



Georgia

A Gathering of Angels

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Guardian Angels and parents of former Guardian Angel animals gather at Best Friends

by Barbara J. Koll, Best Friends Network Volunteer

The weekend of November 7-9 was an exciting time at the Sanctuary as a group of [Guardian Angel](#) supporters and “graduates” of the GA Program and their families gathered to share their love of animals. For many of us, it was a first-time “face to face” meeting with each other even though we felt that we knew one another through the stories and postings on the Network and frequent email communications. My husband and I scheduled our annual trip to Best Friends this year to coincide with this special event.

The weekend was coordinated by Christina Zimmer, mom of the infamous Buck Rogers. Buck was accompanied at the event by his brother Noah – both of whom were in seclusion in the bedroom during the Saturday night festivities at The Cottages. Christina hopes that this will become an annual gathering at the Sanctuary and will become even bigger and better next year.

The weekend began with dinner on Friday evening at The Rockin’ V in Kanab. Approximately 35 people, including a number of Best Friends staff, attended the dinner. [Shelley Thayer](#) was there passing out lapel buttons “advertising” the [“Give the Gift and Pass It On”](#) fundraising campaign for Best Friends’ 25th Anniversary Celebration next year. The goal of the campaign is to double the membership in 2009.

On Saturday morning, we were treated to a personalized and expanded (3+ hours) tour of the Sanctuary led by Tour Guide Jill Simpson, which included meeting several of the former and current members of the GA Program – [Hobo Mississippi](#), [Lake](#), [Luna](#), [Aramis](#) and [Dilly](#).

On Saturday afternoon attendees volunteered at various locations throughout the Sanctuary and at the

Best Friends animal wellness event in Kanab. Saturday evening we gathered at The Cottages for a “block party” where we got to meet all of the former GA Program members who made the trip to Kanab – [Wiggles](#), [Xena](#), [Kunzite](#), [Tuffy](#), [Mrs. Cotton](#) and [Buck Rogers](#). Several attendees, including Mike and Shelli Bzdewka, cat caregivers at Best Friends and foster parents to [Roo](#), one of the first animals in the GA Program in 2005, shared their scrapbooks of the miracle journeys of GA babies – from incredibly desperate situations to Best Friends to their forever homes.

The weekend ended with a special brunch at Angel Village. [Tuggs’ \(formerly known as Genghis\)](#) mom, Cathy, spoke to the group of the joy of caring for a GA pet. She said that Tuggs taught her that love, stability, repetition, patience and time are the most important qualities required to deal with shy kids. She said you can never show your frustration and you must let them set their boundaries. Cathy passed on several important concepts to the attendees at this special weekend. Don’t quit posting on the GA Community. Cathy reads the postings about Tuggs to him and they contain much positive energy that assists him with his continued progress. On another note, she stressed the importance of walking and working with the [Lodge Dogs](#) when visiting Best Friends.

The Lodges are 15 buildings in [Dogtown](#) behind the clinic which house approximately 85 dogs and include beautiful trails for walking the dogs. Tuggs also wanted to make sure we all knew that his brother, [Atilla](#), flew to his forever home in Tennessee on October 21.

Laura Bradshaw, Director of [Healing Heart Sanctuary](#) in Kanab, joined us for brunch. Laura took [Precious](#) into her program after Precious was transported to Best Friends from a Mississippi shelter where she had been abandoned after Hurricane Katrina. Laura’s program is dedicated to “healing disabled animals while fostering relationships between animals and people” and was instrumental in Precious’ recovery. Laura eventually adopted Precious as her own.

The Gathering of Angels weekend provided a great opportunity for a group of people with a shared love for special needs and particularly those in the GA Program to get to know one another better and to share our experiences. Everyone left on Sunday (reluctantly) with a feeling of enrichment and growth and a hope that we will get together again next year.

How you can help:

- [Click here](#) to become a Guardian Angel and support the work of Best Friends as they improve the lives of special needs animals.
- Read the updates on the animals in the program on the [Guardian Angel page](#) and post comments.
- Read more about the program on the [Guardian Angel Community](#) on the Best Friends Network.

Photo courtesy of Christina Zimmer.

Comments

Tuesday, December 16, 2008 at 06:21 pm

posted by: [missydog](#)

I hope I can be at the next gathering. It sounds like a great time to meet fellow Guardian Angels and to meet some of the animals that have stolen our hearts.

Tuesday, December 16, 2008 at 05:11 pm

posted by: [czimmer671](#)

Babrara, great story!! Thank you for posting it!!

I will follow up with dates for next year's gathering soon!

Tuesday, December 16, 2008 at 04:25 pm

posted by: [skya](#)

So very sorry I couldn't attend due to \$\$\$ but so happy that a grand time was had by all!!!! >^..^<

Tuesday, December 16, 2008 at 04:13 pm

posted by: [judylew](#)

It was a fantastic weekend! I loved meeting everyone, especially the GA animals (both former and current). I hope more people can participate next time.