

# **Giving Senior Cats a Second Chance at New Beginnings**

## **A Special Interview With Margaret Slaby**

**By Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Hi, I'm Dr. Karen Becker, and I'm so happy that Patty has nominated Margaret Slaby for a Game Changer Award. And Margaret is joining us today to talk about the amazing work she's doing with kitties. First of all, Margaret, congratulations on your Game Changer Award, and thank you so much for taking time out of your day to talk with me.

**Margaret Slaby:**

Well, thank you for having me. I appreciate it. This is a huge honor.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

We're so excited to learn more about all that you're doing and why. For our listeners and readers who don't know about your amazing organization, why don't you back up and walk us through how you identified the need, and then of course, most importantly, what you did about it?

**Margaret Slaby:**

Well, I took a roundabout way and ended up working at an animal shelter for two and a half years as an animal care technician. The euthanasia rate there was 50%, so half the animals that came in didn't make it out alive. A lot of those were older cats. They were either shy [or] scared. They were traumatized, and they were deemed not adoptable. They had maybe a basic medical need like needing dental care. I had to hold a lot of them while they were euthanized, and all I could do was basically offer them a last meal and tell them I loved them and give them my love and let them feel my love in their last moments as I held them while they were euthanized. It was breaking me, so I had to leave the shelter. I looked at my mom and I said, "Mom, there's something more I have to do. I just feel it in my heart and my soul." And I said, "I want to start a rescue."

My mom looked at me and she said those three words, "Just do it." So in June of 2016, with a handful of volunteers, we had no funding, and the dream of making Monterey County a better and safer place for cats 6 and older, we started Golden Oldies Cat Rescue. And here we are today, we have about 70 active volunteers. We fund an annual budget of probably about \$150,000, and we've saved the lives of, to date, 162 older cats ranging in age from 6 to 19.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

So beautiful. So beautiful. It's just such a great story, Margaret. Such a beautiful story. You saw a need, you had the vision. How did you get the word out and/or collect your awesome volunteers? You grew this from concept to vision, [from] passion in your heart to making it a reality. How did you grow your team or network of volunteers?

**Margaret Slaby:**

We've done everything from setting up tables outside the post office to social media, creating a webpage. It's just amazing. We have a wonderful group, a wonderful community that's stepped forward and said they believe in us, and they support us by fostering, donating, adopting, volunteering. But a lot of it [is] word of mouth. I would say one of the big ways is social media. We do print media, MailChimp, newsletters, so just a lot of targeted advertising, if you want to call it that. Slowly but surely the volunteers have come and most of them have stayed.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Yeah, yeah, I believe that. Would you say, Margaret, are you getting these seniors from other shelters like the one that you volunteered at where they have a very high euthanasia rate? Or is it older – Talk to me about where the kitties come from.

**Margaret Slaby:**

The cats come from shelters or guardians. I would say, more recently, more guardians, because as the word's gotten out, people are contacting us. But in the beginning, it was more shelters because people didn't know about us. But now that people know about us, we get a lot of people. I would say the top reason is somebody's died, no plans in place for their cat, and the family is going through this grief process, and then they're trying to find a home for a cat. So, they contact us, either the family members who are left or the friends of the family. The second reason is people are moving and there's no place that they can take their cat when they're moving. But yeah, so shelters, local shelters, we have two local shelters here in the county, and then guardian surrenders.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Okay. And then the cats come in and then go into foster homes? Are you all foster home-based?

**Margaret Slaby:**

Yes. We are 100% foster home-based. Although the exciting thing is we just finished completion on Buster's Bunkhouse, which basically is a safe space, a tiny home for foster cats when we don't have an available foster. This has been a three-year project due to many reasons, but we just did the ribbon cutting on October 17th. It's named after our first cat, Buster, who came to us from the shelter. He passed away in 2020, but we had his guardian cut the ribbon. So, it'll house cats temporarily while we look for a foster home or until they get adopted, whatever comes first.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

So beautiful. Congrats. That's an accomplishment. Even if it's a tiny structure, you have a structure, and it will serve an amazing mighty purpose, so congratulations on that. When you think back, I bet that when you left the kill shelter and you decided you were going to pivot and do something very different and you came up with this passion in your heart, you probably had no idea that at this point, look at the amazing lives that you saved and the improvement in giving

these beautiful cats a second chance at life, you probably had no idea. But I have to ask, when you wake up in the morning, what do you love most about the work that you're doing?

**Margaret Slaby:**

I would say just knowing that we're giving these at-risk older cats that second chance at a new beginning. That's kind of our slogan, "Second chances at new beginnings." Knowing that they have a safe and loving home for the rest of their golden years, and if they need to come back to us for some reason – and we have had a few come back because their people can't care for them anymore. If they need to come back to us, we always take them back. So, we're providing a lifetime safety net for any cat that we take in. I think it's just knowing that we're making a difference in these cats that can't speak for themselves, can't advocate for themselves. Like the cats at the shelter, they couldn't advocate for themselves, and a lot of them gave their lives because of that.

But now we're here and we can advocate for them. We can make a difference for them. And just seeing them going from being scared, shy, traumatized, hiding under beds, hiding in closets to sitting on the lap of their foster, playing. They just make that change, and they start to enjoy life again, and trust and know that they're safe.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Yeah, it's huge. It's huge. It's so beautiful that they're able to do so, the vast majority of them, in a foster home, so they can begin to trust and feel love and feel secure. It's really a beautiful gift you're giving these traumatized, older kitties. First and foremost, if people wanted to volunteer, donate, get involved, maybe adopt, where would they go, Margaret, to learn more?

**Margaret Slaby:**

Well, we have a website. It's [www.gocatrescue.org](http://www.gocatrescue.org), and [the] email address is [goldenoldiescats@gmail.com](mailto:goldenoldiescats@gmail.com), or they can call, and this is a voicemail-only system since we don't have an office, so it's area code 831-200-9700.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Okay, that's beautiful. I'm a girl who also only ever rescues senior kitties, usually with some type of medical problem. So, what you're doing is not just right up my alley, there's such a profound need. So, I'm so appreciative that your heart's passion, it's such a necessary void in the pet welfare industry, and it's just heartwarming that you have stepped up to meet that need in your area. If you could tell the world one thing, Margaret, or if you would want the world to know one thing, what would it be?

**Margaret Slaby:**

I think it would be that these older cats just have so much love to give and so much life left to live. A lot of people write off older cats as they're not important. Everybody wants kittens. These cats just deserve everything we can give them, and that's what Golden Oldies is doing, we're

giving them that forever home. But I do have to say that it's all because of the people that have stepped up and joined us and said, "I believe," because it's the fosters, it's the adopters, it's the volunteers, it's the donors. I had the dream, but without all these people, the dream would've died. It would never have happened. Golden Oldies wouldn't be here. I'm not the hero, all these people are the heroes, because you can dream all you want, but if you have people that don't join you, the dream dies. And so, Golden Oldies is here because of all those heroes out there who are with us and helping us do our work.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

I couldn't agree more, there's never a team of one, and we are very thankful that you had the vision. But of course, to be able to accomplish the goals that are in your heart, you have to have a team of volunteers that are committed, that will do anything, that give their homes, their hearts, their finances. It's everyone working with you that allows for the successful rehoming and a second chance for all these beautiful cats. I appreciate that you had the vision, I appreciate that you have assembled a wonderful team of volunteers, and I'm also very thankful that Patty took the time to nominate you and your beautiful organization so that all of us around the world can learn more about the really important work that you're doing.

**Margaret Slaby:**

Well, thank you. I'm very grateful to Patty as well. She's a wonderful advocate for senior dogs and senior cats. I really appreciate you taking the time to host me and let the world know about Golden Oldies Cat Rescue. We may be small, but we look at it as one cat at a time. Each cat we save is one more cat that's not going to go into a shelter and be at risk of not making it out of the shelter.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

And for that cat, not only is that cat's life forever changed, but everyone involved with the rescue of that cat is also permanently changed. And so, you're doing a magnificent job of touching the lives, both four-legged and two-legged, in your area. Everyone around you is seeing the important work that you're doing and your team is doing. So, I appreciate learning more about your wonderful organization, and I hope that this interview helps build awareness, donations and potentially a broader, bigger team of volunteers. Thank you so much, Margaret.

**Margaret Slaby:**

All right. Thank you, Dr. Becker. I appreciate it.