

FEEL-GOOD STORY OF THE MONTH

## SAFE HOUSE

The Southeast's only shelter for animals caught in the cycle of **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**  
By Kimberly Turner

TOBY'S\* ENTIRE BODY HURT. He lay on the damp grass, unable to move. Earlier, Mary\*, the woman who cared for him, had packed a bag and gotten into the car. Then the man—who had viciously beaten the woman; the tabby, Toby; and their two other cats—picked Toby up and threw him from the balcony to the ground three stories below. That's where he was when a neighbor found him. As gently as possible, she cradled his small body, taking him to her apartment and then gathering the other cats.

Mary drove to a shelter for battered women, where pets weren't allowed. The idea of giving her cats away or taking them to an animal shelter devastated her, so with help from a counselor, Mary called Rikki Osborne, Ahimsa House's director, who, along with Emily



Christie, the organization's president, answers the 24-hour crisis line. The cats—with new "witness protection names"—were taken to Ahimsa's shelter, an undisclosed location in Forsyth County where they are given medical care, love and attention while their "moms" get help. Board member Dr. Kelly Trogdon does vaccinations and Dr. Tracy Land assists with spaying and neutering, but many animals need serious veterinary attention.

After his fall, Toby required two surgeries. Rikki warned Mary to prepare for the worst, but by some miracle, he survived. "I don't know what I would've done without Ahimsa's help," Mary says.

Mary didn't know that Emily had endured a similar ordeal years before. "There was no place for me and my pet," says Emily. "I ended up letting my cat go somewhere I was uncomfortable with because I didn't want her to be hurt anymore." She vowed that no woman should ever have to make that choice, so she started Ahimsa House.

Concern for a beloved pet delays or prevents half of all domestic violence victims and their children from leaving the abusive home. When victims do leave, 88 percent of animals left behind are tortured or neglected and 57 percent are killed by retaliating abusers. "It's another means of control," explains Rikki. "These men say, 'What I can't do to you, I'll do to your dog.'"

Since June 2004, Ahimsa House, a nonprofit organization that receives no government funding and is staffed entirely by unpaid volunteers, has helped more than 120 animals in Atlanta and Athens. Most return to their "moms," but some, at the woman's request, are adopted out to loving homes with the help of PAWS Atlanta. ●  
\*Names have been changed.

