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STILLWATER, Okla.—How long had he been swimming? It must have seemed like forever. He was in pain and yet, he had to keep swimming. There was no end in sight to the water; it was everywhere. And swim he did. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans Animal Control rescued a Doberman pincher in the St. Bernard Parish of New Orleans, Louisiana. Rudy, as he became known, was found swimming in five feet of water.

"We have no idea how long he had been swimming or who owns him," Marcia Cowen, member of the Doberman Pincher Club of America Disaster Relief Team and director of a Doberman Rescue Group located in Tulsa, Okla., says.

Rudy was found in one of the hardest hit flood areas surrounding New Orleans. According to Cowen, the dog stayed at Animal Control several days before arrangements could be made to transport him. Animal Control officials reported that the dog 'had something wrong with him.'

Cowen arranged for Rudy to go to a foster home near New Orleans but out of the flood zone.

"Rudy's foster family took him to a local veterinarian who told them the dog's pelvis was in terrible shape and that there was nothing he could do at his clinic," Cowen explains. "We sent his radiographs (x-rays) to several Houston veterinarians but no one would touch the case. I sent the x-rays to one of my board members in Tulsa, Dr. Mike Jones, in the hopes that he could help."

Dr. Jones graduated from Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine at the Center for Veterinary Health Sciences (CVHS) in 1991. For the past 16 years, he has owned and operated a small animal practice in Tulsa. He volunteers as a veterinary advisor for the Doberman Rescue Group, helping to diagnose and/or treat diseases or injuries of rescued Dobermans.

"The Doberman Rescue Group gets everything from run down puppy mill dogs to dogs involved in federal court cases," Dr. Jones states. "After reviewing the radiographs, I knew it was too complicated for my clinic, and I referred the case to the Boren Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital located at the CVHS in Stillwater. I consulted with their small animal surgery section chief, Dr. Mark Rochat, who thought he could perform the surgery."

Cowen then began making arrangements to transport the dog. Rudy's foster family drove him to Baton Rouge, La. From there the dog was flown to Houston, Texas. Following a two hour lay

over, Rudy went from Houston to Tulsa.

"We think he stood the entire time because whenever the plane landed and they opened the cargo door, he would be standing there looking at them like, 'okay, now what are you going to do with me?'" Cowen recalls. "In Tulsa, we unloaded him, put him in the car and drove directly to Dr. Jones. The next morning, Dr. Jones arranged for Rudy to travel to OSU and Dr. Rochat. Dr. Jones is instrumental in saving Rudy. He did all the leg work in finding someone who would help Rudy."

More than two weeks after Hurricane Katrina hit, Rudy arrived at the CVHS Teaching Hospital. He had sustained multiple pelvic fractures—fractures that had gone untreated for almost three weeks. Dr. Rochat, one of the best orthopedic surgeons in the country, was willing to try to repair the damage.

On Sept. 20, 2005, assisted by Dr. Jude Bordelon, the senior small animal surgical resident from Louisiana, Dr. Rochat and his surgical team operated on Rudy. The surgery lasted approximately two hours and passed without incident. The most difficult aspect of realigning Rudy's pelvis was overcoming the significant healing that had already occurred. Mother Nature, it seems, had done an excellent job of attempting to heal the fractures but, in the process, had created other significant problems that detracted from Rudy's health and well-being. Rudy's pelvis was broken in such a way that his pelvic canal was significantly narrowed, making normal bodily functions and walking very difficult. The pelvic fractures were basically re-broken and more properly aligned. Maintaining that proper alignment was achieved with the latest in bone plating technology.

Due to the capable hands of Dr. Jeff Ko and his anesthesiology staff, Rudy sailed through the surgery. During his post-operation recovery, Rudy came in contact with Laura Curtin, a fourth year veterinary student from Delaware who would become a major player in Rudy's life.

"I would see Rudy during rounds and we hit it off right away," Curtin recalls with a smile. "One day I noticed he wasn't there and I asked about him. Staff told me he had been released to a foster family. I contacted the Doberman Rescue Group right away."

Because his foster family was worried about his physical therapy needs, they decided not to keep Rudy. Curtin applied to adopt the dog and was approved.

"The Doberman Rescue liked that I was familiar with Rudy's medical background," Curtin explains. "His chart lists him as two years old, but after examining him, we believe he is only 10 or 11 months old. He's out of critical danger. The main focus is to keep this lively puppy, which is still learning everything, from re-breaking his pelvis. Not an easy task!"

Curtin's veterinarian background will be a benefit to Rudy during his recovery. It will take at least three months for him to heal. During that time, he must be kept in a crate to limit his activity and exercised only on a leash to avoid re-injury. Regular physical therapy will help maintain his muscle tone and joint health during the recovery process.

Rudy's Story

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"He has pain medication to help him through the recovery stage," Curtin says. "He has gained eight pounds since he moved in with me, my mixed breed dog and three cats. He's a special boy and I'm glad I was able to open my home to him. He sure has opened his heart to me.

