



dog's life[®]

SUMMER 2008

Be Your Dog's Best Friend

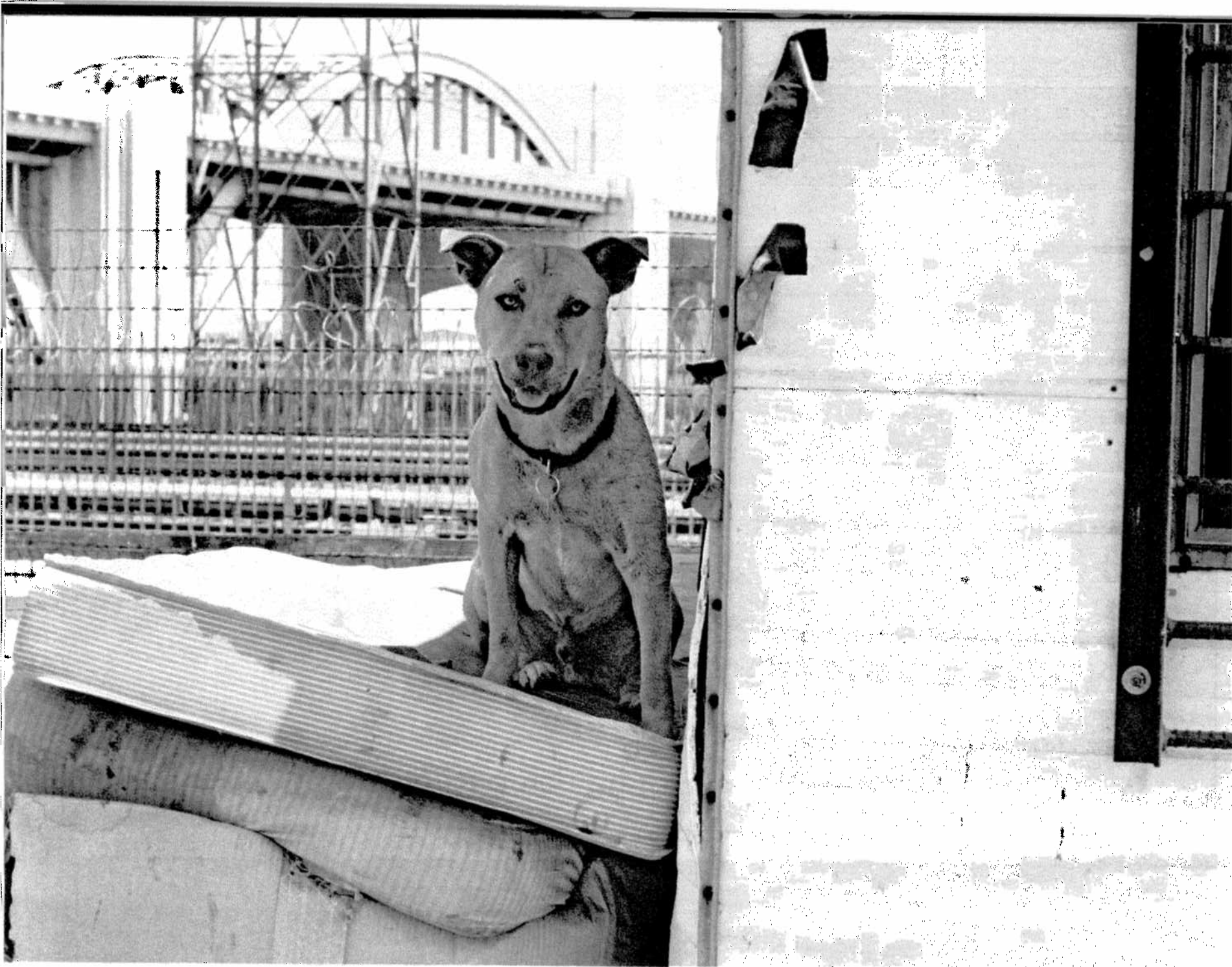
**Dogs
of War**
And The
Soldiers
Who Love
Them

CELEBS SPEAK
At the Genesis
Awards About
the Power
of Dogs

TRAVEL TIPS
Vacationing
With Your
Dog This
Summer

+
32

**DOG PARKS,
BEACHES,
& TRAILS**



Dogs of Downtown

A rescue organization braves downtown Los Angeles armed with care and compassion for dogs of the homeless.
By Eve Wood | Photos by Douglas Hill

The relationship between humans and dogs is a special, and in many cases, a sacred bond that is undeniable. While it is preferable, of course, to have the money to care for an animal's needs, one dog rescue recognizes that the bond of love transcends the pocket book.

The Downtown Dog Rescue, a program within the nonprofit organization Friends for Animals, was originally founded in 1996 by Lori Weise and Richard Tuttlemondo, who both work at Modernica Furniture in downtown Los Angeles. They wanted a way to help the sick and stray dogs they found wandering the downtown neighborhoods without food or water. This led them to further investigate the plight of animals in the homeless community.

What they found was an overwhelming amount of homeless camps in the downtown L.A. area, which had at least one dog roaming per camp, and in most cases, many more. Many of these animals were on the verge of starvation, flea infested, covered in mange and scabs, and suffering from other severe forms of neglect, including eye infections and advanced tooth decay.

Weise and Tuttlemondo realized early on that the way to help the dogs was through their owners, whom usually loved their canine companions but were financially unable to care for them properly. The partners began the program with the help of a homeless man they met named Benny Josephs, who lived off an alley in downtown L.A. They used to see Benny with his dog, named Iron Head, in the neighborhood and Weise asked him to help her gain the trust of other men and women living on the streets with sick and frightened dogs. Once that trust was gained Weise would offer assistance to have the dog spayed/neutered, vaccinated, licensed as well as offering a variety of services including crisis care, for the life of the dog.

But perhaps even more importantly, Downtown Dog Rescue represents for many homeless people and their beloved pets an oasis from the harsh and often brutal realities of living on the streets of L.A. Weise explains that when she goes into depressed areas of South Central L.A., she must tell the residents, "There are no resources. There are no easy answers, and no strings attached. We can only help your dog." And for many of these people, their dogs are all they have to keep them going.

Downtown Dog Rescue also works with a number of dedicated individuals who offer much-needed resources, including workers from spay and neuter clinics, veterinarians, and the Modernica facility, who donates space for the temporary and permanent housing of dogs who come in to the program. "Without Modernica, it would be virtually impossible for us to do this kind of work... and for this, we are so grateful," says Weise.

Brandon Fouche, who owns the company Canine Communications, is another person who donates his time and expertise to help these dogs. Fouche is a first-rate trainer who specializes in pit bull and large breed aggression, working primarily with high-risk dogs from shelters. Fouche works closely with Weise and Tuttlemondo, training and rehabilitating the dogs that come into the Downtown Dogs program. Fouche's approach, much like that of Weise and Tuttlemondo, involves a fierce commitment to the welfare of the animals he rescues.

Together, Fouche and Downtown Dog Rescue have created an offshoot organization called Death Row Dogs, specifically dedicated to saving the lives of dogs being held in pounds as "evi-



Benny Josephs helped Weise and Tuttlemondo reach out to other homeless people and their dogs.

vidence" in complicated criminal cases. These dogs can sometimes remain at the shelters for years in confined spaces with little to no exercise, awaiting the court's decision in cases that often involve dog fighting rings and drug abuse. These dogs are seized and placed in shelters until a court determination is made regarding whether the animals are to be euthanized or put up for adoption. Most of the dogs in this situation are considered "un-adoptable" and are often put down.

While the court systems offer little hope for these animals, Death Row Dogs gives the dogs a second chance to live. Most of the dogs in the program are currently being housed with Brandon Fouche at his facility in downtown L.A. where they receive intensive daily training with the hope that they will be rehabilitated and incorporated into loving homes one day. Tuttlemondo, Weise and Fouche are determined to see each case through to the end.

Grief runs hand-in-hand with success in many of the cases the organizations handle. Take Petey, for example, who is now one of Weise's best dogs. Petey was owned by a homeless man who was also a Vietnam veteran and small-time drug dealer who had been convicted on dog-fighting charges. Weise found out about Petey when animal control called and said that he was going to be put down because he was highly aggressive and would attack people and other animals. The former owner had trained the dog to do what's called "bitework," which means the dog would jump up onto a person's back and attack on command. Weise and Fouche spent hours working

with the Petey, who is now rehabilitated and socialized within the pack of dogs owned by Weise and kept at Modernica—even though his prognosis looked grim in the beginning.

Weise continues to make weekly rounds throughout downtown L.A., educating and supporting people to make a difference in the lives of these unfortunate dogs, but it isn't always easy. She admits that the organization's work can be dangerous, having been threatened with knives and even firearms in her ten years in the business. Yet through it all, she has maintained an unwavering commitment to assist the dogs and educate their owners.

The Downtown Dog Rescue program is truly unique in that it adheres to the premise that everyone, regardless of financial status, should be allowed the opportunity to love and be loved by a dog. Says Weise, "Those of us who love animals just love animals. Once that bond is there, the feeling is as strong in everyone, regardless of income. A person's financial means is not a reflection of their willingness or desire to help animals."

Dogs mend hearts, heal lives and ask nothing of us in return; the people involved with Downtown Dog Rescue are simply returning the favor. 🐾

Eve Wood is an artist/writer who has written for Angelino and NY Arts magazines. Visit her website, www.evewood.net.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO DONATE:
 » www.downtowndogrescue.org, 818-407-4145
 » www.friendsforanimals.org
 » www.brandanfouche.com