

Survival of the littlest

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AUSTIN, Texas — Hurricane Harvey showed how strong Texans can be. Thousands overcame the disaster through perseverance and the sheer will to survive, and perhaps none of them exemplify our fighting spirit more than Meg and Paty.

Left behind when the Morrow family fled their Plum Grove farm, Meg and Paty had to do whatever they could to stay above steadily rising floodwaters, and they found ingenious ways to do it.

“Meg [is] my little Nigerian dwarf goat. I’ve witnessed it 100 times [and] I have pictures and video proof that Meg, as a baby, used to love to jump on things, other animals included,” said Lester Morrow, an 8th grade teacher and athletic coach. “I don’t doubt for a minute that Meg found her way onto the top of a big animal’s back. And how long was she up there? Long enough to survive these floodwaters.”

Skeptical? How about Paty’s survival story?

“Paty, my pot-bellied pig, was always a swimmer. She’d come into the pool ... [and] when she got tired, her body became like a fishing cork,” Morrow recalled. “Her little snout would come above the water, and she’d just float straight up and down.”



Morrow thinks Paty fishing-corked long enough to let the floodwaters recede and make it to safety. That may sound crazy, but on a farm where 14 full-sized goats, 10 to 15 cows and several horses drowned, it's the only way Morrow can explain her survival.

If this story sounds familiar, you're probably one of the millions who viewed Morrow's tearful reunion with Meg and Paty online. Morrow filmed the scene to share with his oldest son, but the footage quickly went viral. One version, posted on Facebook by website The Dodo, accumulated more than 39 million views.

"It was kind of neat to see [people] falling in love with your animals," Morrow said. "You know, I've loved them; they're a part of my family."

It was the love between Morrow and his animals that captured the world's attention. His video begins by showing Morrow's driveway, which was still largely flooded, three days after he had evacuated. As he trudged through knee-high water, Morrow pointed out debris like a set of stairs that had floated onto his property.

Then he spotted Paty running toward him into the water.

"Oh my God! There's Paty!" Morrow suddenly screamed, audibly sobbing. "Paty! Oh my God, baby. How did you survive that?! ... I know you're so scared, baby."

Viewers online thought Meg had run to Morrow because she missed her dad and wanted love, he said, "But I know she wanted her oatmeal."



Then he saw Meg. Overcome with emotion, he screamed her name, but it came out like a goat's bleat: "Me-e-e-eg!"

Next he found three horses that had survived, with some injuries.

"Oh my God, babies, come here," he sobbed. "I'm so sorry we couldn't help you all."

The emotional scene sped across the globe, generating an outpouring of support and offers of assistance from nearly every continent.

"I always saw our country as the humanitarians of the world," Morrow said. "How shocking it was to [see] people from overseas, people from countries that have a lot less than what we have, offering so much because they love those animals."

The support from around the world may have impressed Morrow's students even more than it did him. His 8th graders loved that their teacher went viral — and they loved making fun of him for showing his emotion.

"I was the laughingstock of the school for a while," he said. "I'd walk into the hallway and I'd hear 'Me-e-e-eg!' up and down the halls. It was a lot of fun."

His students also tracked the worldwide reaction to the video, using a "Paty Gone Wild" map in his classroom to plot the points from which viewers had sent supportive messages.



Those messages provided the encouragement Morrow needed to come home every day after school and spend hours learning new skills and working to make his house habitable again after floodwaters damaged his first floor and many belongings.

“You come across these messages that people send you, just pushing you along, [and] you use that as a fire to keep going,” he said. “And a few months later, you’ve got a kitchen, you’ve got a living room [and] you’ve got another Xbox for your boys to play with.”

For additional information on Hurricane Harvey and Texas recovery, visit the Hurricane Harvey disaster web page at www.fema.gov/disaster/4332, Facebook at www.facebook.com/FEMAharvey, the FEMA Region 6 Twitter account at www.twitter.com/FEMARegion6 or the Texas Division of Emergency Management website at <https://www.dps.texas.gov/dem/>.

