Then: The HSUS helped rescue Little Roy and 696 other cats from a Florida property in 2011 (inset).

Now: “He’s the most affectionate cat I’ve ever had,” Roy Ware says of Little Roy. “His whole life revolves around getting attention.”
Little Roy
Background: In June 2011, The HSUS helped rescue 697 cats from a single Florida property—a private sanctuary gone horribly wrong. Six months later, every treatable, adoptable cat had either found a new home or been placed with a shelter, sanctuary or rescue group.

Roy Ware opened the cage door, and the little orange cat leapt out.

It wasn’t uncommon for the cats to try to escape as Ware and other volunteers cleaned their cages in the aftermath of the largest cat rescue in HSUS history. But this one was different. This cat leapt out and clung to his chest. “He just wanted to be held,” says Ware, a retired corrections officer. “He didn’t want me to put him down for no reason. That kind of got me.”

So each day, after cleaning the cages, Ware would return to the last row of the last room, take the cat out and just sit there on the floor petting him. The other volunteers at the temporary shelter began referring to them as “Big Roy” and “Little Roy,” and the name stuck.

As did the connection.

“I did seven one-week stays, helping out,” Ware says, remembering: “Whenever I’d go home, I’d wonder how he was doing, if he was OK.” So on the third deployment, he applied to adopt Little Roy through the Alachua County Humane Society.

On the drive home to Miami, Ware took his new friend out of his carrier, and the cat spent the full six hours sitting in his lap. “Which was strange because you figure he’d be scared of being in the car. But I guess he knew he was safe.”

These days, Little Roy loves to sit in a window overlooking the backyard. He’s got a bit of a crush on the neighbor’s calico cat, Lucy. He’s also fond of his big stuffed rat, which he sleeps alongside. And, of course, he’s always on the lookout for a welcoming lap. “He’s like the joy of my life now because he’s so affectionate, and I love him.”

Little Roy is a constant reminder too—of “the summer of the cats,” of the lifelong friends Ware made while volunteering. “On the top of his neck, he has a 4-inch scar where there’s no hair. And every time I look at him, I wonder how did he get that scar? Was he abused there with the other cats? Or did he get burned or something? And it just makes me think … how lucky he was to come home with me.”
Alex, Gustavo, Anastasia and Natalia

Background: The HSUS helped rescue Alex from an abandoned menagerie in Kansas; the other tigers were seized from a roadside zoo in Mississippi following an undercover HSUS investigation.

The latest victim, like the others, never saw the young tiger.

The animal was lying in wait, hiding nearly submerged in a small body of water. Just as the victim walked past—WHOOOSH!—the tiger leapt up, splashing water out through his enclosure, harmlessly drenching yet another caregiver at the Cleveland Amory Black Beauty Ranch in Texas.

For Alex, the hide-in-the-water-trough game never gets old. After all, the 4-year-old tiger is, in many ways, like your typical young boy: He’s got a vast reserve of playful energy. He loves to play hide-and-seek with his caregivers. And he’s enamored with trucks and other machines, intently watching as they motor past.

His 11-year-old neighbors, sisters Anastasia and Natalia, are a bit more mature. The latter is the “socialite,” rubbing against her enclosure for visitors, explains Katherine Birk, lead wildlife caregiver at Black Beauty, which is operated by HSUS affiliate The Fund for Animals. Anastasia is a bit more reserved. She prefers rolling in the grass or ransacking a pile of leaves. The two have taken to painting, practically pushing each other out of the way to excitedly rub the non-toxic children’s paint across a canvas with their faces and paws.

Meanwhile, the oldest and largest tiger at Black Beauty is a bit of a hoarder: 12-year-old Gustavo will stash his enrichment items one-by-one in his den. He’s obsessed with his oversized Boomer Ball, and he too enjoys painting. But as Birk notes: “The thing with Gustavo is he usually takes his artwork with him. He doesn’t like to share. So he’ll take it out of the easel and bring it into his house.”

Life is better for the four tigers now, states away from the small barren cages they once called home. But life is about to get oh-so-much sweeter: At press time, Black Beauty Ranch was close to opening a new 5-acre tiger habitat—the first phase for a newly acquired 40 acres that will one day house other victims of the exotic pet trade, such as lions, leopards, mountain lions and bears.

A few months before, Birk took a moment to envision that next chapter—to envision Alex swimming in a real pond or the sisters charging through the woods, jumping and playing. “I don’t think words can express really how excited I am,” she says. “It’s just going to be an unbelievable sight to actually see them be able to run at full speed without having to stop right away.”
Catori and Moonstruck

Background: The HSUS helped spare Catori and 16 other horses from slaughter after a tragic truck crash in May 2010.

The driver fell asleep in central Oklahoma, crashing into the median and overturning a truck carrying 30 horses to a slaughter plant in Mexico.

Seventeen survived—morning commuters jumping out of their cars to corral the horses along Turner Turnpike. HSUS state director Cynthia Armstrong worked quickly to track down the owner, and when she learned he still planned to send the survivors to slaughter, The HSUS, two donors and Blaze's Tribute Equine Rescue stepped in to secure their release and transport to safety.

That's how the horses ended up as fosters on the Walling family farm in Oklahoma. As it turns out, one of them—a dark bay Arabian-quarter horse cross named Catori—was actually pregnant. Ten months later, under a bright supermoon, she gave birth in her stall; the foal was named Moonstruck.

Now, if the story just ended there, with Desiree Walling out snapping photos of the newborn, it would surely be enough of a miracle. But that was all before the two tornadoes.

Walling and her sons barely made it home before the first, rushing into the cellar. “The thing I remember the most was the pressure,” she says. “Our ears kept popping.” When the noise passed, the family couldn’t get out; debris blocked the door. Still, Brian Walling could crack it enough to survey the farm. Because the kids were with them, he just mouthed the words to his wife: “Our house is gone.”

Just three of the 21 horses on the property survived. One was a blind pony named Fiona; the other two, standing out in the pasture, were Catori and Moonstruck. Mom had pinned her 2-month-old son up against a stack of large metal sheets. Somehow, they had emerged with just cuts and scratches. “They were in shock, especially her,” Walling says. “She was just in this trance.”

The second tornado struck last May, hitting the farm of a family friend, leaving a day-old foal named Twister without a mom.

The Wallings took Twister in while their friends began to rebuild, but the foal didn’t want anything to do with the two surrogate mothers they tried to set her up with. So Desiree began to think about who else she could pair with the newborn—to teach her about being a horse, about pecking order, about manners.

She soon thought of Moonstruck.

“He has got the greatest demeanor,” she says. “He’s just very friendly. Good temperament. He can tolerate anything. … I’ve got five boys, so you can imagine how rowdy things can be around here. And they go up there, and run and jump, and fly kites around him, and he just stands there like, whatever.”

Little Twister took right away to Moonstruck, who looked back at his owners like “Really?” But within days, they were inseparable. She’d lie down to rest, and he’d wait patiently nearby, picking at the grass. Once she got back up, they’d move on together.

“I look at [Catori and Moonstruck] and I think, ‘Wow, amazing,’ ” Walling says. “And I don’t know why everything’s happened to them that has. But I do know that they have a reason to be here.” She mentions Twister and the fact Catori, partially blinded in the truck crash, has formed a unique bond with her 14-year-old son.

“A lot of people think these horses, especially ones who are heading to slaughter … weren’t any good or weren’t worth anything. But clearly they’ve proven that’s not the case.”
Bulletproof Sam

Background: In February 2012, following a yearlong investigation, The HSUS helped rescue Sam and 16 others from a dogfighting operation in Jacksonville, Florida. His prior owner, allegedly a significant player in organized dogfighting, is awaiting trial.

On March 13, April Simpson logged onto Facebook and loaded up the page she runs for her rescued pit bull. She had some good news to post.

“Dear Friends,” read the message. “Today my Facebook page passed 100,000 fans! Just over two years ago I lived in a tiny cage in a dirty yard and I was forced to fight other dogs. And now I’m surrounded by Love & Friendship! Mom says that I have a message to share with the World ... well thanks for listening! I love you all, Sam.”

More than 9,000 people “liked” the post. Another 457 shared it on their own Facebook pages. “You are a hero,” wrote one person. “Lots of love from Hong Kong,” wrote another. And three weeks later, Bulletproof Sam passed 200,000 fans.

“You are an inspiration Sammy,” read a new message, marking that next milestone. “So glad you are living the loving life now!”

That he is. That he most certainly is.

After spending a year recovering at Hello Bully rescue in Pittsburgh, Sam was adopted last April by Simpson, a volunteer there. Smitten from the start, she had taken him home over Easter weekend, and well, that was that. “When I drove him back that Monday,” she says, “I was just like, ‘I can’t not have this dog with me.’ ”

He’s now something of a “happy grumpy old man,” she says with a laugh, noting he “spends his days in a sweater lounging around.” He loves to sleep, loves to snuggle with Simpson and her two kids. “When people come over he literally is kind of a ham. I mean, he is charming as heck.”

There have been some health scares—a noncancerous tumor removed, several emergency blood transfusions. But recent tests came back strong, and as Simpson says, “he has an amazing spirit.”

And there’s that face. That face continues to grab people’s hearts. Sam is missing his upper lip and portions of his bottom one, and there’s just no way, in his presence, to overlook the very real cost of dogfighting. But at the same time, Simpson notes, because of that missing lip, when he opens his mouth to breathe it looks like he’s smiling.

Constantly, he has her reaching for a camera.

“His story is literally written all over his face,” says Daisy Balawejer, Hello Bully president and coordinator of The HSUS’s Dogfighting Rescue Coalition. “You can just see what he suffered through. But I think that beyond that, you see a dog who doesn’t hold onto the past. He very much lives in the moment.

“You see that level of scarring and damage on a dog’s face, and then your eyes kind of follow the line down the body, and you see his butt wiggling because his tail is wiggling so hard. ... I think that is Sam. Yes, he’s scarred, but only on the outside.”
Koa

Background: In September 2011, The HSUS flew 119 feral donkeys from Hawaii’s Big Island to California—part of an effort to humanely manage populations of the animals, who had descended from the castoffs of early coffee plantations and other farms.

The showgirls descended on Joan Dunkle and Fred Clark’s ranch last spring, dressed in blue and black cowgirl-themed outfits. They wore black boots and white cowboy hats, with black feathers shooting out of the top.

The women had driven over from nearby Mesquite, Nevada, to snap a few promotional photos with the new kid in town—some lucky guy off a plane from Hawaii. And by all accounts, he loved it.

“He was a ham,” Dunkle says. “He thought he was hot.”

Indeed, nearly three years since his plane ride across the Pacific, it’s safe to say Koa is enjoying his new home and newfound celebrity.

Dunkle and Clark, who helped unload and transport the donkeys after they landed in California, run a chapter of Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue in the Arizona desert. That’s where Koa now spends his days rolling in the sandy dirt, napping in the shade and using a traffic cone to play tug-of-war with his friend Robbie.

Koa and Mokie, another donkey flown over from Hawaii, have established themselves as the watchdogs for their small herd of eight, and so they like to stand along the perimeter of the group, always watching. “If they see a dust cloud or a car way off,” Clark says, “they’ll follow it and see what’s going on.”

In a pay-it-forward kind of twist, the two have also emerged as ambassadors and major draws for the ranch. They’re always the first to the gate when guests arrive—and not just because, as Joan says with a laugh, “they know they’re going to get cookies.”

One challenge in the world of donkey rescue, Clark notes, is persuading potential adopters that the animals aren’t stubborn, that they aren’t mean. And in that way, it helps to have Koa standing there when newcomers walk out back. In that way, perhaps this second-chance donkey with the Hawaiian name for “brave” will spark similar opportunities for others. “He’s always right there at the gate to greet them. And if there’s a camera, he makes sure he’s right in front of it. He’s a very sociable guy. Loves people. Loves to be petted and brushed.

“He gets people’s attention … and then they realize how sweet and loving an animal he is.”

ON THE iPAD: Three years after an undercover HSUS investigation cast a spotlight on the cruel practice of bear baying in South Carolina, six black bears traveled more than 1,000 miles to begin their new lives in quiet peace.