

QUINTESSENTIAL PEOPLE®

Honoring  
**HARLEIGH  
GARCIA**

BY LISA STAMOS

Harleigh Garcia is joined  
by Chloe and Xam.

# Fostering Goodness

**H**ARLEIGH GARCIA has the remarkable combination of compassion, grit, relentless work ethic, humanity, fearlessness, and leadership for a person in her mid-20s. She is the CEO of an organization she founded in September 2019, Border Tails Rescue, which is an Illinois-licensed nonprofit based in Northbrook dedicated to animal rescue and welfare. She has a staff of 27. Her clients are man's best friends.

This forward-thinking entrepreneur puts into motion the accumulation of knowledge she gathers on every adventure, including turning some of those lessons into a book, "Taco's Tales-Finding My Forever Home," which is about her first international canine rescue during a family trip to Mexico. When traveling with her husband Rafael, the couple ends up at shelters and helping with local rescue efforts wherever they go. Rafael says, "There's never a dull moment with Harleigh."

Her first encounter with animal welfare happened when she was a girl of 10. A neighbor near her grandmother's home left four Pitbull puppies out in the cold with little to no care. Harleigh's parents said that if she could convince the neighbors to give the puppies to her, she would pay them a small fee. Harleigh was able to rescue two. And so began her negotiating skills. "Animals have always been my greatest passion," Harleigh said. "Animals don't have rights, like people do." After some of her early rescues, she started incubating what would become a vital rescue organization with efforts through social media, to take in dogs that needed a home.

Today, Border Tails Rescue has achieved great success in not only helping dogs find love, care, and a forever home, but their team also helps people. Situations include people facing homelessness, an injury making pet care

## HERE ARE SOME WORDS THAT OTHERS SHARED ABOUT HARLEIGH GARCIA

### Vicki Goodman, MOTHER

From the time Harleigh was a young child, she has had a deep love of animals and a concern for animal welfare and what she can do to help homeless dogs, in particular. At 13, she requested no gifts for a birthday party and raised \$1,600 for Orphans of the Storm. At 15, she again requested no gifts and raised \$1,200 for Illinois Horse Rescue of Will County. At 13, she also began volunteering at any event that would allow someone her age. When she turned 16, she began volunteering at Wright Way Rescue and earned the Presidential Gold Volunteer award, given to people who volunteer over 250 hours in a year. She continued to volunteer at Wright Way for three years, even through her first year of college at Loyola University Chicago.

Starting her rescue was not without huge sacrifices, both financially and personally. Harleigh used her own savings and wedding money to get it started. For the first two years, she earned no salary at while working six days a week sometimes 12 hours a day. Only in the last two years has she been able to take a modest salary. I am proud to say the in the past three years, she has completed over 6,000 adoptions and has 27 employees. She has always been very driven and a hard worker and has used those skills to grow Border Tails Rescue to one of the largest non-kill rescues in the state. She has had to battle misguided perceptions that she is young and couldn't do this, and she has proven the nay sayers wrong.

difficult, inability to cover the costs of their dog's care or food, or elderly people wanting a care plan for their beloved pet's future. One of Harleigh's goals is to open a low-cost spay and neuter clinic, near her building, and eventually a mobile clinic for reaching more pet owners.

Great care is put into matchmaking efforts to help families find the right dog. Harleigh wants people to ask shelters about their take-back policy, in case the adoption doesn't work out well. She believes that shelters should be supportive about this, have open adoption policies, and not be judgmental about situations. "People want the perfect fit, and we make sure the adoption will be good for the dog and the people," Harleigh said. "I also want people to know that there are pure-breed dogs in shelters. It just takes a little patience to find them." Harleigh is also passionate about having the public help their local shelters with volunteer efforts and donations as the demands are significant.

"When an adoption happens, we are making little families, and it's the best day of a dog's life," Harleigh said. She speaks about the incredible value of dogs to positively impact people's lives, especially for improving mental health. In one poignant case, a young woman who adopted a dog said it saved her outlook, and her life.

Harleigh experienced bullying in school, and she knows its impact. She notes that studies confirm that there is a connection between how children treat animals and how they treat their peers. "Parents need to teach their children to have kindness toward animals," she said. "It's not common sense; kindness needs to be taught and modeled."

Harleigh balances her enormous level of compassion with the cruelty she encounters in her job. "You have to compartmentalize, and it's hard not to be cynical." Fortunately, she says, there is mostly good.



Harleigh Garcia provides a medical treatment to Mr. Pookie String Cheese.

### Karen Collins-Boddy, FRIEND

I first met Harleigh Garcia (then Goodman!) as a junior in high school at Loyola Academy. Little did I know that making acquaintances with the girl next to me in history class would lead to a beautiful friendship for which I will forever be grateful. Harleigh is truly the definition of a friend who is with you through thick and thin. As someone who has been on the receiving end of her generosity of spirit and has observed her many times through the years, I can say that she is genuine in giving her time, love, and inner light.

Harleigh has a true talent for forming connections and bringing out the joy in people; she pays attention to details and is one of the most thoughtful people I know. She sacrifices her time when it is inconvenient and does it with a smile in a world that can be so self-centered that it is a rarity.

No wonder she took her passion for volunteering with animals and made it her life work. She views her job through a holistic approach that ensures that the dignity of animal life is preserved and that genuine love bonds are formed between dogs and adopters. Harleigh fosters this same love in her personal life and through community events she does within her shelter. She has a talent for seeing the dogs at their worst and bringing them to their full potential. I admire how she juggles her busy work and being a fantastic wife, daughter, aunt, and friend with such poise and positivity. However, I am unsurprised; I have seen her build upon her strong personality traits over the years and stay the course. She works hard and stays steadfast, making her a fantastic shelter owner and, luckily, my best friend.

### Rafael Garcia, HUSBAND

Harleigh Garcia is my rock, my best friend, and my greatest blessing. From the moment I met her, I knew that she was someone special, someone who would change my life in ways I never thought possible.

One of the things that I love most about Harleigh is her kindness and compassion for dogs. She has a heart of gold and is always willing to lend a helping hand to any dog in need. Her selflessness is truly inspiring and has taught me to be a better person.

Just a few of our adventures have been pulling an all-nighter at the vet to assist with a C-section on a new intake, fostering 70+ dogs on a whim, spending our honeymoon assisting a spay neuter campaign, and even bringing 12 dogs back to Chicago that same trip. There's never a dull moment with Harleigh and I'm glad to be part of her journey and will always support her.

I am forever grateful for her presence in my life, and I cherish every moment we share together. She is my everything, and I will always do everything in my power to show her just how much she means to me. I love my wife more than words can express, and I am grateful every day for the love and light she brings into my life.

### Dan Goodman, FATHER

It is with great pride that I write regarding my daughter Harleigh Garcia, founder and executive director of Border Tails rescue. Border Tails Rescue (BTR) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to saving the lives of dogs that have been abandoned, neglected, abused, injured, or otherwise find themselves sick, alone, afraid, and unloved. She does this for dogs born in the United States, Mexico, and other countries.

From the time Harleigh was a young girl, as we traveled in the United States and beyond, she would always on each vacation ask that she and I go to the dog shelters to see the dogs and to learn what if anything we could do to help them as she was always a true animal lover. What a great quality I always thought, and so I gladly went with her.

A quick story. While visiting family in Little Rock Arkansas, Harleigh and I visited their shelter. We took 12 dogs home with us in our Escalade. It was all very last minute. We rented an additional car for my wife and son. Covid had just began. We drove all day and arrived at my office parking lot at approximately 11 p.m. Unbeknown to me, Harleigh had made the

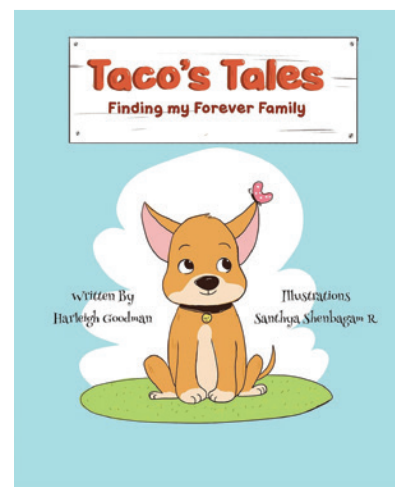
arrangements with people to foster or adopt each of those dogs.

That was the beginning. At 20 years of age Harleigh founded BTR. In her first year she adopted out and saved approximately 700 dogs. Since then, she has saved approximately 6,500 dogs. She is now 25 years old and has done so much good in the world pursuing her passion. Her mother Vicki and I could not be any prouder. We wish her happiness and success always in the pursuit of this passion. Thank you for acknowledging this achievement.

### Isabel Yunker, FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE

I first met Harleigh in 2019 as I was embarking on my career in animal welfare, and she was volunteering at the shelter where I worked. We hit it off immediately, united by our shared passion for animal rescue—and our Aquarius connection! We spent countless hours working to place the shelter's dogs and cats into loving foster homes, staging fun photo shoots to highlight our long-term residents on Facebook, providing potential adopters with all the resources they needed, and even hosting late-night pizza parties for our adult dogs.

Harleigh is a true catalyst for a new era in animal rescue. She takes in the dogs that many overlook and creates an inclusive environment for everyone in our community. I feel incredibly fortunate to have had the opportunity to know and work alongside her! 🐾



Harleigh Garcia visits with Big Bertha.