

Sammie

The Inspiration and Motivation to Change Life for the Animals in Nevada County, California

Sammie, was a 7 week old Shar-pei when I adopted him on May 19, 1991. In my 25 years of being an adult I had not had any kind of pet. I learned quickly, from reading books, that most of the experienced dog people believed that a Shar-pei was not the right dog for a first time dog owner. "Wow! I better get to work." I said to myself. It turned out that with the guidance of a good dog trainer and reading lots of books Sammie was the perfect dog for me. My lack of knowledge and his willfulness inspired me to go on a very steep learning curve to be the perfect dog mom for Sammie.

When Sammie died at 16 years old I knew that their could never have been a more perfect dog for me nor a more perfect dog Mom for Sammie.

Who is this dog that so inspired Cheryl and later Curt to start Sammie's Friends and an entire movement in Nevada County, CA that has changed everything for the animals in the community? The major change is that 68% of the animals use to be euthanized and now it is 1%.

Sammie is the inspiration for the effort that Cheryl and Curt have put in at the shelter. He came to live with Cheryl in 1991

and Curt joined up with them in 1994. Sammie loved his "Cuwtie." He asked many times "Mama wheow did we get him? Was he a stway?"

How would a shelter and a movement come to be named after a dog? If you knew Sammie the answer is clear. Let me introduce Sammie.



Cheryl and Sam when he was 3 months old

When Sammie was 7 months old he went to dog training. His trainer said "I have trained about 7,000 dogs and I've never met one as interesting as Sammie." Since I first arrived at the shelter on March 21, 2001 I have met at least 7,000 dogs and never met one as interesting as Sammie.

What made him so interesting? From the time I knew him at 7

weeks old he was self determined, had a mind of his own and pondered what actions he took and was excellent at observing people and providing what they needed.

One time a friend came over and asked if she could lie on the couch while we talked as her back problems had flared up and her back hurt. Sammie, a fairly aloof dog, and my friend who had no interest in dogs whatsoever then had quite an experience. Sammie, who never got on the couch, jumped up and laid down right next to where my friend's back hurt. She became a great Sammie fan and was awestruck by his knowing what she needed. Sammie did this kind of thing many times in his life.

We called Sammie "The Family Shar - apist" as he not only knew how to help with physical problems, he also understood the emotional life of others. Curt and I were sitting on the floor one evening facing each other having a somewhat disagreeable conversation. The room had tension in it. Sammie sat down and studied us, first Cuwtie then MaMa, then back to Cuwtie and then MaMa. He then walked over and sat next to Curt and mimicked Curt's body position; one leg tucked under

and the other out in front. This actually is a technique that therapists use to connect with their patients. Sammie had determined that at that moment his beloved Cwutie needed his support more than I did. Of course Curt and I both started laughing and that was the end of the dispute.

I went to the shelter inspired by Sammie on March 21, 2001. I felt that he had given us so much and we were so blessed to have been the family picked to be his and in turn we had given him a good life with lots of fun and interesting adventures. That boy went many places. One of his favorites was Casa Nova, a restaurant in Carmel. This restaurant had three lovely tables in front so we could eat in style with our dog. The owner particularly liked Sam and would bring him his very own steak, which I'm sure cost more than whatever Curt and I were eating.

If I had not had Sammie I would never have gone to the shelter to help the other animals and would not have started a volunteer program and Sammie's Friends and eventually run the shelter with Curt and Sammie's enduring energy. To this day he is our inspiration.

Sammie started every day with

his Romp-a-Rooni with Cwutie. This was a round of pushing and shoving and ramming and laughing. Sam thought it was the best fun in the world. Sammie finished every day with his MaMa rocking him to sleep for an hour at bedtime.



Sammie in a stately and introspective pose

Sammie was a party animal. You can see a collage of his life by going to <http://www.sammiesfriends.org/scrapbook.htm>

What was done to change life for the animals in Nevada County

I went to the shelter on March 21, 2001 with the intention of walking the dogs for two hours one day a week and going home and being done for the week, while the rest of my life continued as usual. I could quickly see that

the animals never got out of their kennels and within a short time they either got adopted or died. Nothing was spayed/neutered. There was one kennel attendant. No money was spent if an animal was sick/injured. It was simply euthanized. The county allotted \$50 per animal for vet care and

nothing could be done for that small amount and so no one bothered.

I could see that the reason animals die in shelters is three-fold:

- 1). there are more coming in than going out
- 2.) they are sick/injured and there are no resources available to help them.

3.) without spaying/neutering the number of animals that go to shelters keeps growing in leaps and bounds. Oh my gosh what a disaster!

I decided that maybe I could do more. Animal Control (AC) treated me like I was another empty headed, big hearted animal lover that would whine and complain and have no solutions. They called me a "humaniac" and didn't mean it as a compliment. AC reported to the Ag Commissioner who thought differently. I asked him if I could start a volunteer program. He said yes, and away I went. It took me about a year and even-

tually I had 100 volunteers. The dogs were getting walked twice a day and the cats got cleaned and attended to twice a day. I worked with various dog trainers to try to socialize the dogs a bit more. The euthanasia rate started going down down down. With all these people telling their friends to come and adopt things got better quickly.

Another volunteer began to put all the animals on Petfinder in 2002 and then they could be seen all over the world. We found homes for our dogs all over the place. We now have dogs in nearly every state from West Virginia to California. We also have dogs in Canada and Mexico. Petfinder was a huge asset. The cats didn't go as far but we do have cats in Oregon, Montana and all over California.

In 2002 AC hired a new kennel attendant who remains at the shelter to this day. She cared deeply about the animals and was always willing to work with us in whatever way she could to help save a life.

There were several pivotal moments that changed everything. The first one was in December of 2001. An old man brought 9 seven-month-old puppies to the shelter who had never been out of their litter and hadn't seen any humans but the crabby old guy who dumped them at the shelter with no concern for their future. At that time the euthanasia rate was still very high.

These dogs were brought in after riding in the back of his pick-up

in the rain and smelled like the characteristic wet dog that has never had a bath. As I stood there dumbfounded an AC employee said "Don't even worry about them, Cheryl. They're just shit dogs and they'll be euthanized." I thought quietly within my own head "You said that to the wrong woman" I shored up all my daring and went to the AC Officer, who really didn't have the time of day for me, and begged him to not kill them for two weeks.

I was new to this rescue business but thought "I can figure out a way." I knew no one who I thought could help. I decided to call the first person who came into my mind and ask for their advice whether they knew anything about or even liked dogs. By the sixth phone call I found someone who gave me all kinds of phone numbers and e-mail addresses. I followed up with every one of them and most of them didn't pan out but a few did. I also called the local paper and luckily got ahold of an animal lover who helped me by writing something for the paper. I managed to round up enough people to either adopt or foster before my two weeks was up. I also got every single one of them spayed/neutered before they were adopted out. Spaying/neutering was a novelty in those days. At that point I said to myself "That was hard but not that hard." I worked day and night for those two weeks even though it was Christmas and I had to keep sneaking off from my house guests to do this and to work after they went

to bed. After this incident I became more determined than ever that animals didn't have to die.

At this point myself and a friend started driving dogs and cats to the low cost spay/neuter clinic in Auburn and paying for them out of our own pockets. We would get reimbursed by the adopter. We weren't able to get them all to the clinic, but we were doing more than had ever been done before for the animals. We were making a dent. There were many iterations from this humble beginning; with the ultimate result being that all animals from this shelter have been getting spayed/neutered for many years now.

The next pivotal moment was in 2003. I went to the shelter one day and saw a 10 month old pitbull pup with a broken leg. I thought to myself "this dog has no chance in hell of being adopted with a broken leg" A pitbull with a broken leg is not marketable. The dog had been found in a ditch by an out-of-town person who was hiking along the NID ditch. Fred (the name I gave him) crawled out of the weeds and tried to follow as best he could with his broken leg. The kind lady put him in the car with her two dogs and brought him to the shelter.

About half the people who come to the shelter will not adopt a pitbull and then add a broken leg and an \$800 vet bill and his chances were zero. I thought to myself "That dog is not going to die." I paid the \$800 and got his leg fixed, then found him a

foster home. The foster Mom taught him some manners and introduced him to her household of cats and dogs. Eventually he healed and we found a couple in San Jose who wanted Fred. They came up to see him while he was still in a cast and ultimately came and adopted him forever.

The last I heard of Fred he was running on a beach in Carmel and swinging in his hammock. It was the best \$800 I ever spent!

After my partner, Curt and I spent \$30,000 of our own money on medical care for the shelter animals, we decided that we needed to become a 501(c)(3) so that we could raise funds and continue to help the animals. Curt said "I'm not a lawyer but I am an Engineer who pays meticulous attention to detail. I'll get a Nolo Press book and follow directions and I'll do the 501(c)(3)." And so he did. In April of 2004 Sammie's Friends became a 501(c)(3).

We began to get calls from the community asking for help for pets that had no one to care for them. We continued to pay for the medical care of the shelter animals and added community animals. We then added a dog and cat food program for two low income areas - North San Juan and the town of Washington. Once a month we go to North San Juan, the same day as the food bank truck goes for the humans, and

deliver cat and dog food to the hungry animals. This area is a sad state of affairs and the poor animals would suffer horribly if we did not help them. Last year we delivered 48,000 pounds of food to these two areas.

Sammie's Friends pays to have



Sam: "What can I help you with?"

all feral cats that can be trapped spayed or neutered. We use two low cost clinics to do the spaying/neutering and we pay for it. Last year we altered 500 feral cats.

Sammie's Friends also started a horse program nearly four years ago to help the many horses who so desperately need help in our community.

Our overall goal is to have every dog, cat and horse have a decent life with proper nutrition and

medical care and spayed/neutered. Our philosophy is to fill in the holes. We have done that many times and then often others get interested and fill some of the need; so we move on to the next hole until it is plugged or someone else becomes interested and on and on it goes.

In July 2010 we contracted with Nevada County to run the Animal Shelter. The animals now receive better care, the public likes the ambiance better and are more willing to come and adopt. We come up with many cool marketing campaigns (i.e "The Pitty Party" - a tail gate party and football game between the pits and local high school football players) to get our animals adopted. We work extra hard for the pitbulls. They are difficult to get into good homes, but we succeed somehow.

Sammie's Friends has helped more than 3,500 animals with medical care and helped them to a new and better life. The programs I started at the shelter back in 2001 have been instrumental in getting close to 15,000 animals adopted. 100s (perhaps 1,000s) of people have helped in this endeavor. I have provided leadership, vision and unending and unrelenting focus to accomplish all of this. There's a saying (I think from Abraham Lincoln) "Whether you think you can or you can't you're probably right." I always think we can.

Since taking over the management of the Nevada County Animal Shelter Curt and I have formed an excellent team of people to help with this endeavor. We have a team with great skills and we truly are a team. Everyone gets along and there is never an attitude of "that's not my job". Curt and I have the perfect combination of skills to make this work. Curt has strong accounting, information technology and building maintenance skills. Because of him we are able to write for grants and provide meticulous details of where we get our money and how we spend it. He set up our whole information system of computers, printers, phones, faxes and

keeps them going. Curt has a Master's Degree in Structural Engineering and had a 30 year career with SRI International (formerly Stanford Research Institute).

I provide the leadership skills and assembled the team. I am the front person in the community negotiating and working with the public and the veterinarians and the media and resolving any customer problems. I also know quite a bit about animal behavior and have marketing and public relations skills. I have a Master's degree in Counseling Psychology. After spending my life in Human Resources and as an Organization Development Consultant doing Executive Coaching,

Teambuilding\Meeting Facilitation and Mediation in high-tech companies (i.e. Hewlett-Packard, Apple, ROLM) I have the skills needed to do my part.

In order to run the shelter and make plans for the future we are always looking for sources of income. Currently we write for grants, receive donations and have events to gain the funds to do the work we do. We currently have a fund raising committee and are talking with an experienced person to build an endowment fund. The community has been tremendously supportive and we hope and pray our good fortune continues and we can continue to do what we do for the animals.



Sammy's Friends

Veterinary Care for Nevada County Shelter Animals
and other disadvantaged animals in our community

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