



*The Pet Rescue Foundation*

**Starting from Scratch:**  
*Patricia Sherman, Lodi, California*

Pat Sherman was employed full-time as a grocery store checker in the small Central Valley town of Lodi, California when she got a notion she couldn't shake loose. "I just knew this area needed a humane society." And with that, she decided to create one.

In 1990, Pat met a pair of like-minded animal lovers and the three of them started Animal Friends Connection (AFC). After one of the partners moved away, Pat and Donna Swinney carried on by themselves.

How do you start an organization from scratch? "We weren't educated, we just knew we cared," Pat says. "So we began educating ourselves. We ordered literature from national humane organizations, we joined the Western Humane Educators Association, and we went to every conference and workshop we could find to learn about animal behavior, grant writing and management issues. We called the University of California at Davis to find out how to set up a therapy dog program, and we read books to figure out how to start a pet loss support group. We just used our own instincts and common sense to go from one level to the next."

At first, Animal Friends Connection only provided a voicemail system connecting caregivers with homeless animals. Then in 1993, AFC established a formal foster network and adoption program. "At that point," Pat continues, "we started taking animals to events and new adoption sites. I started writing press releases, going on cable TV and getting to know people at the newspapers to get a higher profile in the community. I had no formal public relations training; I was just winging it. I had never spoken publicly before and it was very difficult in the beginning—and still is."

Pat also embarked on another unexpected path. "I never wanted to be in politics, but in effect, that's where I am." Pat started making connections with the Police Department (which oversees Animal Control Services), the city council and local veterinarians. "I don't believe in attacking. There were lots of changes we wanted to make but we knew we had to move very slowly to get them. We wanted to win friends and not make enemies. We didn't want people to feel threatened or feel like we wanted to take something away from them." The strategy paid off. Pat won over an animal control department that was initially uncooperative. AFC leaders helped animal control services write a volunteer handbook and then helped to provide them with volunteers. Animal control stopped euthanizing cats and dogs in the gas chamber at the behest of the AFC

Board of Directors. AFC visits to local veterinarians resulted in free examinations for all animals adopted through the organization.

Six years ago, Pat quit the grocery job. Between her work at the store and the 40 hours a week she was volunteering at AFC, something had to give. Today, Pat is getting her just desserts. On October 1, 2000 Animal Friends Connection received a grant from Maddie's Fund worth a half a million dollars over five years. Now AFC has enough financial backing to go to the next level, and Pat can finally get paid.