



# Meet Julie Burke

a.k.a.  
Dr. JUL-little!

By Nancy Dewar

Rye resident Julie Burke grew up in Portsmouth and because of her immense love of animals, her family sometimes called her Dr. JUL-little! As a child she would wander down to the Griffin Farm on the corner of Richards Avenue and South Street to visit the geese and sheep. Sheba (an English Sheep dog) and Shari (a gray cat) were the first of her childhood pets, and trips to visit her aunt's horses were frequent. Little did she know that someday she would be caring for hundreds of creatures...4,000 miles from home in Nicaragua!

Julie met her husband Matt through a mutual friend. At that time she had an infant daughter (Addie), Matt was living in Rye building houses, and Julie owned a gardening company. They married in 2004, adopted their daughter Natalia from Guatemala in 2005 and their family was complete with their rescued cattle dog named Zuzu. When the housing and building market tanked in 2008, the Burkes took a leap of faith and acted on Matt's dream of opening a burrito joint. For years he had wanted to start "Fatty Matty's Burritos." They ended up calling it Las Olas which means "the wave," as Matt is crazy about surfing. Their first restaurant opened in Exeter, and there are now locations in Hampton and Wells, Maine.

Matt began taking annual surf sojourns to Playa San Diego in Nicaragua in 2009. Julie

and the girls joined him on a trip in 2012. "It is poor now, but it was really poor then. Lots of wood houses covered in plastic," Julie explained. "Back then people were getting around on horses, bikes and motorcycles. Now there are more cars, and the town is a recognized municipality. It's about a 1 ½ hour drive from Managua to the coast. When I first started going down, we had to take a dirt road from the highway to Playa San Diego. It was mud puddles and severe dust. Now it's cobble stone and much faster."

They stayed for two months, and Julie and the girls began volunteering at a local orphanage. "We live in a pretty privileged area, and I wanted the girls to make a connection with others less fortunate. We played with the kids and did lots of crafts." They volunteered again on their next trip,

and Julie fell in love with a special 5-year-old little girl named Belen who had recently come to the orphanage. Julie smiled and said, "I called Matt and asked if we could adopt again!" They hired a top adoption lawyer, and remarkably Belen was home with her new family in New Hampshire within one year.

While back in New Hampshire, Nicaragua was always in Julie's heart. She started her "Double-Play Gear" project in 2013, where she gathered used baseball equipment and gear for the kids. They end up shipping over four pallets to Nicaragua. The Burkes continued to travel to Nicaragua a few times each year and bought a house in Playa San Diego in 2017. Julie was well aware of all the animals that needed help. When they were moving into their home, a scruffy dog with shredded ears showed up



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The Burke Family...Belen, Julie, Natalia, Addie & Matt

wagging his tail. "He was a very sick street dog covered in mange. We fed him, got him medicine, and named him Flaco (Spanish for 'skinny'). He was a special boy. Sadly, we had to let him go in February 2020 because of a tumor."

Julie's involvement with the local animals really began because of her kids and her friends Dave and Heather Cropper's daughter. The girls decided to do a lemonade stand at Cinnamon Rainbow in Hampton, owned by the Croppers. They wanted to donate half of the money to the NHSPCA and the other half to help dogs in Nicaragua. So, Julie went online to find a group to donate to and found Elisa Quiroz, the founder of a large animal rescue (Fundacion ADAN) based in Managua. Julie began sending funds and supplies to Elisa and eventually established NicaLove.org as a formal non-profit in 2019.

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lie explained, "Cows are viewed as dollars, not pets. If you have cows, you have money. Horses are for work and not treated well. Dogs are guards or herding animals. They don't live in homes and eat off the streets. Two to three years is the average life span. They often die from distemper, parvo, parasites, tick diseases or starve."

Julie initiated and hosted the first local vet clinic in 2018 in Playa San Diego with a local veterinarian. They tended to about 25 animals that day and since have hosted close to 20 clinics with the attendance increasing every time. "Our largest clinic saw over 300 animals. It's really been an education process. Locals weren't educated about animal care nor have the money or access to help them. Initially it was a hard sell to get them to spay and neuter. Especially neutering, as they felt it took their dog's manhood away! Over time it's become less stigmatized, and we are seeing more repeat people arriving." It costs about \$20 for a spay or neuter; much more affordable than here but takes a lot of fundraising to do!

The Burkes recently purchased 10 acres near their home in San Diego to create a facility to house rescue animals. The plan is to move the animals from the 13 foster home locations that Elisa Quiroz oversees to one place that will provide housing and a vet clinic. The infrastructure is





# animal lover's profile



now place. The next step is building a structure that will include a small living area for the caretakers, an emergency quarantine area and covered fenced areas for the animals. Through fundraising efforts, Julie will cover the overhead, utilities, staffing, etc. for the facility. Ultimately, the long-term master plan includes an on-premise vet clinic (offering reduced or sliding scale fees for locals) and long- and short-term volunteer opportunities.

NicaLove's current goal is to raise \$50,000 to cover the infrastructure and first building. They received \$25,000 this summer as a gift from the New Hampshire Gives program and raised \$5,000 from a recent community yard sale. Julie also posts individual animals and their specific medical needs on Facebook and Instagram for donations for needed procedures. Her next big fundraising event, a Zoom call with certified animal communicators, will be held on October 21st in partnership with the Animal Communication Collective. These professionals graciously offer complimentary fundraisers for a variety of animal rescue groups. More information on this public event will be posted on NicaLove's website in early September.

Meeting Julie was such a treat! I loved her the minute we met, but I'm not sure how she does all that she does! A wife, mother of three daughters and two rescue pups, involvement with three restaurants, running an animal rescue in Nicaragua, fundraising and oh, not to mention...also assisting with other overlooked needs for her community in San Diego such as English and computer classes!

If you're interested in collaborating with Julie, she'd love for you to reach out to her.

(NicaLove.org)

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