

Rumson's Williams brings animal welfare crusade to the yoga mat



SALLY WILLIAMS AND HER BELOVED CAT, BRODIE - Photo courtesy Victor Bubadias

By Muriel J. Smith
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RUMSON — (April 7, 2017) - It is truly impossible to chat with Sally Williams without getting caught up in her cause. And, at the same time, you cannot help but be impressed with her drive, enthusiasm and creativity when it comes to raising funds for the cause which is so near and dear to her heart.

Williams is the kind of woman who can turn sadness and grief into something positive and helpful to others. Hence the Brodie Fund.

The Rumson resident is an unabashed animal lover, with a penchant for cats and dogs, with the emphasis on cats. So when the family's 12-year-old cat, Brodie, was stricken with cancer, Sally took him to the Red Bank Veterinary Hospital in Tinton Falls, where a team of veterinarians ran tests and identified the specific cancer that was causing Brodie to cough, sneeze and bleed from the nose. After the extensive testing, followed by weeks of radiation, regular follow-up appointments and supportive care, Brodie was able to live and continue to be patriarch of the family —

which included three other felines — pain free and content, for another 13 months. The Williams family has a special place in their hearts especially for Dr. Dustin Lewis, DVM, DACVR, a veterinary oncologist.

But when Brodie died in late September of last year, Sally felt a compulsion not only to memorialize her pet, but also to let Brodie reach out to help other families with a similar love for their pets, families who might find it difficult or impossible to meet the high costs of cancer treatment, yet reluctant and fearful of having to see their pet linger in pain and agony. So the death of Brodie led to the birth of the Brodie Fund.

The mission of the fund is simple: offer grants to families whose pets are suffering from cancer and who want to rescue them from a disease that would eventually claim their lives. While cancer is more common in dogs than in cats, cancer in cats is generally more difficult to identify because of a feline's natural ability to hide symptoms and pain, and is generally much more aggressive. Cancer is the cause of one-half of feline deaths every year, statistics show and like humans, pets are living longer, with cancer more prevalent in older felines.

It did not take the aggressive, hard working and very determined Williams long to research what financial resources were available to families with sick pets, and finding few, set about to establish a registered non-profit 501c3 organization to offer grants. She gathered together professionals and animal lovers to form a board of directors, and then came up with ideas on how to raise funds so the grants could be issued. The Brodie Fund Board of Directors recognizes the high costs of extensive testing, treatment and care for pets and puts an emphasis on striving for successful fund raisers to help families devastated by the illness of their pets. Dr. Lewis quickly accepted the invitation to be a trustee on the non-profit board.

The April 22 Warrior Pose for Pets is the latest example of Williams's hard work on fund raisers. Scheduled for 8:30 a.m. in Wilson Hall at the First Presbyterian Church in Rumson, and hosted by Monmouth Beach Yoga and Wellness, the fund raiser is a morning of fun, yoga and meditation for children and adults alike, regardless if they are pet owners. Nor is it necessary to know yoga.

"Our hosts are wonderful," Williams said, overflowing with her usual enthusiasm, "they have instructors there who will assist anyone with any position or information they need. They are ready to work with all levels of Yoga and let newcomers see just how wonderful it can be."

Michelle Doyle is the instructor for the adult class, she said, and Amy Zambrano will work with children at the April 22 event. Costs are \$20 for adults, \$10 for children, and interested persons are urged to sign up quickly, since class size is limited.

"We know this year's event is going to be a huge success," Williams continued, "since we held one last fall and it far exceeded our expectations. That's why we decided to make this an annual fund raiser."

For those interested in seeking grants for care of their own pets, the procedure is simple and concise, but explicit. All applications must be made using the fund's one page application, available on its webpage, thebrodiefund.org, and applicants must be a client of one of the organization's participating veterinarians. In this area, Red Bank Veterinary Hospitals in Tinton Falls, Mount Laurel and Hillsborough are the primary participating agencies, with others in Connecticut and New York and more on the way in the near future.

When she isn't working on fundraisers or the routine paperwork and activity of the board, Williams pursues her own career as owner of The Contented Cat, where she is the primary Cat Behavior Consultant. Her work includes making home visits to determine why a cat might be expressing extreme stress or anger, or exhibiting unfriendly or disruptive habits, then resolving the issues in consultation with the family. A member of The Pet Professional Guild, a long time volunteer with the Monmouth County SPCA, and more recently, with Siamese Cat Rescue, Sally is also a certified Animal Reiki practitioner and a member of the Shelter Animal Reiki Association.

So is there any particular reason why Williams is so enamored with felines? Her laughter and joy in telling the story says it all.

"Blame it on my mother," she said. "I've always been told that my mother used to have a cat sleeping on her stomach before I was born. Then during my infancy, much to the chagrin of relatives and neighbors, I often had the family cat sleeping in the bassinet with me and later the crib. Through my preteen and teen years, I was the neighborhood pet sitter, something I still do, and I took a cat with me to college. I've also taken care of a lot of cats, and sometimes, with little illnesses, you can simply cure them with love."

For those wishing additional information about the Brodie Fund, or to purchase tickets for the Warrior Pose for Pets, visit the Brodie Fund on Facebook or their website located at thebrodiefund.org.