

Julian Journal

A Look at Henry's World

A Three-Legged Cat's View of Human Absurdity

By Bobbi Zane

"We are not cat people, we are dog people," Cathy Conheim kept protesting as Henry moved into the Pine Hills home she shares with Donna Brooks and a big black poodle named Dolly in the days after the Cedar fire in 2003.

That was before Conheim got to know Henry, a tiny homeless kitten that had survived the fire and moved in

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along with some human survivors. It wasn't long before Henry also moved into the hearts of Conheim and Brooks — and the protests turned to purrs.

The gray-striped tabby used

up one of his nine lives when an accident led to the amputation of one of his forelegs, turning him into what Conheim called a "tripod cat." Since the tiny animal could no longer be an outside cat, the women brought him into the house. In the year that followed, they discovered an array of life lessons through the eyes of a special feline, and a world of friends who corresponded with each other via e-mail.

A picture book, "Henry's World, a Three-Legged Cat's View of Human Absurdity," was the result. It began innocently enough, according to Conheim, when "we started to write about him and his adventures via e-mail to our friends." To her surprise, the friends — and their animals — started writing back and forwarding the notes to others.

"We saw the power of story-telling and the book started to have a life of its own," Conheim said. She and Brooks counted more than 3,000 e-mails in the correspondence. Many found their way into the book.

As the book evolved, "we could see the power of Henry as he speaks to people who have experienced a loss," Conheim said. By corresponding with Henry, she said, people could talk more vulnerably about their issues.

Some of the issues involved serious illnesses, such as cancer.

"Through animals, we learn that a cure is through reaching out," Conheim said.

The women have sold more than 1,000 copies of the book since it came out in October, even though it is sold only in Julian and on www.Henrysworld.org.

The book project could help

people in other ways, Conheim realized as she was putting it together. Profits generated "are going to animals," she said. She has asked the merchants and other who carry the book to donate the proceeds to the Julian veterinary clinic and feed store "for people who can't afford to take care of their pets."



A devoted "dog lover" Cathy Conheim and her cat Henry.

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