Rescue Me
"When you save a dog's life," says Steklenski (with some of his rescue animals), "you're changing someone else's life down the road."

People | HEROES AMONG US

Flying Abandoned Animals to Freedom

TO HELP SAVE HOMELESS CANINES, PAUL STEKLENSKI PILOTS FLIGHTS TO TAKE THEM TO NEW HOMES *By* **JASON DUAINE HAHN**

All Paul Steklenski and his wife, Michelle, wanted was a dog. But every time they visited pet shops near their home in Schwenksville, Pa., all they left with was a "creepy feeling" from seeing animals confined to a box behind glass. Steklenski eventually adopted a rescue pup named Tessa. Along the way, though, he also learned about an underground pet-rescue network fighting to reduce the nearly 1.5 million shelter animals euthanized each year as they compete for attention against mass-breeding facilities. And he knew he needed to become part of it. "Adopting opened my eyes to a world I didn't even know existed," says Steklenski. "It changes the way you look at everything."

Driven by this revelation and his skill for flying, the former Army tank crewman founded Flying Fur Animal Rescue (flyingfuranimalrescue.org), a nonprofit dedicated to saving shelter dogs and cats at risk of being euthanized. Equipped with a 48-year-old airplane he had raised $70,000 to purchase, Steklenski generally flies up to a dozen animals twice a month from a pickup point in North Carolina to rescue volunteers in New York and New Jersey. "While they're sitting next to me," he says, "I think they know things are going to get better."

Since its founding in 2015, the organization has rescued more than 964 animals. And Steklenski, who has transported as many as 23 animals on a single flight, spends about $12,000 a year of his own money to keep the Fur flying. "I get a tremendous amount of satisfaction doing this," says Steklenski, a network engineer who wants to expand the effort to help even more animals. "I will do this as long as I have a paycheck and a pulse." ●

'Helping these animals just changes the way you look at everything'
—PAUL STEKLENSKI

COURTESY PAUL STEKLENSKI(5)

TRUE CRIME

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People

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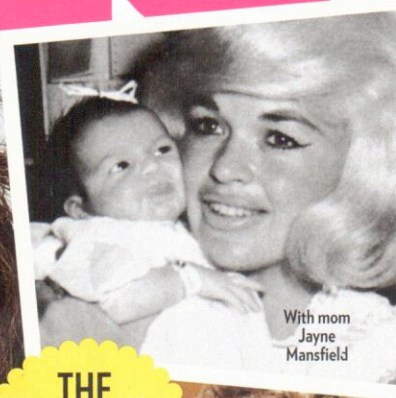
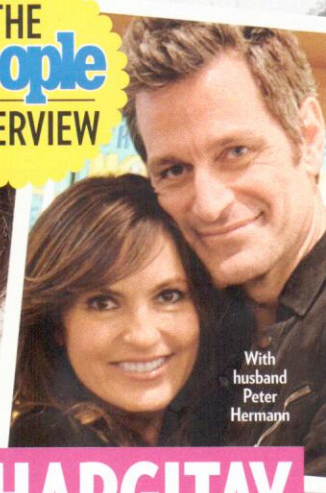


With mom Jayne Mansfield

THE People INTERVIEW



With husband Peter Hermann

"In my 40s...my dreams came true"

MARISKA HARGITAY

LIFE, LOSS & FINDING LOVE

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