



## Edith von Stuemmer: Warrior for Animals



BY *Dana Meeker*

**T**he animal welfare world has lost one of its staunchest allies. Edith von Stuemmer, founder of the SPCA of Northern Virginia, passed away Sept. 19, 2018, at the age of 92.

Edith was born on April 7, 1926, in Los Angeles to German parents. When Edith was 13, she went to Germany with her mother for a vacation. Unfortunately, World War II broke out while they were there, keeping them in Germany longer than they had expected. Edith returned to the United States in 1956, but her mother stayed on a few more years. For many years, she worked for Lufthansa Airlines, eventually managing the D.C. ticket office.



**ABOVE:** Edith von Stuemmer cuddles with her SPCA-rescued dogs Schatzi and Minnie Pearl.

**TOP:** Edith (driving) and her mother go for a spin on her scooter.

The difficult war years and Edith's experiences working for an airline made her a strong woman with the ability to organize and deal with all sorts of situations and personalities.

Edith became involved in animal work in 1969 after she adopted a German shepherd from a local humane group. She shared her home with her mother and her dogs and cats. She loved to travel and bought a small motor home that she outfitted to be able to take her animals with her. When she traveled with her mother, her mother knew that if Edith saw an injured or abandoned animal, the trip would take a detour. Edith would deliver the animal to a local rescue or, as she did on more than one occasion,

bring them home.

Edith was close friends with Pearl Twyne, an animal activist known for exposing the inhumane training methods used on Tennessee Walkers and other gaited horses. Pearl had already helped establish the Animal Welfare League of Arlington (AWLA) in 1944 and the Virginia Federation of Humane Societies (VFHS) in 1959. Pearl was one of the first humane investigators licensed in Virginia. Since new humane investigators were required to spend a certain number of hours observing shelter work, accompanying a humane investigator on cases, and observing veterinarians, Pearl's experience at AWLA and with horses made her an extraordinary mentor to Edith, giving her the knowledge she would need to get licensed and begin working her own cases. Edith was initially licensed to work in Prince William and Fairfax Counties. In 1992, after having served on the board and as President of the Humane Society of Fairfax County, Edith founded the SPCA of Northern Virginia.

Edith recognized from the beginning that to be taken seriously, humane investigators had to comport themselves professionally, and they needed to know and understand all the laws, ordinances, and other regulations pertaining to animal care in Virginia and other nearby jurisdictions. She studied the Virginia Animal Law books published by VFHS and the Virginia Animal Control Association (VACA) and kept abreast of each legislative session's changes. Edith never showed up for a case unprepared.

### In Every Issue:

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## President's Letter

# Passing the Torch, Evolving Our Mission

BY *Dana Meeker*

It has been a difficult two years. Barbara Cohen, our dog chairperson, died in February 2017. Nancy Herndon, who wore so many hats to help our dogs get adopted, died later that year in September. This summer, our wonderful volunteer house checker and dog adoption counselor, Joan Hughes, retired. Joan was a charter member of SPCA NOVA, supporting Edith von Stuemmer as she created this organization after many years working with the Humane Society of Fairfax County. And in September, we lost Edith herself, our founder (read more about her in the cover story).

So many big shoes to fill! The first torch has been passed.

The animal rescue world has changed significantly since Edith founded the SPCA of Northern Virginia in 1992. There were only a few groups in the area rescuing animals then; now there are dozens. Local shelters were euthanizing animals at an alarming rate. There was no such thing as no-kill shelters. TNR (trap-neuter-return) was still new, and

animal transfers didn't really start until the mid-2000s. Now they are two keystones to becoming a no-kill nation.

Our current group of volunteers was fortunate to have the tutelage of such experienced animal welfare advocates to help us carry on their work. They taught us the ropes of animal rescue and animal welfare issues. We helped at adoption fairs in libraries, community centers, and pet stores. We accompanied the founders on trapping expeditions and humane investigations.

We, in turn, assisted in building the infrastructure. We helped the founders get a website up and running, got email for everyone, including Edith, who embraced it for its convenience. We started adoption fairs at PetSmart and Petco as soon as they came to the area. We

provided a system to track information with something besides paper.

We embraced technology, adding an electronic newsletter, online fundraising, and starting a Facebook page. And soon, we'll be launching a fully-updated, responsive website.

Just as my generation of volunteers helped our founders enter the digital age, we now need new, younger volunteers to keep us moving forward. There is so much they – perhaps you reading this – can teach us about innovative ways to rescue and communicate what we do using today's social media tools, like Facebook and Instagram. We need a new generation of ideas, enthusiasm, and expertise. We also need people to mentor into leadership roles the way our founders did for us, to make sure the torch continues to get passed. To them and to you I say, "Come join us and do great things for animals."

To learn what our current volunteer needs are, visit our website at [www.spcanova.org/help/volunteer.php](http://www.spcanova.org/help/volunteer.php) or email our volunteer coordinator at [volunteers@spcanova.org](mailto:volunteers@spcanova.org).



Volunteers pamper a dog at the annual Dog Wash in August. Volunteers are essential to the SPCA NOVA's mission of ending the abuse and homelessness of cats and dogs.

# Horrific Beginning, Bright Future

BY *Patti Price & Kathleen MacKinnon*

**C**hamp and Lucy are sibling kittens and best friends, bonded forever through their shared traumatic experience of having young boys (only about 11 or 12 years old) pelting them with rocks and wads of burning newspaper. At only six weeks of age, these innocent kittens were rescued just in the nick of time by Patti Price's daughter who stumbled onto this horrific scene.

Patti and her other daughter have both fostered and adopted cats from SPCA NOVA, so once these kittens were safe in Patti's care, she contacted SPCA NOVA for help. Patti offered to foster the kittens until they are adopted. In the meantime, SPCA NOVA is overseeing their foster care and road to adoption, including paying for vet care. While Champ and Lucy's journey hasn't been easy, they are now well on their way to recovery.

## Champ Truly Is a 'Champ'

It was only by chance that Patti's daughter happened to see the bullies tormenting Champ and his sister. Poor Champ could barely run to escape his tormentors. He had an injured hip; half of his back right

leg was already missing from an earlier trauma and bleeding at the stump; and his eyes were so infected they looked like blood blisters. As if throwing rocks and burning paper at these kittens weren't enough, the boys then picked them up and started moving toward a trash can.

Interrupted by Patti's daughter, the boys dropped the kittens and ran off. Patti's daughter managed to catch Champ and Lucy, who were both shaking with fear. And even though Champ was sick, scared, and in pain, he never hissed, growled, or scratched.

It has been an uphill climb, but through it all, Champ has been a trooper. To prevent further injury to his right hip and leg, Champ's leg was amputated. Even though recovery was slow after surgery when his incision became infected, Champ has now fully recovered from the hip injury and leg amputation. He is still getting

ongoing treatment for the herpes infection in his eyes, and is under the care of an ophthalmologist. However, you would never know what Champ has endured because he eats like a champ, plays like a champ and doesn't even know he's missing a leg!

This little guy has a heart of gold, and the sweetest disposition. Champ loves to be loved – being held and receiving sweet gentle pets are among his favorite things. He happily greets Patti with much enthusiasm for his morning, afternoon, and evening hugs. As he can't jump, he pulls himself up on the bed or

sofa. He can manage a few stairs at a time, and – perhaps with time – he will master them. Champ loves to play hide-and-seek under the bed and bat a soft catnip ball around. But his absolute favorite thing in the whole wide world is his sister and BFF, Lucy!

## Lucy Is a 'Doll!'

Lucy is a quiet little girl with a lot of spunk. She was tormented along with her brother, but fortunately did not sustain any lasting physical injuries. Lucy was so weak and frightened that she just collapsed in Patti's daughter's arms when rescued. She only



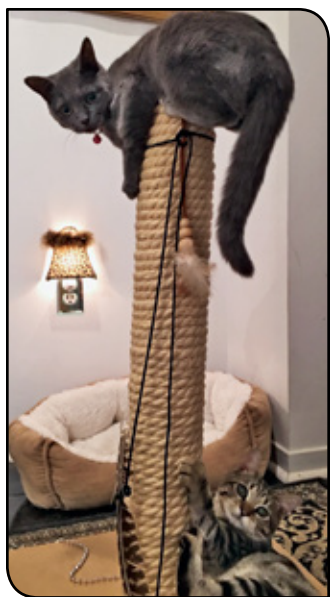
ABOVE: Dr. Kirchart examines Champ while Lucy stays close.

LEFT: Champ perks up at the vet's following his leg amputation.

TOP LEFT: Champ wrestles out of his E-collar.

wanted to be safe and cradled. No fight was left in her. Lucy never cried, not even once. Patti's daughter wasn't even sure Lucy was alive but for her fast beating heart. Much of her fur was missing on her back, and her eyes were swollen nearly shut, filled with infection.

Lucy has made a full recovery with only minor flare-ups to her eyes from herpes. The once lifeless kitten has turned into a beautiful butterfly. Her soft grey coat has fully grown back, and she is as beautiful as ever. Her cute round face and eyes sparkle. Her little body is full of energy. Lucy is a little acrobat and loves jumping as high as she can after a feather wand. She almost never meows. She is timid at first with strangers but quickly warms up to soft voices and encouragement.



Champ and Lucy, well on their way to recovery, find the energy to play.

### Lucy, Champ: Together Forever

Champ and Lucy clung to each other during a long recovery – giving each other unconditional love and comfort. They groomed each other, and Champ stayed very close to Lucy, as though he was her protector. He

would even lie on her backside, where her fur was missing, to keep her warm. Now they play like typical kittens and act like brother and sister, sometimes with a little roughhousing, but always kissing and making up.

They are getting used to meeting new faces

and often just need a few words of encouragement to warm right up. They are little charmers and steal the hearts of everyone who meets them. These two playful kittens will be best friends forever and absolutely need to be adopted together.

## Childhood Animal Abuse: Precursor to Violent Crime

BY *Katie McHenry*

In 2016, the FBI officially recognized animal abuse as a felony crime alongside burglary, arson, and homicide. This decision was influenced in part by a National Sheriffs' Association report that cited studies linking animal abuse to other types of violent crime – most famously, murders committed by serial killers, as well as school shootings, acts of domestic violence, and child abuse. A year later, the Senate unanimously passed the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture (PACT) Act with bipartisan support, showing that, even amid political polarization, both Republicans and Democrats agree that animal cruelty is a serious crime.

According to *Psychology Today*, nearly all violent criminals have a history of animal abuse. Does this mean that every child who has hurt an animal will grow up to be a serial killer? Probably not, but a combination of the child's age range and motive (such as peer pressure and desire to fit in with the rest of the group, post-traumatic re-enactment of their own abuse, or acting out fantasies of violence against humans) could tell their parents whether professional intervention is warranted.

Younger children, up until about kindergarten or first grade, might understand that cruelty to other

humans is wrong yet still see animals as toys on which to experiment. Take for example, a child pulling a dog's tail or trying to sit on a cat. In these cases, parents need to teach the child that being mean to the family pet is on par with being mean to other humans.

However, after first grade (unless the child is developmentally disabled), children understand that cruelty to animals is wrong. Champ and Lucy's abusers were age 11 or 12, which is a major red flag that professional intervention is needed, and that either the children involved were witnessing abuse at home or that they run the risk of growing up to hurt other people.

Sadly, these boys who were abusing Champ and Lucy weren't apprehended. Their rescuer was rightly focused on saving the kittens first. She may also not have known to whom to turn for help. It's best in these situations – once the abused animals are safe – to immediately contact the local animal control agency or the local police department that can help direct the call.

The best way to teach children to be kind to animals is by example. Including humane education in schools and extra-curricular activities is especially important. If a child has been taught that hurting animals is wrong but engages in abusive behavior anyway, it's time to seek professional help.



# Gifts in Remembrance

SPCA NOVA welcomes donations made in memory or honor of someone special in your life. Please include the name and address of the person you would like notified of your donation, along with the name of the person or pet being remembered or honored.

## In Memory of

- ♥ **"Abbey"**  
~ Lisa Hathaway
- ♥ **"Anna" & "Patty" Berry**  
~ Debbie Berry  
~ Kathleen MacKinnon
- ♥ **"Boots"**  
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~ Alissa Mickelson
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~ Vickie Canfield Peters
- ♥ **"Lily" & "Shamrock"**  
~ Nicholas Theodorson
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- ♥ **"Lucy" Morse**  
~ Harry Morse
- ♥ **"Mojo" Justice, sending love and support from your fellow Washington Post Slots**  
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- ♥ **"Moose," an SPCA NOVA rescue & our crazy man for a decade**  
~ Caitlin Zinsser
- ♥ **"Norman"**  
~ Diane Daly
- ♥ **"Princess," light of my life**  
~ Lene Jensen
- ♥ **"Ridge"**  
~ George & Diane Kalinsky
- ♥ **"Sophie"**  
~ Blare Harner
- ♥ **"Summer" Komendera**  
~ Kathleen & Martin Reifschneider
- ♥ **"Teddy," the Rossbach's beloved Golden Retriever**  
~ Domenick & Pearl Dipasquale
- ♥ **"Tux"**  
~ Elizabeth Ebel-Nuwayser
- ♥ **Attie Penders**  
~ John Morrison
- ♥ **Barbara Cohen**  
~ Virginia & Carl Ferdensi
- ♥ **Betty Weimer**  
~ Phillip Weimer
- ♥ **Brenda Hilliard, from the Alden Homestead Family - Happy Birthday, Brenda; love & miss you**  
~ Alan, Denise, Belle, RJ & all the Alden Homestead Hens
- ♥ **Corporal Bradley J. Schmitt**  
~ Michael Nassoioy
- ♥ **Edith von Stuemmer, SPCA NOVA Founder & Extraordinary Humane Investigator for 40 Years**  
~ Mollie McCurdy, my dear friend who was a devoted Humane Investigator  
~ Dana Meeker
- ♥ **Lance Corporal Giancarlo Y. Goyone**  
~ Michael Nassoioy
- ♥ **Lianne Deely**  
~ Betty Robinson
- ♥ **Marlene "Micky" Jester**  
~ Vantage Deluxe World Travel
- ♥ **Ricardo T Johnston**  
~ Anonymous
- ♥ **Rosemary Lucas & Barbara Lucas Clark**  
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- ♥ **"Bailey" & "Chloe"**  
~ Kelly Faulkner
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~ Barbara Newman
- ♥ **Alex McManuels' birthday from Isaac Cooke**  
~ Stephen Roy
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~ Elizabeth Bartky
- ♥ **Beverly Walworth-Rickman**  
~ Gwendolyn Boll
- ♥ **J T Bock's Birthday**  
~ Chris Prochaska
- ♥ **Joan Hughes, who helped us get the two best little dogs in the world**  
~ Toni Burger
- ♥ **Josephine, Jojo, Badger, Lady, Phoebe, Emma, Mia, & Daphne**  
~ Blare Harner
- ♥ **Karen Cockerham**  
~ Matthew Cockerham
- ♥ **Meghan & Chloe Puryear**  
~ Jack Bondurant
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~ Kristen Kinney



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**View details and full schedule at**  
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You can arrange to meet available cats and kittens by appointment in their foster homes or at select Pet Valu stores (locations and schedules vary).

**View details at [www.spcanova.org/adoption/catvisits.php](http://www.spcanova.org/adoption/catvisits.php)**

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**THANKS TO BURKE** Centre Pet Sitting for their gift certificate donation for our Dog Wash.

**WE ARE GRATEFUL** to ScienceLogic for organizing an office pet food and donation drive during the month of November for our rescued animals.

**MUCH APPRECIATION TO** Dulin United Methodist Church of Falls Church for donating the offering from their 2018 Blessing of the Animals in September to the SPCA of Northern Virginia, providing a blessing for our rescued animals.

## Edith *from page 1*

She looked forward to the continuing education coursework required to remain licensed, although in later years she had a hard time finding courses about topics she didn't already know!

For most cases, humane investigators went out with another humane investigator or another trusted individual. This was as much for their own safety as to have a witness to what transpired when an owner was confronted. An owner's initial reaction was often anger or aggression when Edith knocked on the door, flashed her license, and told them that she was there to investigate a complaint about their animal's treatment. Edith stood her ground but tried to keep tempers from rising. She calmly discussed the complaint, discussed the laws that had been violated, and offered the

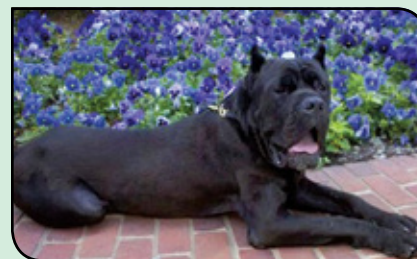
owner solutions. She educated the owner about what constitutes humane treatment and told them what needed to change. She gave the owner a deadline to comply. Edith always followed up, and if the owner had failed to institute the required improvements, she made it clear that she meant business.

Her response depended on the situation. Frequently, animals were living in benign neglect where the owner had taken in a dog, didn't realize how much time, space, money, or whatever was necessary to properly care for it. Maybe they didn't get the dog spayed, and now there were puppies too. The owner might feel embarrassed to give up the dog, so instead just let things get worse. In such cases, Edith firmly let the owner know that it was not acceptable, fair, legal,

## Animal Warrior in Action

**T**here are dozens of stories to tell about Edith von Stuemmer's work rescuing animals. Here's one that exemplifies how she always went above and beyond to care for animals.

In January 2010, Edith and another volunteer were visiting a home to investigate a complaint about two pit bulls being kept outside. Those dogs were inside the home that day and looked well. However, while inspecting the rest of the property, Edith heard frantic barking coming from a pen in the back yard. She found a huge but emaciated black dog tethered to a heavy iron chain. His food and water bowls were empty. When freed from the chain and given water, he drank steadily for several minutes and then gobbled down food Edith gave him. The owner failed to take the dog, a cane corso named Carter, to a vet within 24 hours as Edith requested. Therefore, she returned to the property the next day and took custody of Carter after threatening legal action. The vet who examined him



**Carter, renamed Kona by his new family, shows off how gorgeous he is now – thanks to Edith's intervention.**

said he was 50 pounds underweight due to starvation. Carter was later adopted, and his new family renamed him Kona.

**YES!**

**I want to help rescue animals in Northern Virginia.**

Your tax-deductible donation to SPCA of Northern Virginia makes it possible for us to rescue animals in need, provide them with shelter and nutritious food, medical care, training, and nurturing care, all in preparation for adoptions into homes of their own. Thank you for being a force for animal welfare with your generosity!



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If your company participates with the United Way or the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC), designate donation to "Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals of Northern Virginia."



If your company participates with the America's Charities Campaign, you can donate to the SPCA of Northern Virginia, #19137.

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or humane to continue to treat their animals this way and gave them an out. The animals could be signed over to the SPCA or else legal proceedings would follow. For Edith, a case was never closed after just one visit. If conditions deteriorated again and she found out about it, she was back knocking on the door in a New York minute.

It was in cases where Edith felt that an owner was just plain mean and had no interest in improving their animal's situation that Edith really shone. She burned with fury over how someone could beat an animal or willfully starve it or allow it to live unpro-

tected in the cold, heat, or snow. She would not let it stand. She contacted local animal control, the police if necessary, the state veterinarian's office, and magistrates. With the help of her witnesses, she documented everything – pictures, times, dates, ambient temperatures, interactions with the owner – all of which became part of her case file. She thoroughly prepared the evidence that would be needed if a case went to trial. So much depended on the judge assigned to a case that she didn't always win, but it was never due to sloppy work on her part.

In later years, Edith

handled what cases she could over the phone and referred the rest to Animal Control. She continued to help people from all over the state when they called about animal abuse, coaching them through what they needed to do, whom they should contact, and what to expect. She maintained her humane investigator's license until 2016, stepping down at the age of 90 only due to ill health. When told that Edith was no longer a humane investigator, one volunteer lamented "She made me feel safe!"

In the more than 40 years Edith was a humane investigator, she rescued

hundreds of cats, dogs, rabbits, even ducks and guinea fowl. She provided education to the owners of multitudes of animals to improve their lives and ease their suffering. She trained many new animal welfare advocates and volunteers and passed along the benefits of her vast experience to the next generation. She was awarded the VFHS Bravo Award in 2012 for her lifetime of work advocating for animals. This is her legacy, and she will be deeply missed.

A memorial service for Edith is planned for Jan. 10, 2019, at 6:00 p.m., at Murphy's Funeral Home in Arlington, Va.





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## Remembering Our Founder

Our tribute to animal  
warrior Edith von Stuemmer

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## Passing the Torch

We call on a new generation  
of volunteers to carry on  
our mission

page 2



## Overcoming Abuse

A good Samaritan rescues  
this kitten and his sibling

page 3