

## Other Than Editing

by Jamie De Gregory

### Juliana Walker: Caring for Cats and Community

The week of September 11, 2001, found people around the world in a state of agitation. Amid the confusion of that week, editor Juliana Walker found solace with luckless cats that had themselves found solace at Harmony House for Cats in Chicago.

On Thursday, September 13, 2001, this Chicago native had her first volunteer experience at the three-story Harmony House ([www.hhforcats.org](http://www.hhforcats.org)). “Ironically enough”, Walker said, “when I signed up and had my orientation it was two days after 9/11, and I just found it really comforting to be there.” She explained that the experience was rewarding because she was spending time doing something she enjoyed and helping others. Walker said the experience helped her recognize how valuable time is and that as easy as it is to go home and relax at the end of a workday, “it’s invigorating to know you have something else to do”.

At that time, Walker, who has a bachelor’s degree in journalism, was working as an assistant editor at the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, in Chicago. Her duties included editing the medical-student section of *JAMA*, soliciting artwork for the cover, and working on the poetry section. She came to *JAMA* from Intertec Publishing Corp, where she wrote and edited for the trade magazine *Paper, Film, and Foil Converter*. There she learned how to deal with more technical subject matter. That expertise is put to good use in her current position as an editor for the newsletters of Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago.

Back in 2001, Walker had been looking for “something fulfilling to do outside of work, something relaxing”. An animal lover with four cats of her own, she discovered Harmony House on the Internet and liked the fact that the shelter does not cage or euthanize its cats.

Harmony House is a nonprofit shelter of the Animal Protection Association. The shelter was established in 1970 and now cares for an estimated 130 cats that have no homes. The cats come to Harmony House by a variety of routes. “Some are



abandoned”, Walker said. “A lot of the time people call; they find a stray cat or can’t keep their own. We can’t take them all in, because we’re no-kill. However, we accept as many as we can and strive to get them adopted. Some cats remain at the shelter for the duration of their healthy life span.”

Walker spends every Tuesday and Thursday evening playing with and grooming the cats at Harmony House. Some of the new cats at the shelter initially do not react well to humans, and it is important for those cats to learn to get along with humans. Walker and the other volunteers help the cats improve their social skills, which is essential to their prospects for getting adopted.

In addition to helping to socialize cats at the shelter, Walker quickly became involved with the shelter’s newsletter. As an editor, Walker admitted, “I couldn’t just go and play with cats; I had to get involved with the newsletter.” The shelter’s newsletter comes out several times a year and features an appeal letter about a cat that has special needs and information on caring for cats.

The Harmony House cats are not the only beneficiaries of Walker’s volunteer efforts. Walker has been a mentor for the Chicago Association of Hispanic Journalists *Presente* program since 2001. Every year, she meets with a group of high-school

students interested in journalism. Over the course of six Saturday morning sessions, Walker teaches them how to write a news story—from finding a topic to interviewing, writing, and page design. Walker enjoys the program because “the students get a nice taste of what being a journalist is about. It’s gratifying to see how they progress and what other careers they end up entering [if they don’t become journalists].”

Walker also touches the community through her job. She likes working at Northwestern Memorial Hospital because she is able to work with physicians and do more hands-on work in writing and interviewing. At the hospital, Walker writes for and edits a variety of internal and external newsletters. The internal newsletters include staff interviews and articles on new medical technologies. External newsletters go to the community and past patients. Community newsletters cover everything from advances in spinal surgery to ways that patients benefit from pet therapy.

At the shelter, Walker’s enthusiasm quickly singled her out. Ann Dieter, president of the Harmony House board of directors, said that a fellow volunteer brought

Walker to her attention. “Her words were, ‘This is someone special. You need to meet her. Let’s get her involved.’”

Walker began helping with special events and joined the board of directors in October 2002. She now serves as secretary. Dieter said, “I would say that 90% of the volunteers come when asked. But you meet the 10% that are organized and can coordinate other people. She [Walker] has the ability to completely organize an event.” Walker also helps to maintain listings for the cats on [www.petfinder.org](http://www.petfinder.org), a nationwide service that connects people with animals available for adoption.

Walker’s passion for her work at Harmony House is evident in her voice when she speaks about the cats she helps. “One volunteer told me they get more out of it than the cats do, and I agree”, Walker said. “If you really love animals, you hear all these horror stories, and at least you have this place. It’s satisfying to work with a cat and get [it] adopted.”

JAMIE DE GREGORY *prepared this profile while a Science Editor intern.*