



# Critters For The Cure™ Woman's Best Friend

By RYAN STAYTON



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Clancy Kress runs a non-profit that benefits women with breast cancer, and as you can imagine, she's heard some incredible stories about women and their amazing critters.

ONE OF HER FAVORITES WAS from a survivor whose dog started licking her repeatedly in one particular spot, and when she went to wipe off the slobber, she felt the lump.

The fact that this woman was a breast cancer survivor is only half the story; equally important was her relationship with her dog, who quite probably saved her life in more ways than one. This was but one of the many amazing stories that Clancy has heard since she began Critters For The Cure ([www.crittersfortheure.com](http://www.crittersfortheure.com), 301-977-3776, [info@crittersfortheure.com](mailto:info@crittersfortheure.com)).

Clancy started Critters two years ago after Ally, her best friend, went from stage one to stage four breast cancer, meaning it had spread to a vital organ – in her case, the liver, a prognosis which had no cure, only hopeful treatment options. Rather than focusing on

the fear she felt, Clancy decided to focus her energies on Critters.

"I came up with Critters For The Cure™ because we're both suckers for animals," Clancy describes. "I've taken in a million strays over the years, and so has she. Research tells us--and the women I've met through Critters validates it--that when people battle this dreadful disease, having a pet may be the only reason a woman gets out of bed in the morning. Not all people are fortunate enough to have a network of family and friends, so a pet might be the only support they have."

What she also pointed out was that battling cancer is expensive, and unfortunately, many women in the Washington Metro area are either uninsured or underinsured. They're forced to make some difficult life decisions that someone battling cancer should never have to face. Clancy pointed out, for

instance, that most assistance programs do not pay for anti-nausea medication, wigs, scarves, acupuncture, or Procrit® shots (to increase a patient's immunity). All proceeds from Critters For The Cure™ go to Clancy's Critters Patient Treatment Assistance Fund (CPTAF) program, which then makes sure these patients don't have

beyond procedural treatments.

"We'll pay for a dog walker if you're too sick to walk your puppy," Clancy explains. "If you're battling breast cancer and have financial difficulties, we don't want you to have to struggle between filling your prescription for nausea medication or taking your sick cat to the vet. No

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to do without such necessary treatments. They even pay for pet walkers.

During her first year, Clancy's efforts were limited to donations and sales of Critters For The Cure™ bandanas, collars and leashes, but this year she launched an annual Critters Calendar/Magazine fundraiser to increase visibility to both the medical community and the general public; both are available on her website.

The calendar features 14 amazing breast cancer survivors and their critters – 14 dogs, two kitties, and Mr. Bunnis, the rabbit, while the magazine features background on the disease, the foundation, and most memorably, the touching and inspiring stories of these breast cancer survivors.

Clancy's son, Jay, is a graphic designer and produced the project, but it was still more work than Clancy expected.

"I decided to take off three months for it," she says, "but three became eight. But this was the neatest thing I've ever done, so I can't say I was sorry. I met amazing people and was asked to speak to breast cancer groups."

She doesn't get paid for her work with Critters, but her calendar models volunteer to give her a hand and if the charity gets big enough it may become her full-time job.

A secondary goal of Critters is to increase awareness of the disease. As important as treatment is, its effectiveness is highly dependent on women doing monthly breast self-examinations and getting an annual mammogram. Critters pet accessories, and their annual calendar/magazine sets are all designed to remind women of the importance of taking these preventative measures.

Clancy and Critters For The Cure™ know you can't necessarily prevent the disease from happening, but you can do more to prevent patients from having to make difficult financial decisions during this terrible time in their life, and Critters has recently begun to help women

one should have to choose one over the other. Some women can't afford pet food because of hospital bills or treatment co-payments. We will attempt to cover what most organizations won't, as long as it makes sense, and as long as we have funds. We are not fool-hearty with our money as that would be irresponsible."

Clancy plans to continue running Critters For

The Cure™ as a grassroots, totally volunteer organization supporting Washington area women, using the calendar/magazine project and donations as her primary fundraising means. She is hopeful their calendar project will gain national recognition by its second publication in September.

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"All I know is that the love I get from my two rescue critters is so unconditional," Clancy says. "It's the same story I hear from all my Critter Calendar Women. The bond only increases when you face the hardship of breast cancer."

Though her goal is to help women financially and recognize their relationships with their pets, her involvement has sparked friendships with everyone she's met through her calendar project and she stays in touch with all of them.

Sounds like Critters for the Cure's love is equally unconditional.

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