

Renee Downs, A Ferret-Friendly "Hurricane"

Ferret enthusiast Renee Downs spreads good will wherever she travels.

By Rebecca Stout

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Many people in the ferret community liken the energy of Renee Downs to the force of a Category 5 hurricane. She explodes onto the scene to aid ferrets and ferret lovers and, like a storm, blows right back out to move on to another location. Renee Downs has many ferret friends.

Meeting Renee

I'll never forget the day that this fascinating personality burst into my life. During the winter of 2001, I adopted a ferret from a faraway shelter that was overwhelmed by a massive ferret rescue. The problem? How to get my new little love to my home.

The answer came by way of a phone call from a wayward stranger who had adopted from the same shelter. The bubbly voice with a strong Southern drawl on the other end of the line presented a solution before I knew it. In no time, I found myself looking at a very animated young woman swinging her legs out of a very used SUV. Sporting a spectacular smile and offering a good old fashioned Southern greeting, this stranger and ferret enthusiast delivered my baby into my arms.

Introductions were barely made when Downs opened the back of her SUV to reveal her family of traveling ferrets. Next thing I knew, a picnic was laid out for human and ferret alike right there on the spot. I was barely wiping my mouth and thanking her when she packed up, piled into her SUV and began pulling away. I shouted to her that I wanted to reimburse her for gas and time, but Downs waved me off and shouted back, "No thank you. But you know what you can do for me?" The body of perpetual motion ceased and she looked at me with steadfast eyes, "You can promise me that you will do the same for someone else one day."

One Woman, So Many Talents

Hurricane Renee, as people in the ferret community often call her, leads a colorful life. She is a master scuba diver and instructor, an American Red Cross team leader and disaster instructor, an audiologist, a private pilot, a Ph.D. student, and much more. She has lived on the Gaza strip as well as more than nine U.S. states. During her downtime she creates wonderful dishes in the kitchen, enjoys the outdoors, learns to play the banjo and even tap dances.

"I was raised to believe I can do anything I choose, if I am willing to pay the price to do it," Downs said. "I love a challenge. I want to know everything and see everything. It is worth putting up with things I don't like in order to see and do the things others can't. I will try almost anything once, twice if I like it."

Ah, but this article is about ferrets isn't it? Although it doesn't sound like it so far, let's look closer. Downs' doctoral studies are for bioacoustics, and she is currently studying ferrets. Her experience with the Red Cross helps build up a new organization called F.E.R.R.E.T., the Ferret Emergency Response Rescue and Evacuation Team.

Claiming everywhere to be home, she lives the life of a nomad traveling the country with her band of wayward weasels, helping wherever and however she can. Downs has volunteered and generously given her time to various shelters, organizations and individuals in every state she has ever lived, and also in every state she has visited. No doubt this experience aids her as a committee member of the International Ferret Congress (IFC). Her charismatic personality is enjoyed by many who attend the shelter dinners she cooks at the various symposiums and also earned her the master of ceremonies job at the 2007 International Ferret Symposium in Portland.

Page 2 >>

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