

Lucky dog

By AMANDA GREENE

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Six years ago, author Jane Paley adopted a year-old yellow Lab she named Hooper, a Hurricane Katrina survivor from Lake Charles, La. In June, her book “Hooper Finds a Family: A Hurricane Katrina Dog’s Survival Tale” was published by HarperCollins. The children’s story chronicles Hooper’s journey from devastation to his new home on the Upper West Side.

While the book — which is told from Hooper’s point of view—is largely factual, Paley did have to do some educated guessing on what Hooper’s life was like in New Orleans, and worked closely with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries to find out what a puppy might have gone through under those circumstances.

“I speculated that Hooper’s family had to leave him behind and planned to come back for him, but had no idea about the natural disaster that was to come,” says Paley.

The story follows the intrepid pooch’s struggles to stay afloat in the flooded New Orleans streets and his time in the overcrowded shelter where he ended up in a cage, starving and homesick.

Meanwhile, back in New York, Paley’s family had just lost their beloved dog Hammer. In an effort to deal with her grief, Paley took to the Internet in search of a new pet and found the Web site for [Labs4rescue](#), a rescue organization for displaced Labrador retrievers. Katie Roush, one of its volunteers, sent Paley an e-mail with information about Hooper, along with a photo.

Soon thereafter, Paley and her husband, Larry, met Roush and Hooper in Richmond, Va., to adopt the dog. Paley sat in the back seat of the car with the sick pooch — he was suffering from heartworm and had a number of parasites—the entire way back to New York City.

The sudden transition from quiet roads to loud city streets wasn’t easy for Hooper, who spent eight weeks recuperating from his illness. But he slowly acclimated to the city.

“He’s a true Yankees fan,” says Paley. “He lies on the bed with us during games, and I swear he’s cheering on the team.”

But the Paleys are easily reminded of what he’s been through.

“He’s clearly experienced some trauma. He’s terrified whenever there’s thunder and lightning, and starts panting and wants to hide from the storm. If we have him on the bed with us and put a blanket over him, he’ll calm down a bit.”

And despite the fact that Labs are water dogs, Hooper won’t go near the stuff.

“He won’t even walk in a puddle — he’ll circumvent it. He just does not want to be wet; even a simple downpour upsets him.”

Like many survivors, Hooper has channeled his struggles into something good. Paley was taken with his natural empathy and calm temperament. Instead of ripping his toys to shreds like most pups, Hooper licks and holds them.

Hooper now works as a certified therapy dog, and visits patients in hospitals, nursing homes and physical therapy centers. He’s also involved in a program that matches dogs with young children.

“We rescued him and he rescued us,” says Paley. “He just has the instinct to provide comfort.”