

AMIGOS DE LOS ANIMALES

de Guanajuato, A.C.

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Documenting Dogs' Lives on Guanajuato's Streets

Traer Scott, a fine-art photographer and author from Providence, Rhode Island, recently visited Guanajuato to work on a new book project. She is the author of *Shelter Dogs*, a collection of black and white full-page portraits of abandoned and lost dogs in New England shelters awaiting adoption. The photographs portray with great sensitivity the individuality and dignity of the dogs, some of which eventually found homes while others, less fortunate, were destroyed.

Traer came to Guanajuato on an assignment from her New York publisher (Merrell) to photograph street dogs for a forthcoming book on homeless dogs in Mexico and Puerto Rico. She chose Guanajuato and contacted Amigos de los Animales after discovering our website. Amigos members offered her a place to stay during her visit and agreed to show her areas of the city where she was likely to see street dogs. Amigos also put her in touch with the two animal rescue groups in San Miguel de Allende, where she spent several days photographing dogs in that city.

She took photographs of dogs in the city's center, in the suburb of Marfil, and in villages near the city. Among her subjects was a mother of nine six-week-old puppies in San Javier, who was foraging for food at the shopping plaza when Traer first spotted her. She followed Mama Dog to her den on a nearby hillside and photographed her nursing the demanding brood. Amigos volunteers have since taken Mama Dog and her puppies to local veterinarians to be neutered and the puppies adopted, and Mama Dog has returned to her informal home at an outdoor business establishment.

Traer found the street dogs in Guanajuato to be generally healthier and better treated than those in Puerto Rico, where she had observed many abused and even mutilated dogs. She was shocked, however, to see some emaciated Guanajuato dogs living on roofs from which they could not escape to seek food or enjoy the companionship of other dogs or humans.

Two subjects she photographed were particularly painful to her. One was a young male dog whose nervous system had been permanently damaged by accidental or deliberate poisoning; he was palsied and walked with difficulty. The other was a five-month-old starving puppy with mange that she followed in Marfil, trying to coax with bits of cheese. The puppy, which had a frayed rope around its neck, was too frightened to allow her to approach and ran away from the food. She feared that it would eventually be strangled by the rope if it did not die first of hunger.



Traer photographs a street dog having a siesta

“Guanajuato is a beautiful city, which has provided an invaluable piece of the Mexico puzzle for my new book,” Traer told us. “Although conditions for companion animals seem to vary enormously across Mexico, it is clear that small groups of dedicated volunteers like Amigos are making a huge difference both for the current generation of animals and those to follow.”

After returning to her home in Rhode Island, Traer began the work of reviewing her hundreds of photographs, selecting the best ones for her new book, and writing the text. The book, to be titled *Street Dogs*, is due to be published in September.

A Reprieve for Blind Blanca

By Sandra Ward

A couple of months ago I was driving home when I saw a skeletal part-Samoyed foraging for food along the road near my house. I returned a few minutes later with food and water for her. She seemed disoriented, and then I realized why: she was blind. As she scarfed up the food, I spoke to her and gently stroked her back. I also noticed blood under her tail. I returned to the area later to give her more food and discovered that she lived near a place where stonecutters did their work. She soon recognized my voice and came to me whenever I arrived with food and water, adroitly negotiating the mounds of stone, rusted vehicles, and other debris despite her blindness.

After feeding her for a couple of weeks, I realized I had to address the problem of her long-term care. She seemed to have a uterine infection, and she was not getting any attention at the stonecutters’. With a sense of dread, I arranged with Kris Anderson, a visiting veterinary student from the States, to take Blanca, as I now called her, to the veterinarians I use for my own dogs. They are active in the Amigos spay/neuter and rescue program. I knew in advance that they would probably recommend euthanizing Blanca because of her blindness. It is difficult to find homes for adult dogs, and especially for handicapped dogs, in Mexico.

As I had feared, they urged euthanasia. They noted that she was an older dog and confirmed that she had a serious infection. The main reason, though, was her blindness. They doubted that anyone here would want to adopt her. I begged for a little time to send out an SOS, and when I returned home I began e-mailing my animal contacts in Guanajuato.

That evening I got a call from one of the vets. “She’s been adopted,” he told me. I couldn’t believe it and thought I had misunderstood. “No,” he assured me, “I’ve just operated on her and treated her for peritonitis. She would have died shortly if not treated. A family in Santana is adopting her.” Santana is a village near the city. The vet asked me to pick up Blanca the next morning and deliver her to her new family. The two boys from the family who had seen her at the vets’ would meet me there. I was concerned that parents of the boys might not want the dog, but my vets assured me the parents had given their permission.

When I entered the vets' clinic the next morning I saw the two teenage boys petting Blanca before they noticed me, and they seemed gentle and caring. Blanca was still very weak from her surgery. The vets gave the boys antibiotics and instructions for treating her over the next couple of weeks. They emphasized that the family should call them, day or night, if there were any reason for concern about Blanca's condition. I bought some good kibble for them to feed her for the first week or so.

On the way to Santana, I learned a little more about the boys and their family. Victor, the 18-year-year-old, told me he plans to attend the university. When I asked him what his favorite subject was, he surprised me by saying it was philosophy. There are three boys in the family, which recently moved to Santana from Mexico City. The parents, who were born in the village, had decided to return there because it was a better living environment.

When we arrived in Santa Ana, I saw that it was going to be difficult to take Blanca to their house, which was inaccessible by car and at the top of a steep hill. She was too weak to climb the hill, and she was unfamiliar with her surroundings. Fortunately, I had bought her a heavy blanket, and we used it as a stretcher to carry her up to the house. The parents were out when we arrived, but the boys promised me they would bring her indoors and keep her comfortable during her convalescence.



Blanca with two of her new family members

A few days later I returned with Kris to check on Blanca's progress. She was transformed—playful and lively. When she heard my voice she immediately came over to greet me. Kris examined her and noticed that she seemed to have a venereal tumor. A week later, when I took Blanca back to the vets to have her stitches removed, they confirmed Kris's diagnosis and prescribed medication over a six-week course. Hans Weisshaar and Susi Seidel, two physician friends who live near Santana, have been treating the tumor, and Blanca is well on her way to being a healthy as well as a beautiful and happy dog.

Amigos, Love, and Pizza!

In February we celebrated our fifth anniversary and Valentine's Day—known also as the Day of Friendship in Mexico—with an outdoor party attended by some hundred people. Organized with the object of raising funds to continue our work, the event took place at the beautiful home of Dan Sholl and Lori Wilson, who several years ago restored the crumbling walls of an 18th-century silver mine in the tiny hamlet of El Tajo de Adjuntas several miles from Guanajuato. It was a perfect day for a picnic. The guests enjoyed lots of delicious food, including homemade pizzas baked in an earthenware oven; plenty of liquid refreshments; live music performed by three members of the city's symphony orchestra; a raffle offering numerous prizes; and an art and plant sale. A few intrepid guests even had a dip in the chilly mountain stream that flows next to the Sholl-Wilson home.



Preparing their pizzas

Because most of the food and beverages were donated, the party raised 22,300 pesos (US \$2,000). The board of directors is grateful to the musicians Jason and Michelle Pettit and John Swadley and to the following donors for their generous raffle prizes: the Casa de Espíritus Alegres Bed & Breakfast; the restaurants Casa Váladez, De Los Santos, and La Pirinola; the Spa Azul; author Traer Scott, Dr. Susana Cofer Jones, Chef Ronaldo Mann, and hot-air balloonists Sam and Jean Edwards. The board also expresses its appreciation to Cervezería SOL for its donation of beer and to the restaurants Bar Ocho, Café Zilch, Casa Luz, Chao Bella, El Midi, Grupo Cabaña, and Quinta Las Acacias, as well as to various individuals, for their contributions food and drinks. And of course we are grateful to all those who attended the event or purchased raffle tickets.

The annual event also included, for the first time, the presentation of an award in memory of late California artist Joan Summers Ward, a part-time resident of Marfil whose efforts on behalf of Guanajuato's street dogs inspired the establishment of Amigos. The board of directors created the award to honor a person in the community who has made an exceptional contribution to our work. This year the board decided that two individuals merited the honor.

The first was Señora María Luz Rodríguez of the village of Santa Teresa, who began volunteering at our spay/neuter campaigns a couple of years ago. She has arranged to bring the animals of her neighbors who could not bring them themselves. She has worked in the recovery unit helping the technicians attend the animals after surgery, helping them administer post-operative medications and keep the animals calm and under control when they awake. And she has done all this without being asked. Her participation in our campaigns has been of great service, and she has also worked in her community, encouraging her neighbors to treat their animals humanely.

The second person to be honored was a 12-year-old resident of Tajo de Adjuntas, Juanita Saucedo Ortega, who has participated in our spay/neuter campaigns since 2004. Working with vet technician Lori Wilson in the recovery unit, she has helped administer post-operative care to the animals, checking to be sure they were breathing normally, swabbing their wounds with antiseptic solution, replacing soiled blankets, and informing the technicians of any problem she observed. Her work has included preparing packets containing medicines and instructions for the animals' owners to take home. She remains calm and methodical even during the occasional minor crisis.

For these reasons, we are extremely grateful to María Luz Rodríguez and Juanita for their exceptional devotion to the work of Amigos, and we are proud to have them as members of our team of volunteers.

Our Accomplishments during the Past Year

Except where noted, the activities described below took place between March 2006 and February 2007.

Education and publicity

- We published 12 articles in the weekly Guanajuato newspaper *Chopper*, one each month.
- During calendar year 2006 we published three issues of our newsletter in Spanish and English in January, July, and December, disseminating them principally through the Internet to a mailing list of more than 300 recipients.
- In February of 2007 we published a new brochure about Amigos in Spanish and English, printing 1,000 copies of each edition and adding an online version to our website.
- With help from several student volunteers we made numerous presentations, two of them before spay/neuter campaigns, to school children encouraging responsible and humane treatment of companion animals.
- We distributed copies of our coloring book entitled “Echales la Mano”, our short story “Diario de un Perro Abandonado”, and other educational materials about the advantages of sterilizing companion animals and the responsibilities of pet owners, to children attending the presentations and to families attending our spay/neuter campaigns.
- We maintained and made minor updates in our website.
- We transferred our mailing list to Yahoo and updated it.
- We distributed copies of an instructional DVD entitled “Quick Spay: Early-Age and Adult Surgical Sterilization Techniques for Dogs and Cats” to the veterinarians who participate in our clinic program.

Spay/neuter program

- Thanks to the participation of six Guanajuato veterinarians who participate in our ongoing clinic program and to the voluntary participation of both Guanajuato and visiting veterinarians in our intensive campaigns, during calendar year 2006 we neutered 662 animals (455 dogs, 207 cats), 448 of them through the clinic program and 214 during our campaigns. There were no fatalities.
- The table below shows the number of cases sterilized each year through our clinic program and campaigns.

Year	Clinics	Campaigns	All spay/neuters
2002	90	69	159

2003	175	204	379
2004	469	217	686
2005	390	385	775
2006	448	214	662
Total	1,572	1,089	2,661

As the table indicates, the number of animals sterilized through the clinic program was higher in 2006 than in 2005 (448 versus 390), whereas the number of animals sterilized through the campaigns was higher in 2005 than in 2006 (385 versus 214), mainly because in 2005 we held a three-day campaign in a central area of the city.

- We held three campaigns during the year—a one-day campaign in April in the village of Cuevas, a two-day campaign on the outskirts of the city near Marfil in August, and a one-day campaign in the village of Los Nicolases in November.
- Participating in the campaigns were local and visiting veterinarians, physicians, veterinary technicians, veterinary students, nurses, and many other volunteers. We also received the cooperation of the State Secretariat of Education, the directors and teachers at the schools where the campaigns were held, and the villagers themselves, many of whom offered their assistance and prepared meals or donated food for the volunteers.
- Amigos also received material support for the campaigns from the Centro de Salud and from several veterinary and medical suppliers.
- The veterinarians, physicians, technicians, nurses, and other volunteers who participated in the campaigns worked long, challenging hours; and to all of them we are very grateful.
- We believe we improved our contacts with the veterinarians who participate in our program.

Rescues and adoptions

- Working with our participating veterinarians, Amigos volunteers rescued 253 dogs and cats (mostly puppies) during the calendar year. The animals were taken to the clinics of participating veterinarians, where they were bathed, treated for intestinal parasites, in some cases treated for mange, and neutered and then offered for adoption. The rescuers paid for the baths, treatment, and boarding; in nearly all cases Amigos paid for the surgeries. A few homeless animals (8) were brought to our campaigns, neutered, and adopted afterward.
- The following table shows the number of rescued and adopted animals by year:

Year	Rescues & adoptions
2002	110
2003	205
2004	209
2005	298
2006	261
Total	1,083

- Several volunteers provided foster care to rescued animals awaiting adoption, and several also accompanied animals on flights to the U.S. and Canada to new homes. The adopters paid the animals' travel expenses.

Fundraising

- With *pro bono* assistance from New York attorney Edward Schiff, in May Amigos was incorporated as a nonprofit voluntary association in the State of New York, thus enabling us to raise funds in the United States.
- In June the U.S. federal government's Internal Revenue Service approved Amigos for tax-exempt status as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit voluntary association, thus increasing the attractiveness of supporting Amigos on the part of US donors.
- Mex-Can Pet Partners, our affiliate fundraising organization in Victoria, B.C., Canada, continued to raise funds for Amigos. In May the group held a Mother's Day yard sale, raising \$1,700 Cdn.
- Also in May Virgilio Fernández and Estela Cordero, owners of the Gene Byron Museum, hosted a fundraising breakfast at their home in Marfil, raising 3,800 pesos for Amigos.
- In July we received an unsolicited donation of US \$500 from the Guardian Warrior Foundation of Scottsdale, Arizona; and in December we received a \$1,000 Cdn. donation from the Maria Davies Trust through Mex-Can, the third such donation from that source.
- Treasurer Martha Roberts arranged with Citibank in New York for Amigos to receive donations via Visa and MasterCard.
- In February of this year Amigos held its annual Valentine's Day fundraising event to celebrate its fifth anniversary, raising 22,300 pesos.
- We raised 16,134 pesos through the sale of Amigos teeshirts.
- During each of our spay/neuter campaigns and during the Day of the Cave (July 31) we held a rummage sale, helping to defray the cost of the campaigns. The residents of Los Nicolases and San José de Tránsito generously contributed 2,725 pesos toward our costs.

Members

Currently Amigos has 130 members: 1 individual member, 10 family memberships, 5 business members, 23 benefactors, 5 "best friends", 83 volunteer members (including veterinarians), and 3 honorary members (who are also volunteers). Some of the paying members are also volunteers.

Cooperation with city and state authorities and other groups

- We met with mayoral candidate Dr. Eduardo Romero Hicks, at his invitation, to describe our activities. We also discussed our concerns about the lack of regulations in the municipality of Guanajuato for implementing a state law, passed three years ago, to prevent the neglect and abuse of domestic animals, and our concern about the complicated procedure for reclaiming or adopting a dog captured by the city's animal-control personnel and taken to a site in Yerbabuena.
- After becoming mayor Dr. Romero Hicks solicited our suggestions for the regulations, and we submitted our recommendations to him; we also gave his director of municipal services our written comments on a drafted regulation.
- At the request of the State Secretariat of Health, we submitted monthly reports to state and city health officials about our spay/neuter activities. We also obtained volunteer assistance from a student to format detailed information about each case in a format requested by the city.

- We continued our cooperation with the local group Centrol de Protección Animal in Guanajuato and with two animal-protection associations in San Miguel de Allende.
- We offered our support in the form of advice to other groups and individuals in Mexico seeking to establish animal-protection organizations or place animals for adoption.

Recent Donations, Memberships and Volunteer Support

We depend upon the donations we receive from our supporters to provide services to the community. Our sincere thanks go to the following donors and volunteers for their recent support.

Best Friends: Maria Davies Trust, Aileen Thomson, Sandra Ward

Benefactors: Diane Carter, Marsha Coarsey, Sam and Jean Edwards, Robert Eschenasi, Sherry and Dennis Fear, Ellen Finks, Patricia Heinke in memory of Joan Ward Summers, Eileen Hoffman, Sandra Kamm, Gail Petchesky-Martyn, residents of the communities of Los Nicolases and San José de Tránsito, Mark and Kay Noguchi, Ron Mann, Gail Metchesky-Martyn, Martha Roberts, Loren Ross, Diane Treat, Elena Weldon, Anne and John Wolan

Individual memberships: Ruth Burchard

Family memberships: Carol Broad, Julia de Costa, Erna Paris and Tom Robinson, Gerhard and Ute Stebich

Volunteers not previously mentioned in this issue: Josie Gavieras, Debora Esther Sánchez Macías

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