



Gandalf's "super sweet disposition" won the hearts of rescuers, says rescue team member Ashley Mauceri. He has since gained weight and continues to recover.

LOCATION: Dunlap, Tennessee

ANIMALS ASSISTED: 51 dogs, 10 cats, one goat and one pigeon

FOR RESCUERS ON THE SCENE THAT FRIDAY in late December, the images are not easily forgotten.

As they approached Geoffrey Peterson's vacant home, surrounded by towering desiccated weeds, four large shapes suddenly lurched at the windows. "The windows were so covered with feces and grime that I couldn't see the dogs," remembers HSUS state director Leighann Lassiter. "I could just hear them barking and bouncing off the glass."

Inside, a maze of narrow paths wound through stacks of books, small appliances and piles of garbage and animal waste. Stuffed in among the junk were cages with dogs so skinny you could count their bones. A goat watched rescuers through a tractor



tire-sized hole she had apparently chewed in the drywall. As lead veterinarian John Mullins watched, the goat nibbled pages from a book. "There was nothing for her to eat ... other than drywall and books," says Mullins.

Bags and cans of pet food were everywhere, but each dog's bowl sat empty. One gaunt shepherd mix hung his head toward the place where he hoped food might come. Another dog had pried his crate's bars apart with his head and nearly gotten stuck.

A tipster had contacted The HSUS about emaciated dogs being taken to vet clinics around the Chattanooga area. The HSUS brought the case to the attention of the Sequatchie County Sheriff's Office, which began an investigation and obtained a search warrant.

Rescuers found more dogs behind closed doors, in bedrooms, bathrooms, closets and even outbuildings. They discovered cats, too, like one pair huddled together in the only clean corner of their crate. In one bathroom was a pigeon. "He was so skinny," Lassiter says. "It was the first time I'd seen a bird just sit there and shake. It was pitiful."

But there was worse: five dead dogs in the freezer. The image, says detective Paul Howard, will stay with him. “One puppy was wrapped up in a towel and had two bows tied around it like a Christmas present.”

One by one, the animals were documented for evidence and gently scooped up by HSUS rescuers, volunteers and law enforcement officers. The goat was led from Peterson’s abandoned house on a leash. “She was just so happy to be outside,” Lassiter remembers. Animals in noncritical condition went to Humane Educational Society and McKamey Animal Center, while those who needed extra medical attention went to Animal Care Center of Ooltewah, where Mullins works.

All, Mullins says, are on the road to recovery. The pigeon and dogs are gaining weight. They are no longer anemic. And the dogs’ urine burns from living in their own waste have healed. The despondent shepherd mix, now named Gandalf, gained nine pounds in the first two weeks. On Christmas Day, volunteers bathed and visited the dogs. One woman even made felt-covered toys for them.

At Humane Educational Society, the cats have come a long way since that first skittish day. A consistent routine—including gentle touch and talking to them throughout the day—is helping them become more social, with a few now gladly accepting cuddles.

Over the next weeks, more dogs were rescued from other properties connected to Peterson, who has been charged with four counts of aggravated animal cruelty, one count of animal cruelty and felony possession of morphine. Though he’s out on \$10,000 bond, he cannot own or in any way deal with animals. He’s on a lot of people’s radar now, Howard says. “They will be watching him. We will be watching him.”



Until rescuers arrived, these two cats had no escape from their waste-filled crate.



Rich Crino (right)

ANIMAL RESCUE TEAM VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

// BY TANYA MULFORD

WHEN RICH CRINO was volunteering with the HSUS Animal Rescue Team in Sevierville, Tennessee, helping save dogs owned by a suspected dogfighter, the team found 50 abused or neglected dogs, most chained to posts outside. “It was really a good feeling to liberate them from the chains,” Crino says. “All of them just had an ‘Ahhh!’ moment ... when the collars came off, when the weight came off their necks.”

He still treasures that moment.

And then there’s the experience of helping rescued animals heal from their physical and emotional wounds. Dogfighting victims are especially rewarding, Crino says. “These are supposed to be these big, bad fighting dogs,” he says, “and all they want is love and affection—somebody to pay a little attention to them.”

Jennifer Eckhaus, manager of the rescue team’s volunteer program, says volunteers are essential in caring for and rehabilitating animals. Victims of dogfighting require special handling and extensive enrichment, which means more volunteers than normal, usually one volunteer for every five dogs. The team’s shelter managers love Crino, she says, because he’ll do anything that’s needed—and do it well.

It seems right that Crino is a volunteer rescuer; his first experience helping animals was as a shelter volunteer about 12 years ago. Next he worked in animal control and then at shelters, eventually running them, for 10 years. Within a month of retiring, Crino got the call for his first rescue. Now he helps animals for free and earns his living as an artisanal woodworker in Kingsport, Tennessee. His wooden sculptures of dogs and wildlife have been auctioned off to benefit rescue groups such as Hello Bully, an HSUS partner in the Dogfighting Rescue Coalition. But it’s the rescue work that gives him joy, Crino says. “I’m having a ball.”

IN THIS ONGOING SERIES, we feature Animal Rescue Team volunteers whose efforts make our work possible.



Several chickens rescued from cockfighting have found a good home at HSUS staffer Janette Reeve's farm.

LOCATION: Daisytown, Pennsylvania

CASE HISTORY: Dozens of roosters and hens, rescued from the property of a cockfighter, find homes after a nearly 2-year-long court case.

IT WASN'T THE LIVING CONDITIONS that were so horrible. The roosters had food, water and adequate shelter. And Thomas MacFann's lush green property appeared rather idyllic when rescuers arrived that day back in August 2012.

But the birds' lives were anything but peaceful: MacFann was forcing the roosters to fight and breeding them for fighting. Federal authorities called The HSUS for help.

As rescuers wound through the maze of roosters tethered to posts about 30 feet apart, they found a scene similar to so many other animal fighting operations. Small A-frame structures and plastic barrels with cutout openings served as shelter. In

the barn, there were scales for weighing roosters before a fight.

Inside MacFann's home, rescuers found a virtual cockfighting shrine with trophies, ribbons, wall art and stacks of gamecock magazines. There were performance-enhancing drugs, notebooks with fight schedules and a travel kit with medications, knives and sharp gaffs for tying onto roosters' legs during fights. "You name it, if it was related to cockfighting, he had it there," says Chris Schindler, HSUS manager of animal fighting response. "He had clearly been in cockfighting for many years."

MacFann refused to give up custody of the 92 roosters and hens removed from his property, so the birds were moved to a temporary shelter near HSUS headquarters in Maryland. For eight months, HSUS staff and volunteers cared for them while the case against MacFann dragged on.

Kathleen Summers with the HSUS Stop Puppy Mills Campaign went Fridays after work, toting treats such as raw pumpkin, blueberries and popcorn. "They'd go

bananas over pumpkin and would literally jump up and down when they knew it was coming," she remembers. After treat time, Summers would play music on the radio, inspiring their chirps.

One gentle old rooster named Mr. Bumbles stole Janette Reeve's heart. "We gave him special food and a little bigger cage, just because he was so old and had a lot of medical issues," says Reeve, HSUS deputy manager of animal fighting response. But even with expert vet care, Mr. Bumbles died.

"All of the abuse and drugs these poor birds are given makes it hard on them," says Reeve, noting that one drug given to roosters in the ring keeps them on their feet despite significant blood loss. "Basically, it keeps the birds fighting even though they're dying."

With the court case still unresolved in May 2013, the surviving birds were moved to a sanctuary in West Virginia, where HSUS staff built individual rooster houses and a communal hen building.

In June 2014—just as his case was about to go to trial—MacFann pleaded no contest and was convicted, and the court was able to release the birds. While most remain at the sanctuary, several have been adopted.

Reeve adopted eight hens and an old rooster who earned the name John Wayne because of his strut. The chickens live on her farm, where they have comfy nesting boxes in their shed and nearly an acre of fenced land to explore. "Whenever I call them, they all come running," Reeve says. "They are such sweet animals once you get to know them."

