be adopted. It took so little time and effort to save these kittens! I realized that if I had just taken them to an animal shelter and not done any more investigating into the options for taming and finding homes for them, these innocent animals would have lost their lives simply for the unfortunate mistake of being born wild.

I feel compelled to spread the word and I want to do that by telling Miranda's story. She is one of the kittens that showed up on my doorstep that day a little over three years ago. This little girl was the smallest and the most afraid. She was always at the bottom of the pile of hissing and spitting kittens. I had already adopted a

pedigreed Ragdoll kitten from a League City Breeder and named her Rini, literally a week before the discovery of these kittens so I had no intentions of keeping one. But Miranda stole my heart and I was very worried that her meek little personality would not get her a home. Once all of the kittens had been tamed, checked by the vet and given all their shots, we were able to put them into the Second Chance Pets system with the help of Mrs. Verbsky and Mrs. Stevenson. Second Chance Pets holds adoptions at the area PETCO stores on Saturdays and Sundays. When the kittens were ready, we began schlepping them to PETCO during "adoption days" to see if we could find homes for them. One by one they were adopted, but we never took Miranda to adoption days. I had already decided to make her "forever" home with me. Rini, the Ragdoll, grudgingly accepted Miranda and she has made an incredibly loving pet; I could not imagine life without her. By telling her story, I hope more people will be armed with the knowledge of what to do if they are placed in this type of situation. If I can help save just one kitten's life with this book, then I will be happy. That is why I am taking this project a step further by publishing it. I plan to meet with board members of Second Chance Pets and ask if they will put a link to the book on their web site, and all proceeds will be donated to this organization. I also hope to have a display set up to promote sales of this book on adoption days at PETCO.

The process of creating this book was a difficult but thrilling one. Fortunately the story line had already been created for me. I just had to modify and shorten it a bit to fit the criteria for a children's book. I made an outline for the story, to which I wrote out image ideas. Once I had a basic idea of what the story was and what scenes needed to be created in order to visually tell the story, I set out to research what type of children's stories involved cats. Of course, there are a ton of children's books out there, but only a handful feature a cat as the main character. I went to several book stores, and walked up and down the children's book aisles in search of a book that I could use as inspiration for mine. I spent a good bit of time in these aisles. Book stores are filled with children's books, and each book is unique. I had to

figure out what would make my book stand out amongst this colorful bouquet of books. The best way for me to go about accomplishing that task was to pick out the books that most visually appealed to me. Mo Willems' *Don't Let The Pigeon Drive The Bus* jumped out to me at first because of its silliness and simplicity. The artwork was not intricate or detailed but this series of books is incredibly successful because the books make children and adults laugh. It struck me while reading this book, that parents are reading these books and my message would be reaching them as well. I came across several books with cats as the main character but one book in particular immediately drew me in, the Skippyjon Jones series by Judy Schachner. Skippyjon is a Siamese kitten with a wild imagination that takes him to many different places. It is an exciting book, with wonderful pastel colors. It was the perfect size for the little hands that would be thumbing through the large pages with bright and vivid pictures. It was the perfect reference, so I scooped it up! The size of the book really appealed to me because the pages would be big, giving me a larger canvas to work with. I knew from the beginning that I wanted my characters to stand out, be vibrant and large. Nothing attracts children more than big beautiful fully colored pages!

While I really enjoyed Skippyjon Jones' look and feel with the pastel colors and the Siamese cat, it was not the look I was going for with my book. I had to do a little more research to find inspiration for my kitten characters. I found inspiration for my characters in several stories that I had grown up with like the animated movie *Gay Purree* featuring the voice of Judy Garland. The story follows a prissy white cat and her tom cat beau as they travel all over Paris. The main character of this movie, Mewsette, provided the majority of my inspiration for Princess Rae. She is a beautiful fluffy white cat with a prissy attitude that was astoundingly endearing. Princess Rae's real life counterpart, Rini, has many of these qualities making Mewsette's personality ideal for Princess Rae's. Another story that I provided me an immense amount of inspiration is Disney's animated film *The Aristocats*. I grew up watching this story and I loved it so much.

With these images in mind, I took pictures of Miranda and Rini, the cats at the center of the story and sketched out cartoon characters of them. A week later, I had created rough sketches of what my two main characters were going to look like.

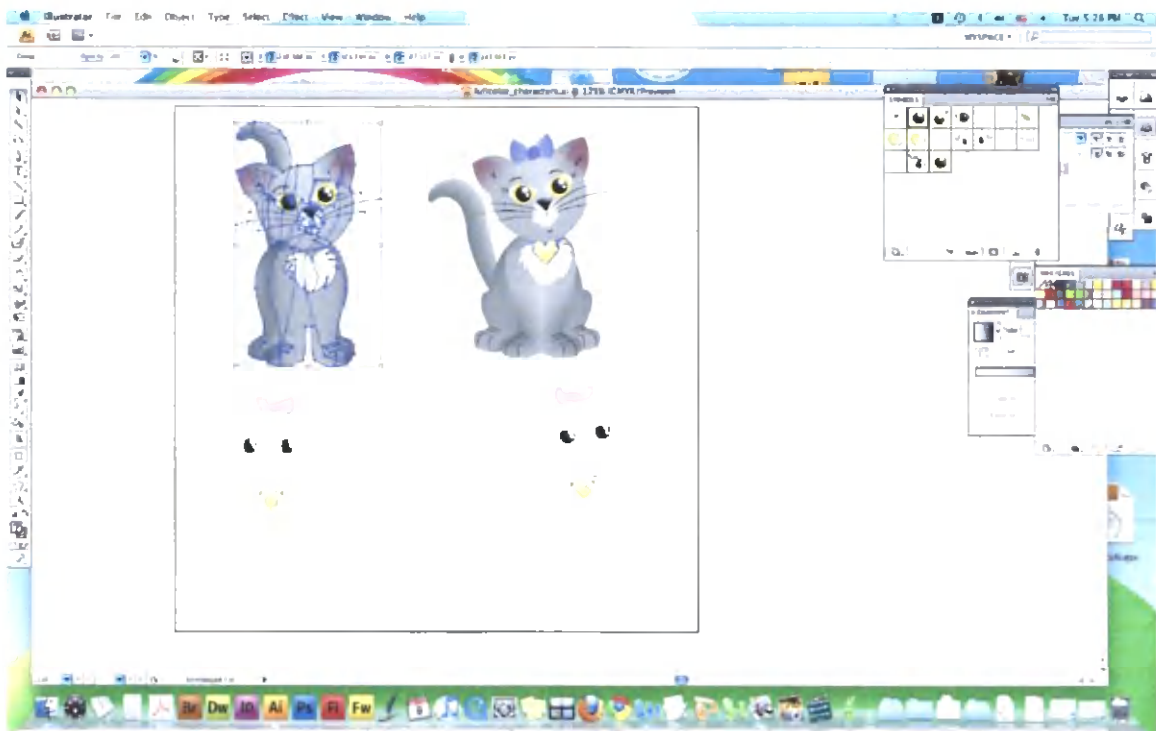


My first sketch of the two main characters Mandy and Rae.

As soon as the character sketches were perfected, I scanned them into the computer, where I then transferred them into Adobe Illustrator to trace and color. I decided to do all of my artwork in the Adobe Illustrator program. I feel that this program gives me the most flexibility in designing the characters, scenes and text layout throughout the pages. Since this story is based off actual events, I wanted my characters to look very much like their real life counterparts.

One of the greatest attributes of Miranda is her very expressive eyes. They express a great deal of emotion, and I wanted to emphasize that attribute. In order to do so, I referred to one of my favorite forms of art, the Japanese style of anime. Anime artists use large expressive eyes to give their otherwise simple characters a wide variety of emotions. With that art form in mind, I created larger than life eyes

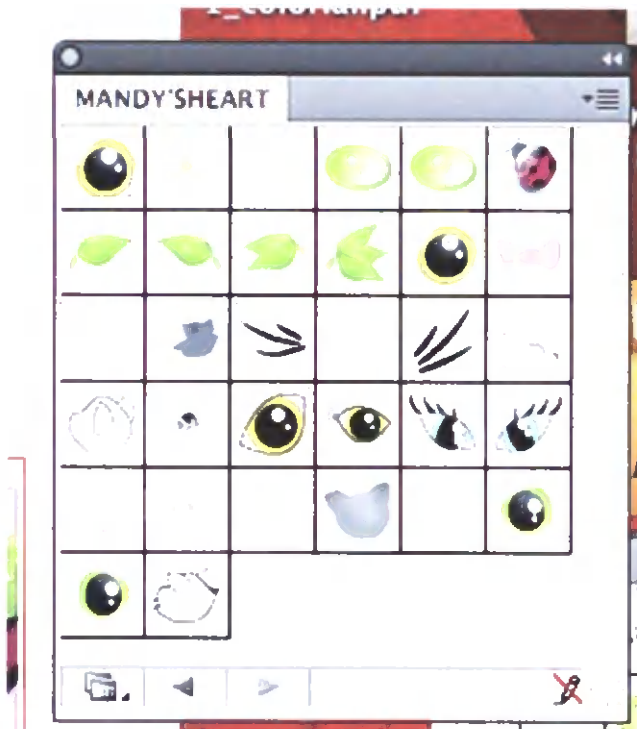
on Mandy that could easily convey emotion. I spent quite a bit of time creating the bodies for Mandy and Rae's characters since they needed to resemble Miranda and Rini as much as possible. Miranda has a silver coat with darker and lighter shading in various places. This effect can be made by using gradient meshes, which are multiple manipulability color points that can be formed into any shape providing the desired shading effect. Rini's coat is extremely fluffy; the majority of the fur is white with some peach or cream mixed in. I once again used the gradient mesh technique to give Rae a natural fading from peach, to cream to white.



An example of the characters created in Adobe Illustrator with the gradient mesh technique.

When the main characters were created, the hardest part was over. One of the best features in Adobe Illustrator is the symbols palette. The symbol palette allows you to create and save an object, which you can then name and place in any new document. When opened, the palette allows you to drag and drop that object into the documents. There is no limit to the amount of objects you can create and save in the palette, and it can be opened in any document. I built all of the cat characters based off of the two main characters. I simply changed the colors or added different

elements to make the kitten characters match the real kittens they represent. When a page was completed, I could copy and paste objects, or save them to the symbols palette. I could then easily place the objects onto the next page saving myself the time of recreating them.

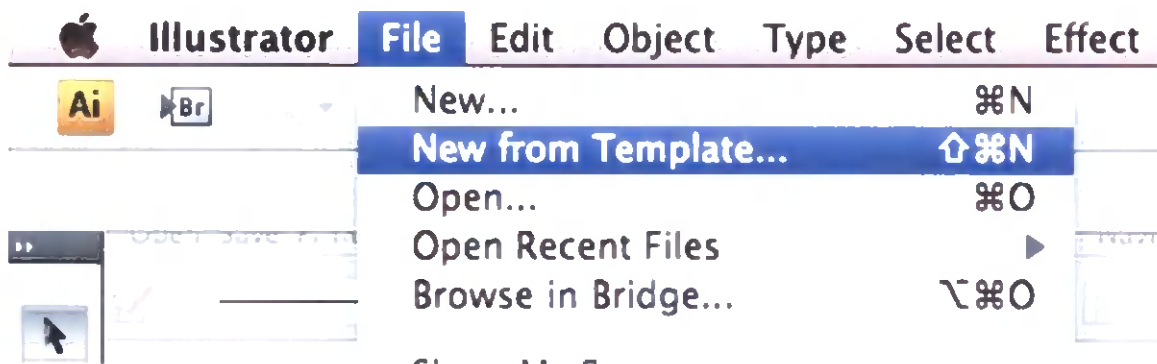


The Adobe Illustrator Symbols Palette for Mandy's Heart.

The cover of the book is very important; it needed to be able to compete with the masses of other vivid books on the shelves. The background of the cover literally came to me in a dream. I saw a unique print with a magenta diamond pattern running across the page on a soft pink backdrop. At this point, I still had not come up with a name that I felt suited the story accurately. The story is chronicling Mandy's adventure in finding a home. In the end when she finds her home she receives a golden heart collar. After spending hours grappling the different potential titles, Mandy's Heart was the winner. It was symbolic of the home her figurative heart found and of the literal golden heart she would be given at the end of the book. Following that theme, on the cover "Mandy's" is a shining gold, while "Heart" is a deep magenta. The title told the story without actually telling the entire story.

With the cover completed, and the characters created, the rest of the pages seemed to come together effortlessly. I designed a handful of different scenes that the story would take place in. The first scene was the bushes in which the kittens were born. The story is narrated by Mandy so many of the views needed to look like the reader is right there with her. The characters themselves are very detailed so that they would come alive on the page, and to add to that I made the backgrounds as simple as possible. When I constructed the house, which would stand behind the bushes, I kept the colors bright but the actual structure very simple. The best way for me to create the look I wanted was to produce it in Adobe Photoshop then transferring it into Illustrator. For the best results possible, I needed to make it a high-resolution object. This allowed me to scale the object either very large or very small without any pixilation. Like the characters, once one scene had been completed I could copy and paste that scene onto another page easily adding only very minor details or changes.

As I created the 34 pages, I used another great feature in Adobe Illustrator called a template. Instead of opening a new document in Illustrator with the default settings already in place, then having to manually change them, I used the template feature. This feature permitted me to create one document or template with all of my size specifications already saved. So when I went to create a new page, I created that page from the template that I had created, saving me time.



An example picture of the template option in Illustrator.

One of the most difficult objects to produce was the cage that would capture and house the kittens, for the majority of the story. It was extremely taxing making sure that the angle and dimensions looked as accurate as possible. There are several other little bits and pieces sprinkled throughout the narrative that took up an enormous amount of time. The cat carrier, for example, needed to look like an actual cat carrier. I took several pictures of the cat carrier I own, along with a few in a local pet store. I then traced the images and I used the carrier that looked the most dynamic on the page. I reused this same technique when designing the veterinarian's office and the various objects that would typically be found in it. I went to my local veterinarian's office and took several pictures of it then traced the different elements in Illustrator.



An example picture of the objects rendered in Adobe Illustrator.

There is one element in the story that I have placed that is strictly for me, the orchids. Although this entire book is my creation, I felt that it needed my signature.

Orchids are my favorite flower not only because of their striking beauty, but also due to their meaning; rare and delicate beauty.

A few of the human characters are based off the real people who helped me save these cats. The two main human characters were creations from several years ago, but they fit seamlessly in the theme and style of the artwork. The other characters, Betsy, Susan and the veterinarian, were all modeled after the real people. I gave the characters the same color eyes and hair along with similar style of clothing. Of course, I used their real names so that they could identify themselves in the story.

The printing process was the next hurdle. I have never printed something on this large of a scale and I really had no idea the first step in getting this thing printed. I researched for the best places to help me print and self publish. I called over a dozen online self-publishing services companies, but none of them could print a book the size I required. Even though children's books vary in size, these self-publishing companies only have a small number of set sizes that can print. After calling every self-publishing company I could find with no luck, I decided the best place to get this printed was locally and not through an Internet based operation. I researched how to get an ISBN number and how to go about getting the artwork and story copyrighted. I found a local printer who could print the book in the size that I had originally intended. Finding the printer and the other information is just one more step closer to the finish line, but it was not the end. I still had to set up my images for the printer, and I had no experience in doing such a thing. Again I researched. I researched the different printing methods and how a printer would layout the pages of a book.

While creating this book I not only learned more about the program I was using but also various new techniques that I had not known before but will be a great value to me in my career. I have gained knowledge of the printing industry and the self-publishing world that will be vital to me in the future. But mostly this

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Capstone Project
Project Statement

process has taught me that great things can be achieved through patience and endurance. It means so much to me that I can create a lasting legacy of what I have learned and the work I created while at the University of Houston-Clear Lake, and at the same time, assist a charity that helps homeless animals.