



## In Memory of Ruby Brown

by Michael J. Walker

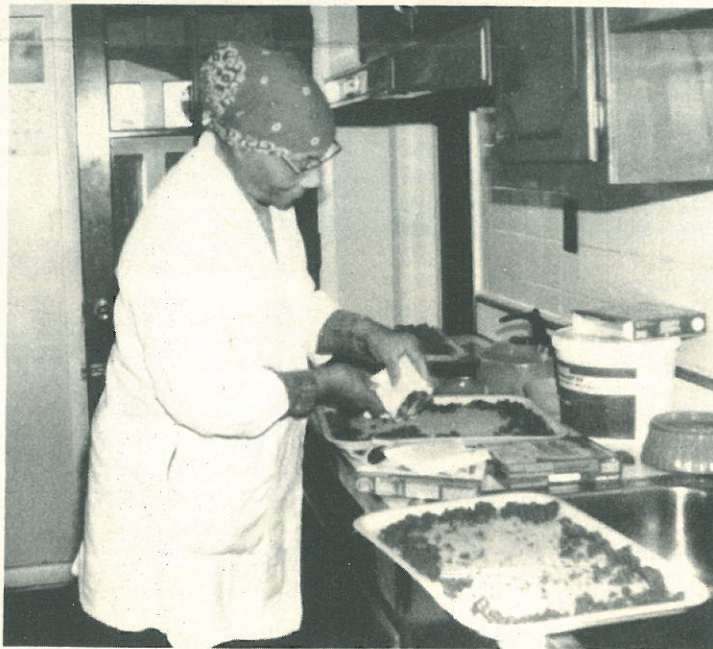
They buried Ruby Brown on Thursday, September 13, 1984 in her beloved Virginia countryside outside Leesburg. She passed away from a heart attack suffered on September 8.

A lot of people in the Washington, D.C. area knew her and will miss her, but it is the homeless cats and dogs who will miss her the most this Christmas. That's because she was chief animal caretaker at Peace Plantation, the cat and dog sanctuary she managed for over 30 years for the National Humane Education Society on the outskirts of Leesburg.

I first met Mrs. Brown four years ago when I had to find a home for my four cats because my landlady in Bethesda said the management of our apartment building no longer permitted tenants to keep pets on the premises. Distraught with worry over my cats, I took my vet's advice and brought them to Peace Plantation. I chose this haven because the vet said it did not practice euthanasia and instead either found new homes for the animals or cared for them for as long as they lived.

"I know how hard it is to give up your pets," Mrs. Brown told me as I stood there at the sanctuary fighting back my tears, "but we will try to find a new home for them, and if we cannot, we will care for them here," she said. I looked around and saw how well the cats looked in their special yards and rooms and how well the dogs appeared in their kennels.

As it turned out, she and the other staff of the society found homes for two of my cats, and cared for the other two until they died of old age this year.



**Mrs. Brown concocting her special nutritious meals of dry, moist, and canned foods and fresh vegetables for the cats.**

*Photo by Jan M. Walker.*

"I try not to favor any cat or dog in our charge," she told me, adding, "and I strive to pass my love to all of them in my care."

Loving and caring for that many cats and dogs required constant replenishment of food. In all kinds of weather, Mrs. Brown was nearby in a home owned by NHES to tend to the animals. Feeding was a special time, when Mrs. Brown concocted blends of dry and soft canned foods with fresh vegetables for nutritious tasty meals for the animals.

"I weep when one of my charges passes away, but I appreciate it every time a new home is found for some of the other animals," she told me.

According to Mrs. Brown, "No task is too menial when it

comes to tending to the cats and dogs." I could see that she helped in all the chores, including removing leftover food and cleaning litter boxes so no odor lingered. Visitors always complimented her about the cleanliness of the indoor and outdoor quarters.

Also, every animal required regular checking to see if they were sick and required veterinary treatment. "Despite these and many other problems, I have loved every minute I have worked here," Mrs. Brown said.

She spent about 30 years in the employment of the society. In that time she and the other NHES staff found homes for more than 25,000 abandoned cats and 1,700 homeless dogs.

But beside this, she freed Anna Briggs, President of NHES, from having to constantly attend to the cats and dogs at the haven.

Mrs. Briggs often had to be away directing fund raising drives to bring in enough money from the public to keep Peace Plantation out of the red. Mrs. Briggs also had to be away capturing neglected, hungry strays in many Northeast cities so they could be brought to Peace Plantation for loving care.

Mrs. Brown told me, "Mrs. Briggs hired me first as a maid. I was a widow with six children and no income. Soon after Mrs. Briggs opened Peace Plantation as a cat and dog haven, she trained me to manage and run the sanctuary. I'll appreciate her generosity for as long as I live."

Mrs. Briggs hired Mrs. Brown as chief animal caretaker when much of Virginia, like other southern states, looked down on blacks. "I gave her the responsibility," Mrs. Briggs says, "because she was the most loving person I knew for the job. I cared little about the color of her skin. The only test was whether she could care for the cats and dogs day in and day out when I had to be absent. She told me she could and that was enough."

And now at the age of 76, Mrs. Brown has passed away. "I and hundreds of other animal lovers in this area will miss her," Mrs. Briggs says, adding, "So too will the many cats and dogs she cared for. She was that rare kind of human being whose love for life and for all creatures permeated all her activities."

She is survived by four sons, two daughters, a sister, a brother, and a sister-in-law.