

Katrina Victim Wins Court Fight Over Dog

Judge rules that couple can't keep rescued canine they adopted.

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A dog rescued from Hurricane Katrina will go back to the Louisiana woman who says she's his rightful owner, rather than the San Diego couple who later adopted the dog, a judge has decided.

Arizona's Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Christopher Whitten ruled March 13 that the dog, who was named Pablo by his Louisiana owner, then renamed Boots by his new owners, should be returned to the first owner.

That owner is Paula Duming, who says she was forced to leave Pablo behind after the floodwaters surged after the 2005 hurricane.

"Unfortunately, no matter how this issue is resolved, a loving pet owner will lose their dog," Judge Whitten wrote in his ruling.

According to court testimony, emergency personnel rescued Duming from the second story of her Louisiana home in September 2005, shortly after the hurricane struck. But she was not allowed to take Pablo along in the helicopter, so she left him with food and water.

Pablo was rescued later that month by the Utah-based Best Friends Animal Society and then later flown to the Animals Benefit Club of Arizona, who found a foster home for the dog with a San Diego couple in December 2005.

The couple formally adopted him the following month.

Representatives from Best Friends argued the dog shouldn't have been put up for adoption. However, the Animals Benefit Club and the new owners claimed that the dog wasn't Duming's dog.

But a key piece of information presented at the trial — the number on the dog's vaccination tag and descriptions of the dog's choke chain — indicated that Boots and Pablo were the same dog.