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News Feature

The miracle that's Einstein

By [Kathy Moran](#) (The Philippine Star) Updated October 11, 2009 12:00 AM



Donna Reyes hugs her dog Einstein who went missing during the onslaught of tropical storm 'Ondoy' but was later rescued by members of the Philippine Animal Welfare Society (PAWS).

JUN MENDOZA

[MANILA](#)

, Philippines - "I love you Einstein. May God take you to dog heaven." - Mama

This was the note that Donna Reyes, executive director of the Environmental Studies Institute of Miriam College, wrote to her missing *aspin* (*asong* Pinoy) Einstein on Oct. 2, a week after "Ondoy" brought record floods to Metro Manila.

On Sept. 26, when Ondoy struck the capital, Reyes was coming home from a speaking engagement in Mindoro, and Einstein was left at the yard of their house in Provident Village in Marikina. But her [flight](#)

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back to Manila was cancelled. "I texted my neighbor and asked him to check on Einstein," said Reyes. "He texted back that the flood waters are rising and that it would be difficult for him to stay in touch with me on Einstein."

Later that afternoon, Reyes saw on TV the damage Ondoy had caused, and that Provident Village was among the hardest-hit areas. Sick with worry but unable to do much, she closeted herself in the bathroom and wept. She could not sleep and all she wanted to do was make it back home to rescue Einstein. By 8:30 a.m. Sunday, Reyes was in Provident Village but could hardly recognize her community. She also could not make it to her house because the streets were impassable.

"I saw a few dead bodies on the street. Even the neighbor who I texted the day before did not make it. But I was intent on finding Einstein," Reyes recalled. She combed the streets for Einstein, all the while calling out her pet's name. She saw the bodies of around 50 dogs that had died in the flood – but none of them was Einstein.

"Just like a mother, if there is even the smallest glimmer of hope, I continued to hope that Einstein would be safe somewhere," she said, teary eyed. "I continued to pray that he was still alive." Reyes has had Einstein, a gift from a colleague in Miriam, for 10 years. She named him after Albert Einstein, her favorite scientist. A science major and an environmentalist, she said she wanted a dog that is native to the country.

When Reyes finally made it to her house, she found everything a mess and the dog was nowhere.

"We were asked to leave Provident at 3 p.m. because they were going to try to let the water out. I had no choice but to give up my search for Einstein," she added. Four days after the storm and still with no sign of her pet, she returned to work at Miriam College. It was here that she found out that the Philippine Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) was rescuing dogs in Provident Village. Reyes went to PAWS on Oct. 1 hoping to find Einstein. Her heart leapt when veterinarian Dr. Maripi Diaz said there were two more dogs rescued in the flooded village. Even as she left her contact details, she felt she had to let go of the hope of finding her dog. The next day, she held a small service for Einstein in her office. She wrote the note and offered [flowers](#). "I keep a journal where I write my 'thank you' to God at the end of each day," shared Reyes. "On Oct. 2, I thanked God that all my relatives and I were safe, even if we lost everything we owned. I also thanked God for the gift of Einstein."

But on Oct. 4 – the Feast day of St. Francis de Assisi and World Animal Day – PAWS told her that a

Einstein in the shelter," said Reyes. "I knew my life would begin to recover." Reyes was asked to take Einstein home that day because he was traumatized and uncomfortable because he had been around strangers for many days. "I decided to take Einstein back to Provident and stay in the house of my cousin," Reyes said. But the dog remained restless and kept barking. "I knew that I had to take him back to our house. As soon as we made it home, in less than ten minutes Einstein fell asleep on the couch beside me."

"I knew that this was a miracle," Reyes said in tears. "I am deeply grateful to PAWS for what they have done for me." The day we met up with Reyes at Miriam College was a happy one. Einstein patiently waited for Reyes as she spent time talking with me. "Finding Einstein is going to make my recovery faster and better," said Reyes. "It is a message of hope for me and now I know I can begin to pick up the pieces of my life and I can recover."

Pets need to be saved too

When the house of nursing graduate Dianne Diares in Barangay Pinagbuhatan in Pasig City was flooded, she brought her one-year-old Labrador to her [boyfriend](#) Ernzt Madamba's house. Together they loaded the dog on a boat. While they were paddling to Madamba's house, Diares saw dead dogs floating along the streets and it touched her heart.

Later that day, she got to a computer and logged on to www.pinoypetfinder.com where she shared her experience on a forum started by lovepets.com, a group under non-government animal rights organization the Animal Welfare Coalition (AWC). Joey Tiosayco, founding president of the website and a colleague of Diares and Madamba, said that since the Sept. 26 flooding, AWC and its international partner organizations Humane Society International (HIS) and World Society for the protection of Animals (WISPA) have been thinking of ways to enter affected areas that are hard to reach, like Pasig City.

They joined the relief efforts of a television [network](#), but they were brought to Marikina City. Next, they joined the military relief efforts but the authorities barred them from entering areas still considered dangerous.

Tiosayco said Diares provided the information they were looking for. Even before the flood, Diares and Madamba had been actively helping out in the website's information campaigns. Diares identified the families with pets around her barangay and served as a guide for AWC volunteers in their medical mission.

On Oct. 5, the group assembled near a church in Pasig City and assessed the situation. The next day, they brought 200 bags of dog food, 40 kilos of cat food, some bird food, 100 dog collars and leashes, a dozen foldable crates, multivitamins, and anti-rabies vaccine. They rented 10 boats at P1,500 each for the mission.

They visited every house and if there was an animal inside, they asked when was the last time the pet received an anti-rabies shot. Diara said some pet owners said their pets were fine, but seeing the poor condition of the pets, they became suspicious and thought the owner was lying so the AWC team would not take their pets. She said most owners wanted to keep their pets with them even if they were all perched on rooftops or stranded in the second floor of their homes. Some dogs were also tied up with wire instead of a proper leash.

During their half-day medical mission, they attended to 200 pets, mostly cats, birds, and dogs, most of which are native breeds. They plan to return to the site. - **With Evelyn Macairan**

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