



Sasha (now known as Zoey) smiles with her new family, Devin Kennedy (left) and Jackie Ide.

NAME: Sasha (now known as Zoey)

CASE HISTORY: One of more than 60 dogs rescued from a Mississippi hoarding case in August

THE GAME STARTS when Devin Kennedy returns home from work. He opens the front door and stares mischievously at Zoey, who's right there wagging her tail. She stares back. Her ears are alert. Her haunches are taut. She knows what's coming.

Kennedy suddenly rips through the living room and into the kitchen with Zoey on his heels, her ears flapping. He sprints into the family room, where she bounds gleefully from one piece of furniture to the next. The game ends with her wriggling on her back amidst a flurry of scruffles, scratches and "good girls."

"If we were in a full-length sprint, she'd probably win," he says.

Not bad for a three-legged dog.

The scene is profoundly different from the day HSUS rescuers arrived on a hoarder's property in Mississippi. The year-old pup had been living in a fenced-in area with about 20 other dogs. Her right front leg hung at an odd angle as she hobbled toward rescue team members, tentatively wagging her tail, then backing off.

Rescuers named her Sasha and brought her and the other dogs to a temporary shelter, where

she blossomed. A video just one day after the rescue shows her in Ashley Mauceri's lap. "She wasn't wagging her tail or showing much affection," remembers Mauceri, manager of animal cruelty response for The HSUS. "Then she looked up and gave me the smallest little kiss. It melted my heart."

Two weeks later, the dogs were transported to HSUS offices in Gaithersburg, Maryland. Sasha was a superstar coming off the truck, Mauceri says. "The entire HSUS headquarters was outside chanting for her to come off the rig. And she came off bold and excited, like, 'I'm here!'"

While most of the dogs went to HSUS placement partners, Sasha was taken to Muddy Branch Veterinary Clinic, where X-rays showed a shattered bone near her elbow and an old fracture in her paw. A specialist was brought in to remove her leg because of the shattered and infected bone—and Sasha remained positive through it all. "After it was gone ... there was just no stopping her," says clinic manager Jennifer Bila.

Kennedy and his girlfriend, Jackie Ide, adopted the dog after hearing her story from Mauceri, an old high school friend. They renamed her and now, rather than fighting for her place in the pack, Zoey goes for walks and chases leaves and squirrels. "She absolutely loves her stuffed alligator, which is as long as she is," says Ide. She also loves sleeping with her legs in the air and sitting on people's laps. "She'll sit on you for however long you'll let her."



LOCATION: Rutherford County, North Carolina

ANIMALS RESCUED: 6 Persian cats and 52 small-breed dogs

WHEN TARA LOLLER FOUND the kitten, she was confined in a tiny room with five other Persian cats. There was no litter box, and the walls and floors were covered with waste. The stench of ammonia made it difficult to breathe.

The kitten's soiled fur and swollen eyes made her look ancient. "But she was very curious," says Loller, an HSUS rescuer, "and would come up to me and then go nurse on her mom."

Her spunkiness shone when Loller picked her up to have her photo taken for evidence. She immediately wriggled to be let down. Loller named the kitten SassafraS—Sassy for short.

The rescue resulted from a cautious customer who had ordered a puppy through what seemed a reputable website. After being told she couldn't pick up the puppy directly from the breeder, she canceled her order. When she was finally allowed to visit, she was so disturbed by the conditions that she contacted the Rutherford County Humane Society.

The sheriff's office was brought into the loop, and it contacted The HSUS for help.

Rescuers found soaked dogs outside in the rain and dozens more inside in stacked wire cages. In the bathroom, where a space heater pushed the temperature above 100 degrees, one dog and her newborn puppies were kept in a small plastic crate with no water.

Local placement partners took in the animals, providing medical care and readying them for adoption. Brother Wolf Animal Rescue stepped up to take Sassy, as well as four other cats and several dogs. Sheryl Mann, then executive coordinator for Brother Wolf, and her daughter (pictured below) fostered the kitten for several weeks as her adventurous spirit grew.

Brother Wolf held a "Name This Kitten" contest on Facebook (winning name: Athena), and dozens of families have applied to adopt her. She remains in foster care as her health improves.



When rescuers found her, the courageous kitten was exploring a dilapidated plastic tub on top of a table.

ANIMAL RESCUE UPDATES

HSUS STAFF helped rescue more than 170 animals from two suspected puppy mills in Alcorn County, Mississippi, in late October. On one property, rescuers found 123 dogs and puppies in raised wire cages with no access to clean water or food; others lived in a dark, filthy shed. Many were underweight and suffering from untreated medical conditions. Two dogs were found dead. On the second property, rescuers discovered dogs, cats, horses, ducks, chickens, roosters, rabbits, goats, a donkey and a miniature pig living without adequate shelter, clean water or proper food. Various Mississippi rescue organizations are caring for the animals, and four people face charges.

In mid-October, authorities executed a search warrant on a suspected dogfighting operation in Sevier County, Tennessee. The culmination of a four-month investigation, "Operation Off the Chain" freed 50 dogs, most of whom were chained to old car axles driven into the ground. Blue plastic barrels with large rocks inside provided their only cover. But the dogs welcomed the rescue team. One graying dog leaned into her rescuer, tail wagging; another lifted his chin to lick his rescuer's face. Three people have been charged in the case, and the dogs are being cared for at an HSUS-run temporary shelter.



ON THE IPAD:
See more photos
and get an update
on Sassy.