

# Benji

## Off the leash!

### The Benji Story



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“We needed a dog that could express genuine emotion, a dog who could show anxiety, fear, happiness, warmth and love... a dog that could literally act.” These were the words of Joe Camp when he was searching for a dog to play the original Benji. “Because Benji is the primary three-dimensional character in the Benji films,” says Camp, Benji’s creator, “you live the Benji stories in Benji’s eyes. In Benji’s heart and soul. There are no talking dogs and animated mouths. You must hear the dialog in Benji’s eyes.”

From that beginning, Benji’s fame has extended around the globe. From Japan to Italy, from Australia to France, he has become the World’s Most Huggable Hero. He has traveled in France, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, Germany, Canada, Puerto Rico, South America, Hawaii and the Far East.

He was the second animal to be inducted into the American Humane Society’s Animal Actors Hall of Fame (Lassie was the first.); he has twice received the American Guild of Variety Artists’ Georgie Award as the Top Animal Entertainer of the year; his motion picture theme song “I

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## ADD ONE / ABOUT BENJI – RAGS TO RICHES

Feel Love” won a Golden Globe award and was nominated for an Academy Award and, along with Tom Cruise and Tom Hanks, he has been voted one of the ten most popular performers in the United States by Performer Q survey.

And recently, Camp was on the search again, this time through animal shelters all across the country.

The new Benji was adopted from the Humane Society of South Mississippi in Gulfport, Mississippi, on November 18, 2001. The mixed-breed terrier had been in the shelter for only two weeks when Camp came to town to see another dog in the shelter whose picture had been sent to him. When he arrived, however, the dog that caught Camp’s eye was another pup – and she has now become the next Benji.

The “new” Benji’s story is truly one of rags to riches. Before being picked up by the County Animal Control, the abandoned dog wandered the streets of Pass Christian, Mississippi, lost and alone. And less than five weeks after being rescued from the streets, she was adopted and featured on ABC’s *Primetime Thursday* and *Good Morning America*.

The search for the new Benji through the nation’s animal shelters began in Chicago and traveled to Minneapolis, St. Paul, Atlanta, Anniston (Alabama), Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Jackson and Gulfport, Mississippi. In addition, several national organizations and Internet pet adoption services helped spread the search through shelters all across the country and hundreds of photos were screened.

Benji upholds a legacy of adoption, as the original Benji dog was adopted from a Burbank Animal Shelter. According to the American Humane Association, that fact was directly responsible for the adoption of more than 1,000,000 dogs.

According to early test screenings, *Benji Off the Leash* “the best Benji movie ever! And the most fun!” It’s the perfect introduction of the new Benji because it is, in effect, her very own story, lost and alone on the streets of a small Mississippi town, struggling to save her mom from a backyard puppy mill while trying to avoid a pair of bungling dog catchers and a goofy dufus of a self-appointed, unwanted canine sidekick – all of which raise the Benji concept to a new level. Two dogs acting. Literally expressing their feelings and intentions, without words, without animation! Without special effects! One, caring and focused on goals; the other a lovable ditz, carefree and out for a good time. Together they are hilarious. Written by Joe Camp especially for the new Benji after her rescue, *Benji Off the Leash* will be released during the summer of 2004.

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