



Robert Kovacik

(cont'd from p.20)

His sister Lisa lives with her family and two rescue dogs she cherishes in Florida.

Sadly, his brother Stephen, a highly-acclaimed photographer and political activist, died suddenly in December, 2009. It was a great personal loss for Robert, who idolized his older sibling. Stephen was also a dog lover who, even when he was taken ill on a road trip with his mother, implored her to take care of his rescue dog Jason instead of coming to the hospital with him. He died a short time later of a pulmonary embolism. Brother David now has Jason constantly in tow. "Just as Stephen would have expected from his family. We'd never let him down."

It's no surprise that he devotes much of his precious down-time working for animal welfare. "I am so honored to be an advocate for Best Friends Animal Society, the only national animal welfare organization focused exclusively on ending the killing of dogs and cats in America's shelters," he says. Best Friends leads the No-Kill Los Angeles (NKLA) initiative, which is focused on ending the killing of dogs and cats in city shelters by 2017, and operates two centers, the NKLA Pet Adoption Center in West L.A. and the Best Friends Pet Adoption and Spay/Neuter Center in Mission Hills. It seems to be working, as there was an 84 percent live release rate in Los Angeles shelters for first quarter 2016.

The thing he is most excited about this month is the second annual "Clear the Shelters/Desocupar Los Albergues" initiative, jointly sponsored by NBC4 and Telemundo 52. The nationwide adoption event will be held July 23. Nearly 20,000 pets found their forever homes in 2015, when some 400 animal shelters across the country partnered with NBC Owned Television Stations. NBC4 Southern California secured participation from more than 50 shelters and hopes more people come out to adopt pets. In a single day, the station found homes for more than 2,500 animals!

Participating shelters will open their doors on July 23 from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and will reduce the usual adoption fee to only \$20.00. On July 29, NBC4 will air a national 30-minute special hosted by Robert, that will highlight the success stories of "Clear the Shelters" and help raise awareness about pet adoptions.

So, with all this animal advocacy, what about his own household? Any dogs? "Yes, I have two black dogs that were rescued off the streets of LA, named Hayworth and Hudson," he shares. "The names sound like old Hollywood stars, but they are actually named after the streets where I found them." Hudson is a Newfoundland-Chow mix and Hayworth is a Border Collie-Lab mix. One of his great joys is taking the dogs for a morning walk in the Hollywood Hills with his two pups while he glances through the LA Times to get a jump on the news before starting his long days at NBC4.

Robert has also gone to bat for friends such as celebrity, philanthropist, business woman and animal lover, Lisa Vanderpump. The *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* star and owner of popular restaurant Sur and Pump, was at the Polo Lounge in Beverly Hills on Christmas Eve, 2010 with her husband Ken and Robert when a drunken man approached the table and began verbally assaulting Ms. Vanderpump. Robert jumped up to defend her and ended up suddenly being punched in the face by the man, taking 20 stitches in his lip for his gallantry. Robert said days later his New Year's resolution: "Learn to duck!" Happily, there are no scars and Lisa remains one of his closest friends. With a friend like Robert, who needs a bodyguard?

He is known as being a pretty cool character, something perfectly illustrated in what many know as "the cockroach incident." He was covering a story live and suddenly a giant cockroach appeared on his jacket and crawled uncomfortably close to his face; but the veteran reporter didn't bat an eyelash, continuing with his story nonplussed. The footage went viral on social media and even made the late night talk show highlight reels. He posted to his Twitter account: "Thanks viewers for noticing the "guest" in our live shot! Any names for my new pet?" Typical Kovacik humor, but his NBC4 employers bested him with their response "Nothing bugs Robert Kovacik". The phrase cool under pressure comes to mind. And how many journalists do you know with their own "jingle"? It's catchy. Check it out on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwp_Q9s7IC0.

Does he have any weaknesses? He ruefully admits that, early in his life, he was a really, really bad driver. "My nickname was "Crash Kovacik" due to my propensity to keep totaling our cars," he says with a grin. "My mom actually begged the judge to take away my license at one point." But, not to worry car-crazed Angelenos. "I got my license back and my mother actually trusted me enough with a car when I went to Brown."

His mother is obviously his biggest fan and the feeling is mutual. "She is an amazing woman. My parents named me after Robert Kennedy. My father was an attorney but politics were his passion. Stephen Kovacik Jr. managed numerous high-profile campaigns from

(cont'd on next page)

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