

YOUNG LAWYERS

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FINDING CLAY

On June 23, 2016, West Virginia changed forever. Much will be written about the great flood that devastated our state and left indescribable human suffering on a scale rarely seen. There are so many stories that need to be told and just as many that need to be heard. Sharing our stories will allow us to heal, allow us to bond, allow us to rebuild and show the rest of the nation what we mean by Mountaineer Spirit. Here is one such story.

Immediately after the flood occurred and before the waters had completely retreated back into their banks, the Board of Governors of the State Bar, led by Johnny McGhee and Anita Casey, sprang into action to offer long-term legal assistance to flood victims. A service not obvious to me at first, but I am so thankful they had the foresight to anticipate the needs of the victims in rebuilding. The Young Lawyers

Section, like so many fellow West Virginians, wanted to help and voted to donate the remainder of its budget to flood relief supplies. Jasmine Morton, Linnsey Amores and Shannon Smith's husband Michael joined with Anita Casey and me to purchase and deliver flood relief supplies. Jasmine had traveled to Clay County and saw firsthand that they were in desperate need of supplies, so we decided that was where we would go to help.

I had already been down to Clendenin with a group from the Eastern Panhandle and was looking for an excuse to go back. What I experienced on my first trip had a profound effect on me, as it did on everyone. More importantly, having an established group already in the area provided me with the opportunity to commandeer a crew of volunteers from Wetzel and Tyler counties, and they were

a fine collection of big burly men with names like Bird Dog, Big Hoss and Jeremy, among others. The plan was for everyone to meet off of the interstate at the Wallback exit. When I got there, Anita and Linnsey were at the park and ride, and out of their vehicles tending to a stray dog that was hanging around a large debris pile. The poor girl was covered in mud and exhausted and did not drink any water or eat food that we tried to give her. It was clear to everyone that this dog did not have much life left. Even my new friends, despite their tough exterior, were moved by this helpless creature. To me it seemed as if she had accepted her fate and was waiting to die even walking away from human comfort. Who knows what she had been through and I later found out she had been there for days. She laid in the direct sun without making any efforts to find

shade and was so weak that she would lie down in the gravel lot with her tongue flopped out covered with gravel. We were all frantic and agreed that we had to take her. We could not leave her to die.

Without any sort of agreement, we all just took to helping her. While others cleaned her off with baby wipes, I made her a bed on my passenger seat with one of the blankets I had brought for my use. After initially shying away from human contact, the cold air from the vents seemed to bring her comfort. She lay down and rested her head on my arm, that was all it took, I was not going to give up on her and I decided to name her “Clay” in honor of where I found her. (Full disclosure, I have a dog named Monroe. Naming dogs after counties is old hat for me.) We then drove toward Clay County High School to deliver supplies and within two minutes Clay had repositioned herself in front of the vents and was snoring up a storm. Arriving at the high school, I was given a harness by a local volunteer and used a leash from my car to walk her around. It was apparent that her energy level was much improved. She was quickly regaining her personality, which is very tender and affectionate toward people. We were then directed to drive along the river toward Prociuous and deliver supplies. Clay was eager to get back in my car and more importantly in front of the vents. She would immediately go to sleep and awake any time we stopped, bark a few times when I exited but then go right back to sleep. This lasted the entirety of our journey, about five hours.

Returning to base camp that evening, my Eastern Panhandle crew was very excited to meet our new friend. At this point she was back to normal and very happy. We fed and hydrated her and made her a safe spot on a cooling pad in the shade, but she would not take her eyes off of me and even whined when I walked out of sight. We had bonded and I wanted to take her home but couldn't imagine denying someone who had lost everything from their pet. I registered her that evening on a website set up for flood rescues. I put photos of her on my Facebook page to help find her owner and was amazed at the response. As of now, the post has been shared 10,000 times with 1 million views. I received lots of helpful suggestions, one of which was that a mobile vet station was being conducted the next day in Clendenin. That was perfect as I was worried about diseases and she was limping when we first rescued her. When I took her to the mobile wellness check, a reporter, Jessi Starkey from WCHS-TV, was there to do a live feed on the event to help spread the word. She



Matthew L. Harvey and Clay, who was rescued in the county of the same name by Harvey and other members of the State Bar.

overheard me say Shepherdstown when giving my address to the volunteer, and that so happened to be Jessi's hometown. We struck up a conversation and she decided to put Clay on the newsfeed. There was no way Clay wasn't going to be reunited with her owners with that much coverage and I happily turned her over to the Kanawha County Humane Society confident that she would be home soon.

Or so I thought. Clay, like most pets rescued during the flood was not claimed. I kept track of her almost daily and had other people who had seen her on Facebook checking on her. When it was obvious that her owners hadn't been found, I made arrangements to unofficially adopt her. I say unofficially because in my mind I am only fostering her until her owners can be found. I'm still looking and still hopeful despite our growing bond.

Human life is the most valuable gift on earth, but there is a special bond between pets and their humans. Imagine the day when someone who has lost everything gets a call or email that their best friend is alive and well. Clay is much more than a survivor, she is hope. **WVL**