



Bonnie Turner and her husband, Michael, on their farm.

ATLANTA, Georgia (CNN) -- I met Bonnie Turner seven years ago when I was looking for a puppy.

There was just simply no one better to turn to than the eccentric grandmother who loved animals so much that her 86-acre North Georgia farm was home to donkeys, goats, high-priced show dogs and even a few wayward deer.

On Saturday, nothing was left of that bucolic sanctuary after a 130-mph tornado ravaged it. Bonnie died, thrown 50 feet from her home as her husband, Michael, cried out her name, their neighbors Joe and Jamie Wheeler said.

Her death has shaken me. Images of the animals that died -- at least 35 dogs and 100 still missing -- make my voice crack when I speak about her.

But I want her to be remembered as more than a victim, as probably does the family of the tornado's second victim in Floyd County.

Bonnie -- whom everyone called Mrs. Bonnie -- was a retired veterinarian's assistant. Her husband, Michael, who now lies in a hospital in critical condition, built a home for them. Her "Mikey" was a man who knew that something beautiful takes time to build.

He spent hours making ornate clocks that decorated their home, and many more helping his wife oblige the physical rigors of taking care of dozens of animals. A band of Chihuahuas and a few of her award-winning American hairless terriers nipped at her ankles as she performed her daily chores.

On a cloudless day in April in 2001, I visited Bonnie with a friend. She told us to lie in the grass, and she went inside her house, unleashed about a dozen puppies and watched as they ran out the door toward us. They began licking our ears, noses and toes.

I noticed that a small, black-and-brown Chihuahua was trying to get my attention. I had been looking for a white female one, but Mrs. Bonnie would have none of that. "That's your dog, he likes you," she told me.

I named the 4-pound Chihuahua Jesse James.

During the years since, I often called Bonnie with questions about Jesse or dogs in general and she was always there to help.

I wish everyone could have met her and experienced some of the happiness she evoked in so many. She is a soul who will be deeply missed.

Bonnie left this quote on her Web site, www.flinthillkennel.com: "Beauty such as this is a gift, and I'm often in awe of this world we've been given."