The story of Zuca’s adoption began long before her trip to the United States and was only made possible through the collaboration of many selfless, caring people. Zuca’s life began lonely on the streets of Puerto Ayora. Several children found her alone late one night in June and out of concern for her well being brought her to Darwin Animal Doctors where they knew she would be safe. Dr. Ainoa Claudín and several veterinary student volunteers spayed Zuca and provided the excellent medical care she needed to restore her to full health. Then, Mayra Alvarez and Rene Heyer opened their doors and lives to Zuca and showed her the love and compassion she needed to trust humans and reveal her true, beautiful, playful, loving personality. As a veterinary student volunteer, I, like all those before me, immediately fell in love with Zuca. Every time our paths crossed, I was greeted with a wagging tail and endless kisses. Her goofy antics with her big sisters, Yara and Candy, had me constantly laughing and at the end of each day, once her puppy energy was exhausted, she would cuddle up beside me and warm my soul. I knew Zuca would be the perfect fit in my family back home and by the end of my two weeks at Darwin Animal Doctors, I was willing to do whatever it took to make that happen.

Zuca’s trip to the United States would have been impossible if it wasn’t for the exhaustive effort by Mayra Alvarez, Rene Heyer, Tod Emko, Dr. Ainoa Claudín and Terry Stone. All of them devoted much of their time, resources and emotional energy, to provide Zuca with all the medical care, safe transportation, paperwork and love needed to make such a long journey. It took several months to arrange, with a few set backs, including Zuca falling ill with a tick borne disease. Thanks to Mayra, Rene and the Darwin Animal Doctors, she was nursed back to full health. When the day came for Zuca to make her trip to JFK airport, I know it was very difficult for Mayra and Rene to say good-bye. But they knew at the arriving gate, a new family would be anxiously awaiting her arrival with open arm.

I will never forget the moment I first laid eyes on Zuca on American soil. After a long and scary flight, she was nervously curled up into a ball at the back of her crate. But when I called her name and ran up to her, Zuca perked right up with her tail thumping the walls. When I opened the door, she sprawled out across my lap, belly up, asking for tummy rubs, and showering me in kisses. It was one of the happiest moments of my life. We eagerly headed home to Philadelphia where Zuca’s new big sister, Cinder, and my girlfriend, Angie, whose ear I had been talking off about our newest family member since July, awaited our arrival. For Cinder and Zuca, it was love at first sight. They are bonded so closely now and are sisters in the truest sense of the word. From morning wrestles, to mid-afternoon naps, to late afternoon wrestles, and night time cuddles, they are inseparable. As she did in the Galapagos, Zuca has won over the hearts of everyone she has met. She has also been reunited with many of the other volunteers from the UPenn Veterinary School, including one of her favorites, Adam Chung.

Zuca has adapted wonderfully to her life her in the States, although I know she will never forget all of those at Darwin Animal Doctors who saved her life. I am forever grateful to all those at DAD who made this adoption possible. Zuca (who currently sleeps at my feet as I write this) has brought my family, Cinder and I so much happiness and love. She is the perfect addition to our family. She also serves as my motivation to continue pursuing my education to become a veterinarian so that I can give back to all the deserving animals in my community In closing, Zuca is the perfect example of what Darwin Animal Doctors represents, which is the collective effort of many people to give back to the deserving animals in our communities and to the environment that give so much to us, and ask for so little.