

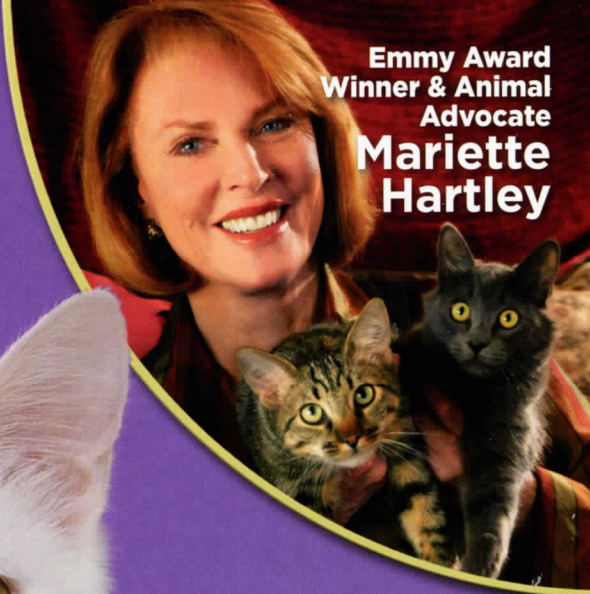
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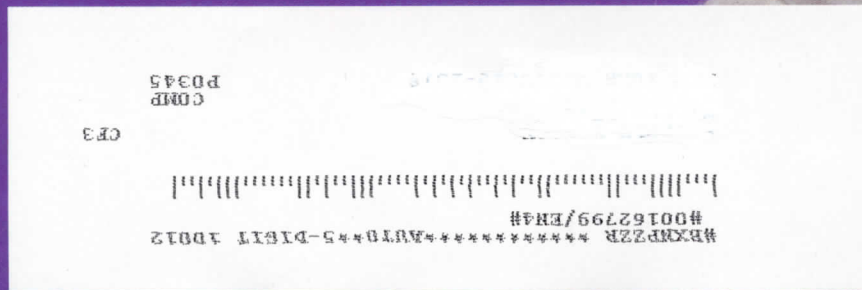
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# Advocacy & Rescue

CHAMPION FOR CATS

## From Volunteer to Vet

Meet three women who switched careers in order to care for cats.

CAT LOVERS WILL GIVE THEIR TIME, money and hearts to a cat, but will they change their career for catkind's sake? That's what has been happening at KittyKind, a cat rescue and adoption group in New York City. At least six volunteers have left their careers to pursue shelter medicine.

Three of the volunteers are Gayatri Dhavan, 30, a sophomore at the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, formerly a news producer at CNN; Emily Roye, 26, a sophomore at the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University in North Grafton, Mass., and a singer; and Marissa Yoo, 29, currently taking post-Bachelor of Fine Arts, pre-veterinary classes at Hunter College while she creates marketing material for a financial advisor in Manhattan.

### Deciding to Change

Cats, family and events influenced these women to change careers.

Dhavan grew up in India with "the occasional goat, cow, elephant or camel" walking into the front yard. Lacking local veterinarians, her family nursed sick animals with available medication. In 2002, while working at CNN in New York City, she joined KittyKind to "give something back," Dhavan says.

A nonprofit, all-volunteer organization, KittyKind helped adopt cats made homeless by the terrorist attacks on September 11. Dhavan volunteered for health maintenance. After a cat receives an initial health exam, it sometimes needs extra care. Dhavan learned to give supplements, antibiotics and comfort to stressed cats. In 2005, she decided to change careers.

"Volunteering at KittyKind and support from my best friend Adam propelled me to start taking pre-vet classes



COURTESY OF MARISSA YOO

Clockwise from left: Marissa Yoo; Gayatri Dhavan; and Emily Roye

after working at CNN for five years," Dhavan says. Although her job started at 4 a.m., she took evening classes in organic chemistry, molecular biology, calculus and physics at Hunter College. She ignored comments that she was too old to return to school. In the fall of 2009, she began attending veterinary school at the University of Pennsylvania, with a major in small animals and shelter medicine. Her goal is to influence veterinarians to volunteer with rescue groups.

Roye grew up with cats and a dog in New York's Westchester County in a family of doctors. She studied opera at Barnard College, but by her senior year, she had more passion for cats than auditions, she says. After graduation in 2005, she enrolled in pre-veterinary courses at Hunter College and Columbia University.

Roye worked in a veterinarian's office and joined KittyKind as a health volunteer.



COURTESY OF GAYATRI DHAVAN



COURTESY OF EMILY ROYE

Both of her rescued cats almost died due to medical problems, but she nursed them back to health. In 2009, they joined her when she left for Tufts/Cummings Veterinary School. Her major interests are shelter medicine and international livestock management, and she hopes that, through education, fewer people will relinquish animals.

Yoo grew up in New Jersey, learning as a child the value of spaying and neutering. Her brother was allergic to cats, so she adopted two rabbits. The two became 20. She paid to have the male neutered and found homes for the babies. Although she was always interested in becoming a veterinarian, Yoo wasn't "confident enough to follow through," she says.

In 2005, while working at the Montel Williams television show, she joined KittyKind to receive hands-on experience. She learned health maintenance, researched shelter protocols

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and once baked cookies for a fundraiser.

Yoo's rescued cat, Neo, convinced her to become a veterinarian. After many tests and surgeries, Neo was diagnosed with cryptococcus, a fungal disorder that required constant nursing. When Neo recovered, Yoo knew she could take care of animals for the rest of her life. In 2005, she began pre-veterinary classes at Hunter College, studying for a second Bachelor's degree in biology. She limits herself to one class a semester because of her job in finance. She hopes shelter medicine will limit disease and increase comfort for confined animals.

### Sacrifices and Gains

Since deciding to become veterinarians, these three students have had little time, money or social lives. Dhavan says her first year at veterinary school was overwhelming.

"The toughest part about going back to school is seeing other people your age getting married and starting families while you're moving back in time to start a whole new career," she says.

Roye was "exhilarated" at first and then exhausted. She wonders if there's room in her head to learn more. She misses her boyfriend, friends and family.

For more information on KittyKind, visit [www.kittykind.org](http://www.kittykind.org), or call 212-726-2652.

Yoo seeks balance to juggle work, school and relationships. They've gained benefits from the challenges. Dhavan is more confident

and believes in herself. Roye is learning to manage her time and life in ways she wasn't sure she was capable of. She's also taking classes for her Master's degree in public health. She even sings at school (therapy pets are her audience). Yoo says hard work leads to self-knowledge. She's discovering that she's good at math and science, courses she avoided at the New York University Tisch School of the Arts.

On their journey from volunteers to veterinarians, these women have helped hundreds of cats. Along the way, that gift has returned tenfold. 🐾

*Beverly Wilson is a teacher and freelance writer. She has volunteered at KittyKind since 1999. She has three rescued cats who tolerate her rescued retriever.*

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