

A NOTE FROM OUR FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Indiana-PAW Friends,

When I asked my Indiana-PAW colleagues what I should write about for our inaugural newsletter, I was bluntly advised: "Amy, don't just drone on and on about Indiana-PAW and bore people. Let readers know you, and what drives you." Everything you need to know about me, you'll find in a story that began a decade ago in a desolate Midwestern field.

The path that led me to launch Indiana-PAW began in a chilly cornfield in Champaign, Illinois on November 12, 1996. I'd just moved to Illinois from California, and was in my first year of law school at the University of Illinois. With no family or friends nearby, I longed for a companion. And so, I went to the Champaign County Humane Society and adopted an 85-pound mixed-breed ball of fire named Marcellus. She'd been at the shelter for nearly a year, and was so excited to go home with me that before we could make it to my car, she slipped her collar and led me on a wild chase through the cornfields near the shelter. Though I didn't know it as I tore after her through that field, my heart and life would never be the same.

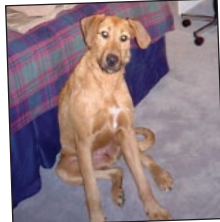
What a dog Marcellus proved to be. She was an extraordinary soul. One who understood how to suck the marrow out of life. One who infused every moment with joy. One who understood that time waits for no one. She loved me with such zeal—we should all have the good fortune to be loved the way she loved me. And how I loved her. I loved her like I've never loved anyone—before or since. And I believed I would love her for many years.

But it wasn't meant to be. Less than a year after I adopted Marcellus, her life was unexpectedly cut short during routine surgery. A veterinarian failed to properly suture her after spaying her, and she bled internally through the night at the clinic, then went into cardiac arrest and died on a stainless steel operating table. When I received the call with the news, a large part of me died too.

Losing Marcellus brought me to my knees. The pain was searing. The sense of loss overwhelming. The anger over the senselessness of her death unyielding. For the first time in my life, I felt helpless and hopeless.

But then, my aunt said something to me that brought everything into focus—

"Amy, you helped dignify Marcellus' life. She didn't die alone in an animal shelter, but was adopted and loved, and now will be remembered forever. Every shelter animal should be so lucky."



Marcellus, who inspired Amy Van Ostrand to launch Indiana-PAW, and whom Amy describes as "an extraordinary soul."

And with my aunt's comment, I knew what I needed to do—for Marcellus, and for myself. I resolved that I'd finish law school and practice law, but that I'd also find a way to dedicate my life to animal welfare work. I knew then—as surely as I do today—that every homeless animal deserves our efforts to dignify their lives. Each of them deserves the opportunity to be loved like Marcellus was.

And so...here we are. I'm a full-time practicing attorney, and find it richly rewarding. But the heartbeat of my life is my family of shelter animals (my four-legged kids), and now Indiana-PAW. Indiana-PAW is my baby, and I'm more proud of it than any other professional accomplishment.

Most of all though, I'm proud of the many Hoosiers who are working together—from shelter workers, to animal rescue group volunteers, to citizens—to bring about a day when Indiana is not just doing a "better job" on the animal welfare front, but is regarded as a national animal welfare leader. **We will do it.** It's going to take many years, and an untold amount of blood, sweat and tears. **But together, we will do it.**

And I feel immensely blessed to be a small part of the process. I wake up each morning with a sense of hope. A desire to work until I'm exhausted. A feeling of gratitude for the chance to labor for such a worthy cause. And each night, I go to bed with a sense of peace that, through this work, I'm not only brightening my small corner of the world, but am also tipping my hat to Marcellus each day.

And so, there you have it. Everything you need to know about me, you'll find in the story that begins with me running through an Illinois cornfield after a once-in-a-lifetime dog named Marcellus. Indiana-PAW exists because of her. And I will spend the remainder of my life doing this work for her. 🐾

Amy Van Ostrand, Esq.,
Indiana-PAW Founder & Executive Director



Indiana-PAW founder and Executive Director, Amy Van Ostrand, Esq., with her husband, Derek, and their adopted kids: Melanie, Jay Gatsby, Wyatt, Daisy, Jules, Dorothy & Walter.

...together, we will do it.