



Published Weekly in Julian, California

Volume 26 - Issue 43

Wednesday June 8, 2011 Julian, CA.

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## Henry Comes To The Elementary School To Inspire Creativity

by Catherine Conheim



*School assembly with Henry puppet and Cathy Conheim*

You all have read articles in this paper about Henry, the three legged cat who came to be adopted by week-enders Cathy Conheim and Donna Brooks. His journey has taken him far and wide but probably no place he has gone has been as exciting as his being able to extend his paw to the children of Julian Elementary, gifting them all two books and workbooks and an entrance ticket into the magic of Henry's World, where anything and everything is possible. Henry, two legged girlfriend Tink and Dollydog all came to school for their chance to be petted by 275 adoring hands.

The Julian Elementary School has been recognized nationally for its outstanding Program on building character. Henry, the three-legged cat, was a feral cat living in Julian when he was rescued. In the years since his leg was amputated and his story told, Henry's healing work has received numerous awards; his project The Just Me Project, has been used by schools, physicians and parents. Last week the Just Me team turned the Julian Elementary School into Henry's World. The fantastic teachers and superintendent could not have been more welcoming. The week

was intensely filled with artistic expression that culminated at the Open House on Thursday evening. Teachers and students agreed that the lessons they had learned had changed their world as well.

With the amazing creativity and endless hours of preparation of Sue Ann Foster, Ph.D. and Sharon Tiner from Sacramento, each of the eight classes from preschool to sixth grade created a unique art project. They made pieces of sculpture, collages, batik paintings and bracelets containing affirmations. As they undertook their projects, they learned what expression



of emotion means. They understood the power of storytelling as they related their own life stories. Henry's story has started a healing movement, helping the children displaced after Hurricane Katrina, the families of wounded veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, children struggling with chronic illness, and everyone who deals with a challenge.

The Special Education Students made a portrait of Dolly, the black poodle who felt invisible and lost when her owners adopted the three-legged cat. They made an incredible colorful rendition of Henry's



*Sue Ann Foster, Ph.D, Henry and an Inspired piece of art*

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girlfriend , Tink, complete with her wheels. Working together as a team helped each student recognize that everyone has something to contribute. Dolly's book teaches the vocabulary of emotions so that no child needs to feel that they can only express fear or anger. The animals were recieved like rock stars as they came to the campus. delighting both the students and teachers.

The teachers helped the children to celebrate what makes them special through their creativity, and students learned to listen carefully to each other's stories as they shared and celebrated together. Every lesson was grounded in one of the "Kibble for Thought" contained in the books about Henry and Dolly: What's the Matter with Henry? And "What About Me? I'm Here Too!". One important kibble is Hate is Learned while another is Mistakes are Learning Opportunities. The teachers from Julian were astonished by how much the children shared about their lives while creating "Life Lines"—artistic representations of the highs and lows they had already experienced. This project emphasized that it is not what

you experience that defines you, rather it is how you respond to that experience. It also showed every student and every teacher that all of us go through hard times as well as good times.

At the open house the community room and art room were decorated with hundreds of pieces of colorful art. Children proudly showed their family members what they had done, and were eager to explain to others the excitement of Henry's World. The next phase Henry has in mind will be to use the empathy built through art to reinforce the anti-bullying and character building curriculum at the school. Many parents said they had never seen their child so excited about a school project before, and teachers were astonished by the impact the week had on their classes.

Visit henry at [Henrysworld.org](http://Henrysworld.org) and see more of the children's art work which is now on exhibit in the Julian library through the end of June. Over 100 pieces are on display throughout the library. Prepare to have magic dust spread on you as you wander through the art that has emerged from the story of this three legged spirit cat.



*Dolly basking in the spotlight*