

# **Best Friends**

## **Built on Kindness**

**by Francis  
Battista,  
Best Friends  
Rescue  
Director**



The more I travel as an emissary of Best Friends, the more I am impressed by the commitment and the effects of thoughtful individuals on behalf of the animals.

Without the benefit of back-up organizations, and often without even a network of friends who understand what motivates them, they rescue, heal, rehabilitate and place huge numbers of animals every year.

They often tax themselves physically, emotionally and almost always financially, in order to do what they know to be the right thing: saving animals.

As if they didn't have enough to do already, independent rescuers often find themselves "pushing" the boundaries of local municipal codes and rather than being thanked and supported by official animal regulation departments, they are often hounded by these agencies. But, undeterred, they persevere—dependent on miracles, the good will of friends and strangers, and the protection of angels. Healthy, happy animals are, after all, the only reward or thanks that matter.

These heirs of St. Francis come in city and country versions and in all colors of the rainbow.

Best Friends is in touch with such individuals and small groups. I am personally acquainted with a number in the Los Angeles area and have had the privilege of passing along some of our bounty of donated food when available.

If you are interested in helping your neighbors help the animals with donations of money and food, please contact Best Friends for names of rescuers in your area.

I believe these are the building blocks of kindness that will one day transform the world. 🐾



# News from Best Friends

## Our very own (saint) Francis!

One day he's totally absorbed in nursing a little kitten who's just been brought in to the sanctuary and needs round-the-clock care. The next he's likely to be in Los Angeles rounding up antiques and other saleables for a Beverly Hills yard sale. You can turn on the TV and find him promoting a spay/neuter program, or go to a shopping mall and find him taking a turn at signing up new Best Friends members.

Francis is our man for all seasons, and special emissary to people everywhere on behalf of the animals. He and Silva drive out regularly from Angel Canyon, home of Best Friends, to southern California, where they run rescue and adoption programs, raise funds for the animals, and promote the cause of kindness and compassion at every turn.

Francis talked about a week which began with the huge fires in Malibu and ended with the Best Friends Celebrity Benefit. He says it somehow encapsulated the pain and the pleasure of working for the animals.

**From firestorm . . .** "The Laguna Beach, Thousand Oaks and Altadena fires were over. Action on the Best Friends Lost and Found Pet Hotline was winding down. I was driving back over one of the canyons when my heart sank. Another towering cloud of smoke.

"What would soon be known as the Malibu fire was already out of control and destroying hundreds of homes, and thousands of acres of wildlife habitat.

"Familiar names of Best Friends members and supporters whose homes are in Malibu were soon flashing across the TV screen – friends who had taken once-helpless dogs and cats into their homes.

"I heard so many heroic stories of regular folks who braved the quixotic flames to save any animal they could find. One woman was out in a field all night hosing down a group of horses as the fires passed by.

"And all week members and volunteers worked to bring people back together with their lost pets."

**. . . to Fiesta.** "The Best Friends Celebrity Benefit was coming up that weekend," says Francis, "and at



*Francis and Silva Battista.*

Photo: Harry Munro

one point we even wondered whether we should cancel it. But a lot of volunteers and sponsors had put a whole lot of work and energy into it, and animal lovers don't give in easily. Sure enough, at week's end hundreds of celebrities, supporters and animal groups from all over southern California crowded into the Chateau Marmont."

And what happens when four hundred animal lovers of every stripe and species gather in a famous Hollywood hotel to celebrate the cause of animals?

"A howling success!" he laughs.



*Francis with Natasha Kinsky (left), and Claudia Schiffer, at the Best Friends Benefit in Hollywood.*

Photo: Scott Downie



# Networks really work



*Francis Battista and rescued dog Bismarck.*

**By Francis Battista – Best Friends Outreach Director**

**More than a buzzword.** It's easy to lampoon that buzzword of the '80s, "networking." I used to dismiss the notion as a trendy excuse for "doing lunch" and not much else, but when it comes to helping animals, networking really works.

Networking is just a way of multiplying the effectiveness of individuals and groups, minimizing duplication of effort and creating a dynamic that is always bringing new elements into the network. For example:

**The cat and the Cataldis.** Two weeks after the Northridge earthquake, Diana and John Cataldi are on a walk around their Sherman Oaks neighborhood. In a third story window of one of the many condemned and red-tagged buildings, they see and hear a cat crying.

Neighbors say they've been hearing an animal in the building for some time, but nobody is allowed to go in. Diana calls the fire department, the police, and animal control – all to no avail. They're either not interested or claim it's not their jurisdiction.

Eventually she calls NBC news, which refers her to Best Friends because our Lost and Found Pet Hotline is on their short list of emergency numbers.

I take the call back at the sanctuary. We have volunteers, but I have reservations about prompting a volunteer to illegally enter a condemned building, especially while 5.0 aftershocks are still rattling the terrain.

**The network.** Next, Diana and I formulate a plan. She will return to the building and get the name and number of the Building and Safety inspector from the condemned notice, and I will see what I can do from the animal rescue end.

I call a friend and animal lover, Michael Bell. Michael, a great networker who knows everyone, pulls a few strings at animal control, Diana spends the morning on the phone and gets Building and Safety to see things our way, and they all

converge, along with Diana's husband John, on the condemned building.

With clearance from Building and Safety, John and an animal control officer do a third story balcony break-in and rescue a distressed kitty with a hurt paw from its hidey-hole.

Meanwhile, Michael Bell has the situation in hand on the ground, I'm arranging with a Best Friends member to pick up the vet bill, and in no time the handsome flame point Siamese is safe and well at the East Valley Shelter.

Later on in the evening the story is on the evening news, and several people call in to offer a home and a happy ending to a potentially awful story. 🐾



## Network Notes

**1. Develop a resource file** with names and addresses of organizations and individuals that help animals. Contact them, and keep a record of what each does and doesn't do. Pet supply stores and veterinary offices are good places to inquire about independent rescuers.

**2. Talk to friends** who you know are concerned about animals, and find out if they share your interest in setting up a network to help animals. (Be realistic about what each can do.)

**3. Include a variety of talents.** Networks depend on all elements contributing something to the solution of a problem. What can you offer? Temporary housing for a stray? Money for boarding or vet care? Setting and watching traps at regular intervals? Contacts with people who have resources?

Also, your own talent will need to be more than an uncanny ability to find stray animals! Strays are the problem that needs solving, so if you only produce problems for others to solve, you will start to notice that your calls are not being returned.

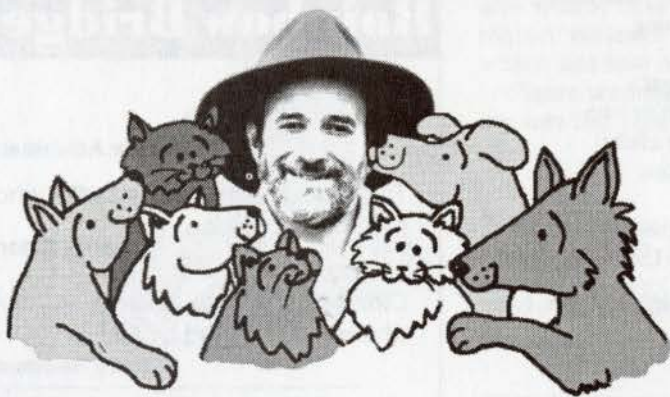
**4. Know your limits** and never take on more than you can handle. Animals will suffer, people will burn out, and the network will collapse.

**5. Follow-up is important.** If Mr. "A" finds a stray, and you arrange for Ms. "B" to provide a temporary home, it is in everyone's interest to help Ms. "B" find a permanent home for the animal. Don't walk away leaving your friend holding the bag, or she will sour on the program. Success depends on all elements remaining active and engaged until the safety of the stray animal is permanently secure.

**6. Show your appreciation.** While we are all in this for the animals, remember that everyone needs to be acknowledged and appreciated. Thank-you letters are best, but a phone call is better than nothing to let people know that what they do for the animals does not go unnoticed. 🐾



## Ambassador to the animals



### How Patience brought gratitude and love to the Beverly Hills Garage Sale

By Francis Battista, Best Friends rescue director

She came by the name Patience because of the good natured way she waited out the Best Friends Beverly Hills Benefit sale last June.

Cloistered in the cool confines of the garage while the sale and the heat raged outside, she greeted me and everyone who came to walk her or check on her food and water with the sweet eyes and gratitude of a soul who knows she has been rescued from starvation and death but who also has come to believe that nothing is guaranteed.

The volunteers dubbed her Patience, and while she was a very stubborn old girl, her new name seemed to say something about the way she had obviously weathered life's storms.

A few weeks earlier, she had been living on the Hollywood Freeway near a park in North Hollywood. Some people tossed food over the fence that parallels the highway, but for at least a week, no one took the initiative to get her out of danger until Michelle, a long time friend of the animals, located an access gate in the fence and took one sorry creature out of harm's way.

A reddish shepherd mix with a foxy face and pointy ears, Patience was a filthy, flea-infested, arthritic wreck. Her coat was thin to nonexistent on her rump because she'd been gnawing at parasites. Her front teeth, incisors included, were gone or worn to nubs from one or all of a combination of accident, injury, scrounging for food amongst rocks and gravel and chewing at fleas. The vet to whom Michelle brought her also said that she was partially deaf from chronic ear infections.

For all that, with a little cleanup and good food, she blossomed into a sweet creature with a beautiful face and wonderfully expressive eyes. God knows what her story might

be. All attempts to locate her home failed. She had obviously been loved and pampered at one time, because she had long since been spayed and once acclimated felt that her proper place was on the sofa or bed!

Had her loving owner died and not made provision for her? Was she an earthquake victim, living on handouts for five months? Had she just wandered off and become hopelessly lost?

Whatever her past, Patience's future is now assured. After six weeks in Best Friends care she was placed in a wonderful home in Malibu on the beach to live out her years with kind people and beautiful sunsets. 🐾

### Points for Pooches from Patience



Patience says here are a few general guidelines, so you can be sure whatever once happened to her won't happen to your favorite pooch:

- Make sure that your dog or cat wears an ID tag at all times. Fires, earthquakes, careless tradespeople, and general emergencies don't usually give advance notice.
- Wide-ranging neighborhood walks with your dog (on a lead, of course) are an excellent way to provide your pet with a mental map in case he or she should run off because of thunder, the Fourth of July, or a natural disaster.
- When adopting a pet, don't let age or excessive wear and tear put you off. Older animals make wonderful companions and seem to radiate gratitude.
- You can't always count on family and friends to provide for your best friends after you're gone. Be sure to discuss your concerns with your lawyer and make adequate provision in your will or trust. Patience might well have been turfed out by an impatient son or daughter-in-law. Such advice is not for the infirm or aging only.
- Keep a collar and lead and perhaps even a cat carrier and some treats in your car in case you come across a stray animal.
- The kind folks who adopted Patience have a great story to go along with an exceptional companion.



# The Los Angeles Quake

By Francis Battista – Best Friends Rescue Director

As I write, just a couple of weeks after the earthquake, my thoughts and prayers are for the safety of the people and animals within the radius of destruction of the 6.6 temblor.

Many of Best Friends' members and supporters and their pets were among those who had their homes or possessions trashed in those few moments of predawn violence. And we pray special prayers for those of you, our southern California friends, who have endured more than your share of troubles over the past few years.

My wife Silva and I were in Burbank, Ca, when the quake struck. The main corridor of the shock wave passed within a few blocks of us – close enough to be thrown around along with the furniture, but far enough away to escape collapsing buildings, ruptured gas and water lines, fires and chaos.

The event is still so vivid that it's tempting to tell "war stories," as it were, but you've already seen endless news clips of the disaster. Suffice it to say that as dramatic as the coverage was, it did not begin to document the scope of the damage or the traumatic effect on people and animals.

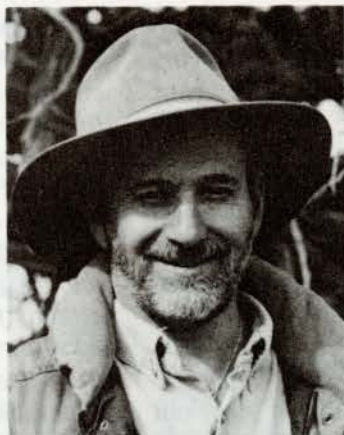
When fires struck the same area last October, we established a lost-and-found pet hot line to help return displaced animals to their families. Immediately following the quake we promoted the hot line heavily over TV and radio and were flooded with reports of lost animals. Thanks to the engagement of Best Friends staff, the participation of volunteers, and help from our good friends at Kal-Kan Pet Foods, we were able to give personal, one to one attention to the hundreds of people who called the hot line, while still maintaining the regular Los Angeles program.

In reviewing all the cases, I have noted an all too predictable common denominator: Most of the lost and found animals were not wearing I.D. tags.

Some callers gave preemptive explanations that their dog never left the confines of their yard so they didn't need tags. The vibrating, rolling earth toppled block walls like dominoes and startled dogs ran for miles.

Many cat owners protested that their cats were exclusively indoor cats and wouldn't tolerate a collar. They didn't expect an earthquake to knock the windows out of their house and send a frightened cat into hiding.

As I write this, many animals are still separated from their families, but happily, many are finding their way home, being claimed from shelters or being reunited with families through the Best Friends Hot Line. Prayers, prayers, prayers. 🐾



## How to prepare for the unexpected



1. **I.D. tags on all pets.** Make sure that all your animals – even indoor cats – wear I.D. tags at all times.
2. **Photos.** Have a good quality, representative photo of your pets at home and in the car or at work.
3. **Cat carriers.** Keep a sturdy plastic carrier for each of your cats. Do not rely on harnesses or leashes.
4. **Chain leashes.** Whether you take your dog for walks or not, keep a chain leash handy for each of your dogs, so if you need to tie them to a tree or post, they won't be able to chew free and bolt.
5. **Emergency supplies.** Keep emergency supplies of pet food on hand along with other family emergency supplies.
6. **Know where to get help.** Keep a list of the phone numbers and addresses of all shelters in your area as well as all night or emergency vet clinics. Keep a duplicate list in your car and at work.
7. **Know where to look.** If you lose a cat, especially a cat that is normally indoors, concentrate your search close to home. In my experience, most house cats placed in unfamiliar surroundings will hide as quickly as possible. Don't expect them to come to your call; look behind boxes in your neighbors garage, under piles of wood and in crawl spaces.
8. **Get the word out.** If your pet should become separated from you, check shelters, post reward notices with a photo, place a lost ad in area newspapers and check the found ads in the same papers.
9. **Don't give up.** If you don't seem to be having much luck finding a lost pet, don't give up. It may take days or weeks, or even longer, but the more you look, the more likely you are to be reunited, sooner or later. 🐾



# Best Friends Outreach



## L. A. outreach needs new office

The Los Angeles outreach, under the direction of staff members Francis and Silva Battista, is a model networking program, helping find homes for pets that people are unable to care for any longer.

A monthly listing of animals needing homes is prepared and monitored by Mardi Kleple, with help from Tom Symczyk and Carla Jetton, and is sent to over a hundred other volunteers who make further copies to post in places of work, veterinary offices, pet supply stores, etc.

People who respond to the notices are put in touch with the pet's owners, who are also provided with information on how to screen a potential new home for their dog or cat.

**Can you help?** The program in L.A. needs an office in the Sherman Oaks area, a good office computer, fax, copier and staff person. If you can help provide any of this, please call (818) 907-4992.



## **Best-ever Beverly Hills Garage Sale**

There were fine antiques and collectors' musical instruments, fashion designer clothes and hi-tech electronics.

Over forty volunteers helped collect, and then sell, all the luxury items that were laid out on June 25 and 26 at the home of Lawrence and Marcella Leigh in Beverly Hills. Thanks so much to you both for your caring hospitality, and to everyone who donated and bought items that will help provide for your furry friends at the sanctuary. 🐾



## Ambassador to the animals



# A HelpLine that's a Lifeline

By Mike Laskavy

*Francis and Silva Battista are putting together the Best Friends Hollywood Benefit. (See previous pages.) Proceeds will be helping Best Friends outreach programs. Francis' regular column will be back next month. Meanwhile, volunteer Mike Laskavy describes the work of the Los Angeles HelpLine, one of the outreach programs.*

**"I have to give my dog away."** Hard to say, hard to hear. It's typical of numerous situations handled by the Best Friends' Los Angeles HelpLine.

The HelpLine has become a critical resource for people needing to find a home for an animal. Its main purpose is always to empower callers to take the necessary steps themselves. "We're trying to encourage people to do more without making them feel we're simply dumping the problem back on them," says coordinator Carol Long.

A good telephone volunteer understands that when people feel they can't care for a pet any longer, they feel guilty and it's natural for them to want to off-load that guilt. So compassion is essential. But the volunteer also understands, and must communicate, that the key to overcoming that guilt is to do right by the animal.

Patience is a must. "I don't hang up until I feel the person knows the next step to take," says volunteer Marcy Snyder. "And if they need me, I'll take that step with them."

"You need to keep coming up with creative ideas," adds volunteer Trish Malin.

Carol points out that people are often very frustrated by the time she hears from them. "They've called 20 places already, and nobody could help them. They feel burned out, and need some reassurance."

**An up-to-date resource list** is the volunteer's first aid kit. Ours is compiled by one of the team and has complete information on shelters and their policies, low-cost spay/neuter clinics and services, legal resources (the volunteers don't offer legal advice), and lots more. For people who want to adopt, there's also a monthly adoption bulletin.

When an animal needs a new home, the basic procedure is to find out the animal's age, health, and character, and why he/she is being given up. This information can be used in a flier and in the adoption bulletin.

An information packet is available, including how to create a flier and how to screen ad respondents.

A calm, caring manner is crucial in a crisis. There are calls from overwhelmed people trying to run their own rescue shelter or take care of feral cat colonies. And there are heartbreaking situations like the abused woman whose husband was also hitting her dog. Wanting to check in to a battered women's shelter, she wouldn't leave the house until she'd first found a temporary home for the dog. With help from Trish, a social worker, and the humane society, she did. "Keeping her dog was her only ray of hope," says Trish. "She couldn't possibly throw everything away."

And even though the rule of thumb is not to get personally involved, Marcy says she simply has to throw away the rule book sometimes. "If I know the person doesn't care and isn't going to do anything, then I *have* to take over. I am the animal's only hope."

Marcy was manning the phone when a woman who was moving to Las Vegas called to say she had left her dog with the vet with instructions to destroy him. "If you want him, he'll be there till four," was the cold message.

"Thank God I picked up the message," says Marcy. "I drove to the clinic, got down on my knees, and this dog crawled out and collapsed on my lap. He had no life left in him, no spirit, he was so neglected. He'd been kept on a chain and didn't know what it was to be happy."

She took him home, smothered him with love, and four months later, found him a new home. Her efforts paid off. "I've never seen such a transition! He's incredible – he doesn't stop wagging and jumping and kissing and hugging – he can't get enough affection!" She still visits him.

**For people wanting to start a help line** in their own city, Marcy suggests calling established help lines and talking with the people running them. Get all the available resource books. You need to be emotionally prepared for the job, too. "There can be a lot of disappointment and you have to handle all situations in a fresh and hopeful way."

But there are big uplifting moments, too.

Trish: "The reward comes whenever someone says 'thank you' and tells you it worked out."

Marcy: "You're thrilled when someone calls and says they want to adopt an animal. You play it back: Did they say *Adopt*? It's very exciting."

Summing it up, Marcy says, "Always think of the animal first and foremost. You're the voice of the animal – and, hopefully, the savior." 🐾

“Keeping her dog was her only ray of hope. She couldn't possibly throw everything away.”