

ANIMALS IN NEED * PEOPLE IN NEED
Written for Hearts United for Animals
By Allison Hunter-Frederick © 2009

Cast of Characters:

Incognito: a male mouse born with a deformed leg

Belcher: a male red-legged California frog

Midnight: a female Black Labrador retriever pup

Sprinter: a male hamster

Hopper: a rabbit whose feet got injured by a wire cage as a pet

Iggy: an iguana

Val: an alley cat

Angela: an angelfish

Cracker: an Amazon parrot whose girlfriend Polly lives in the rainforest

Pedro: a Chihuahua

Hatch: a duck sold at Easter in a department store

Act I

(Incognito and Belcher are sitting in a corner. Incognito is scribbling on paper.)

MIDNIGHT (staring at Incognito and wagging tail): Incognito, what are you doing?

INCOGNITO: I'm wr-writing a play.

(A ball rolls across the floor. Sprinter darts onto stage and after the ball.)

SPRINTER (chasing after a ball): Midnight, get the ball!

(Midnight runs after ball. He's about to grab it with his mouth, when Sprinter dashes past him and kicks the ball. Both animals run after ball. Hopper limps quickly onto stage.)

HOPPER (clapping paws): Sprinter, can I play too?

SPRINTER (running again after ball): Yes! Get the ball before it goes off stage!

HOPPER (blocking ball): I thought you were preparing for a marathon?

SPRINTER (charging him): Now I'm preparing to be a soccer player.

(Sprinter and Hopper collide. Both tumble to floor.)

HOPPER (rubbing head): Ouch! Maybe you should go back to training for the marathon.

MIDNIGHT (jumping on them): I got you! (Picks up the ball with paws) And the ball!

BELCHER (puffing himself up): SHH!

(Animals sit and are quiet.)

HOPPER: What's up, Belcher?

BELCHER: What did Incognito tell you he was trying to do?

(Animals glance at one another and shrug.)

INCOGNITO: I'm wr-writing a play.

IGGY (lumbering onto the stage): I like stories!

BELCHER: It isn't one yet! And it won't be one, if Incognito and I don't get some quiet.

SPRINTER (bowing): We can leave.

HOPPER (jumping): Or we can stay and hear the story!

INCOGNITO: It's a-about how an-animals can help people.

VAL (leaping next to animals): Why should we help them? We're the ones needing help!

INCOGNITO: And a-about how pe-people can help animals.

VAL (flicking tail): I don't need any help.

INCOGNITO (shrinking): Ev-everyone ne-needs he-help, Val.

VAL: And I'm not giving any help!

INCOGNITO (reading notes): O-once upon a time, th-there was a gen-gentleman who lost his eye-eyesight on his 40th bir-birthday due to eye disease.

BELCHER: And once upon a time, there was a dog about the age of Midnight who lived with a foster family. He got trained by professionals to help the man walk without sight. Now the man travels around the country making a living as an inspirational speaker.

INCOGNITO: Th-this is act-actually a true story.

SPRINTER: Do you have any more stories? Are there ones about animals other than dogs?

INCOGNITO: O-once upon a time, th-there was a nine-year-old gi-girl with au-autism. She made fr-friends with an iguana.

BELCHER: Pet therapists say that time with animals helps promote structure to the day for children with emotional needs.

IGGY (swishing tail): You mean I could be somebody!

BELCHER: Iggy, you already are somebody.

IGGY (pointing at group): I could make a difference!

VAL (calling off stage): You sure could if you sat on someone.

HOPPER (crossing paws under chin): Can I be in your play?

SPRINTER: If Belcher is involved, I suspect a campaign. What's up Belcher?

BELCHER: I'm glad you asked! Incognito is writing a play about service animals. When he's done, we want to take the play on the road to present to organizations and encourage them to use shelter animals to help with their needs.

MIDNIGHT (cocking head): I don't get it. How can we help? Some of us are big or clumsy.

INCOGNITO: Th-there are a lot of needs, ph-physical and em-emotional, among people. Animals have ben-benefited pa-patients who are sc-scared in hospitals, chil-children who have been ab-abused, sur-survivors of tra-tragedies such as storms and bombs, and even ba-babies on drugs. Different animals meet different needs.

BELCHER: Do you know pet owners are less likely to have heart problems than others? Even in institutions, where animals just visit, individuals are more alert, smile more, and act out less in their presence.

IGGY: You two are very smart! I want to be in your play too.

BELCHER: If there aren't any more questions, how about everyone clears out and let us finish the play? Then we can practice it, take it on the road, and hopefully help some people in need!

IGGY (flicking ball away with tail): We'll go play ball!

(Animals chase after ball, except for Incognito and Belcher who return to writing their play.)

Act II

(Belcher and Incognito sit in a circle surrounded by the rest of the animals.)

BELCHER: Thank you to everyone for giving us ideas for our play, taking parts and practicing them, and going on the road to present. Now we need your help again.

HOPPER: I want to help!

MIDNIGHT (pushing Hopper aside): Me too!

BELCHER (clearing throat to get attention): Calls have come to us from all across the state for animal volunteers. Angela will read the list.

ANGELA: An activities director at a seniors' home would like a couple of pets who can regularly visit. Their secretary used to bring her greyhounds, but then she left for another job. The patients loved having visitors who weren't coming just to run tests or give medication.

(Sprinter rolls ball across stage. Hopper, Midnight, and Pedro scurry after it.)

SPRINTER (raising hand): I'll go!

ANGELA (shaking head): Nice try.

BELCHER: Sorry Sprinter, but we need an animal that can go for walks and doesn't need a cage.

MIDNIGHT (bounding up to group): Like me?

ANGELA: Yes, under one condition. Sprinter, would you continue to train Midnight to become more.... gentle and obedient?

SPRINTER (bowing): Sprinter here, at your service!

ANGELA: Pedro, we'd also like you to go. The home wants a younger dog and an older dog. You've grown well-accustomed to people holding you since your arrival and....

INCOGNITO: Th-these seniors love to hug.

PEDRO (dancing): I'll get them smiling and moving!

ANGELA: A new employee at an institution for individuals with emotional needs would also like to try pet therapy. It'd be a new venture for the organization and so she requested an engaging but trusted animal.

SPRINTER (stepping forward): I can go!

HOPPER (pushing Sprinter): Me too!

ANGELA: She'd also prefer an animal with a long lifespan, in case the patients get attached.

(Sprinter steps back and pulls Hopper with him.)

SPRINTER: How about Cracker?

HATCH: Parrots do live 50 years or longer, which is about as old as any animal here is going to live. They also like to play tricks. The patients will need to stay alert around Crackers. Besides, he's lonely and nice and could use someone to care about—even if a human instead of a female parrot.

HOPPER (crying): No one wants me.

SPRINTER (flopping to a sit): Me either.

MIDNIGHT (dropping ball at their feet): Sorry.

INCOGNITO: Act-actually, we have an assign-assignment that includes you.

(Sprinter perks up. He elbows Hopper who continues to bawl.)

SPRINTER (whispering): Listen! (Hopper stops crying and tilts head.)

INCOGNITO: A science teacher is looking for some small animals that require frequent care. She wants to help her students to learn how to follow a schedule.

HOPPER (twirling around): Yay, someone wants me!

SPRINTER (grabbing ball): Can I still play soccer?

ANGELA: Yes, you may. Now let's cover the rest of the list....

Act III

HOPPER: When does school start again? I want to return!

INCOGNITO: Wa-wasn't the science room fun? I-I liked mee-meeting new animals. (Lowers head.) The sn-snakes kind of scared me.

SPRINTER: I liked the students. They timed me when I ran. They threw my ball for me to fetch.

HOPPER: Maybe you could train to be a soccer player AND a marathon player.

BELCHER: Seems like our play succeeded. Incognito, you make a good campaign partner. Does anyone else want to share?

IGGY: More stories!

(He swishes tail and accidentally over animals.)

(Midnight barks at Iggy and bounds over his tail.)

MIDNIGHT: Let's play jump rope!

BELCHER (scolding): Is playing all you care about? (Shakes head) Some things never change.

(Cracker swoops and bites Iggy's tail.)

CRACKER (chanting: Jump rope! Bite tail! Have fun!

IGGY (rearing up): I'm going to sit on everyone!

(Everyone scatters, sits, and is quiet.)

BELCHER: Thank you, Iggy. Maybe some things DO change. But, I miss Angela. All of you listened to her.

CRACKER (chanting): Where's Angela? Where's our leader? What will we do?

BELCHER: She's swimming in an aquarium in a doctor's office. She's bringing calm to expectant and hopeful women.

HOPPER (crying): I miss Angela.

INCOGNITO (patting Hopper): We all do.

HATCH: I went to a farm. So did Belcher.

HATCH: The idea that pets are good for people is not new. As long ago as the 1700's, Quakers had patients commune with animals on farms to cure them, instead of using severe treatments. Now, there is renewed interest in pet therapy.

IGGY (whispering to Belcher): Is Hatch going to tell us a story? (Belcher nods and puts one foot to mouth to hush Iggy.)

HATCH: We went away during spring break. City students were given an opportunity to run a farm. Many of them hadn't seen animals before and were scared, but they grew to love us!

SPRINTER: Are you going to start making speeches now too? You could team up with Belcher and Incognito.

HATCH: Maybe I will.

CRACKER: Something is missing! Where are the insults? Someone is missing! Where is Val?

MIDNIGHT: Maybe she got put into pet jail for being mean.

HATCH: There isn't any such thing!

MIDNIGHT: Should be!

INCOGNITO: V-Val got adopted.

(Animals all look at Incognito.)

BELCHER: I see THAT got your attention! Val was the last of our group to get selected. A girl in a behaviour school was badly in need of friends, but was hurting anyone who didn't do what she wanted. The principal didn't know what to do, but thought maybe an animal would help. The animal had to be tough, which we all know Val is. The principal didn't want to risk more than a day on the experiment, which is the only reason Val agreed to it. The girl started asking for Val, she kept returning, and the parents were so pleased that they adopted Val.

IGGY: Mean kid adopts mean cat?

HATCH: That sounds about right, doesn't it?

(Animals are silent.)

MIDNIGHT (putting head on paws): You know, I think I'm going to miss that cranky cat.

OTHERS: Me too!

(Animals are quiet again)

HOPPER: If she can get adopted, so should we!

INCOGNITO: We-we all should.

BELCHER: We need to keep telling our stories and getting people to listen. We have just begun our work. We need to continue spreading our message until all shelter animals are adopted.

ANIMALS (chanting): Go Belcher! Go us! Please adopt us! Please help us!

CURRICULUM IDEAS:

1. Poll classmates. Record how their pets help them. Record how they help their pets.
2. Find out how community organizations are using animals to help people. Volunteer your services and journal your experiences. Share with the rest of the class.
3. Visit your local shelter and find out what needs their animals have. See if there are ways that you can help meet those needs.
4. Brainstorm for ways to help promote the adoption and better care of animals. Create your own promotional campaign with speeches or skits or sketches.

PLAY EXTENSIONS:

1. Research pet therapy. Find examples other than those listed in the play. Rewrite the play using your own examples.
2. Find out how community organizations are using animals to help. Rewrite the play using real local stories.
3. Visit your local shelter and find out what needs their animals have. Imagine that one of them gets adopted. Have them visit the animals in the play to share their story.
4. Compile a list of educational topics. Read the HUA descriptions of the personalities for the six portrayed animals. Write your play to present information in an entertaining way to an audience.

HUA Descriptions of Animals

Tabby Cat – “Val”

Val is a “Valley Girl”...always primping and checking her appearance in the mirror. She talks like a snob, and she thinks she is superior to the others. She is a “Valley-Cat” with real catitude.

Angel Fish – “Angela”

Angela is a beautiful and wise fish. She is kind to her friends, and they respect her very much. Angela is calm and very skilled at giving good advice.

Amazon Parrot – “Cracker”

Cracker is a jokester. He loves to mimic people, and he is always looking for a good time. He is very intelligent, very witty, and full of energy. Cracker had a girlfriend in the rainforest names Polly. Whenever he gets lonely, he says “Cracker wants a Polly”.

Black Lab Puppy – “Midnight”

Midnight is 10 weeks old. She loves EVERYONE. She follows the others around and asks, “Can I play?” She is still a baby, and has needs and actions of a baby.

Duckling – “Hatch”

Hatch was an Easter duckling. A department store in the city was giving away chicks and ducklings for Easter. They only problem was the family that took Hatch had no way to keep him in the city, so Hatch was taken to a farm pond and dumped. Hatch has some pretty strong feelings against making pets out of wildlife or farm animals.

Baby Rabbit – “Hopper”

Hopper is a happy, hyper, honey of a rabbit. His cage was all wire, which caused Hopper to have some foot problems. When his foot problems developed, the family took him to the local animal shelter. Hopper is an eternal optimist, and he hopes that someone will adopt him.

Red-Legged Frog – “Belcher”

Belcher never quite perfected his croak, so when he makes his frog sounds, he makes a deep, long “errrp”. Belcher was sold in a pet shop. He is very concerned that frogs are kept as pets ... Numerous factors in the environment are resulting in the disappearance of many red-legged frogs in their native California. Belcher is angry, and is becoming a spokesman for his followers. He is a frog with an attitude.

Iguana – “Ignacious” (Iggy for short)

Iggy loves to lie in the sun, soaking up the rays and doing nothing for hours. He is always the last one to catch on to jokes. Everyone loves Iggy...he’s just a little slow.

Hamster – “Sprinter”

Sprinter loves to run and work out in his cage. He is kind of a health nut. He runs approximately 2 miles per day on his wheel, and someday he would love to run in a marathon. He loves to tell the others when they look like they have put on a few pounds, and he suggests that they get their own exercise wheel.

Mouse – “Incognito”

Incognito was born with a deformed leg, which causes him to walk with a limp. Incognito knows something about EVERYONE. He is that quiet little mouse in the corner of the room who hears lots of things. He often is unnoticed by the others, but when he speaks the others listen, because he knows a lot!

Guinea Pig – “Grandma Greta”

Grandma Greta is getting near the end of her life. She was a classroom pet in a kindergarten class for 6 years, and then the teacher “retired” Greta. The teacher said that Greta had been a faithful and loving friend to many children. It was now time for her to relax and let people take care of her. Greta is almost blind, so depends on her friends for help getting around. Others come to Greta when they need advice.