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PHOTO CUTLINE –



A horrific case of animal cruelty was recently handled by the Humane Society of Calloway County and resulted in what is possibly the most incredible dog adoption in the society's history. The adoption of "Ribbon" was filmed in Murray by the National Geographic Channel for an upcoming series. Due to the graphic and disturbing nature of Ribbon's injuries, his photos can only be viewed on the humane society's website, www.ForThePets.org. Pictured left to right – National Geographic cameraman Peter Hutchens, Sara Fineman, humane society dog adoption volunteer Suzy Crook, Rescue Ink volunteer Joe Panz, humane society Executive Director Kathy Hodge, Rescue Ink volunteer "G", senior pilot William McCleary, and A.R.F. (Animal Rescue Flights) pilot Ted Dupuis.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC FILMS HORRIFIC CASE OF ANIMAL CRUELTY AND RESULTING DOG ADOPTION IN MURRAY

Warning – Some readers may find the description of injuries contained in this article disturbing.

MURRAY, KY – Probably everyone in Calloway County, Kentucky can remember what was happening on Thursday, January 31st, during the height of the ice storm. Residents of Murray

had no power, no water, and no telephone. That alone was enough to remember and talk about for years to come, but for Sara Fineman and her husband Terry Strieter, the day had a horrible exclamation point added to it.

Terry went to the garage to feed their two dogs and found a strange dog curled up and sleeping on one of the dogs' bed. He could see that there was something very wrong with the dog so he called for Sara to join him. They saw that the dog had severe injuries to its ears, head, face, chest, and front legs. The dog appeared to be sleeping. The dog's ears were mostly gone with pieces and ribbons of flesh hanging from where the ears should have been. Raw, open wounds were clearly visible with greenish puss running out of the ear canals. The top of the dog's snout, running up all the way between the dog's eyes, was encrusted with dried, decaying, flesh which resembled thick, infected scabs.

They were shocked by what they had found and immediately called the Humane Society of Calloway County on a working cell phone. As luck would have it, the Murray Electric System had gotten power restored to the Weaks Community Center, the same building where the humane society's office is located, so Sara left a message on the society's answering machine requesting assistance with the dog.

At about the same time as she was making the telephone call, the dog woke up and got off the bed and cautiously took a few steps. Sara remembered that the dog looked under weight and somewhat lethargic. Its face was so swollen that its eyes were only slits, causing Sara to wonder if the dog was able to see. Not knowing if the dog was friendly, Sara offered it a bowl of dog food and the dog immediately began eating it. She gave the dog a bowl of water and it immediately began drinking. It was obvious that the dog was undernourished.

A short time later humane society volunteer Krystal Campbell, a 3rd year Animal Health and Technology student at Murray State University, stopped by the society's office to check phone messages. This was something that she was doing on a regular basis during the ice storm because she was personally delivering humane society dog and cat food to persons in need so that no animal would go hungry. Upon hearing the message she immediately responded to see what needed to be done.

After seeing the dog, Krystal knew that it needed immediate veterinary care but didn't know if the dog would be friendly. She cautiously moved the food bowl away from the dog and it showed no aggression. Sara noticed that it was not aggressive towards her two dogs either. Krystal spread out a bed sheet in the back seat of her car and carefully placed a leash around the dog's neck. To her relief the dog climbed into the car. Krystal said that when the dog shook its head, puss flew all over the car. She and Sara took the dog to Westside Veterinary Services for treatment. Westside Veterinary Services works closely with the humane society and participates in its Good Samaritan program which provides reduced cost veterinary care to injured animals that are in immediate need and whose owners are unknown.

Veterinarian Noel Thomas was first to treat the dog. It was an unneutered, male, pit bull, brown in color, with a white patch of hair on its chest. When the dog arrived at the vet's office, Dr. Thomas remembered it having a pleasant disposition and it seemed very friendly. It had a noticeable limp resulting from injuries to its swollen, left front leg. He determined that many of the wounds could have been as old as five weeks and he found dead, decaying pieces of flesh where its ears once were. The dog had dozens of abscesses on its head, face, chest, and front legs. Dr. Thomas said, "He really looked terrible and was in pain."

Over the next two weeks the dog received a lot of care from the staff at Westside. It was given medication for pain and antibiotics to clear up the infection. Shortly after the antibiotics began working, the swelling reduced around its eyes letting its care takers see that the dog had very loving eyes. The dead skin that used to be the dog's ears was removed. Hydrotherapy was given to loosen the scabs so that the infection underneath could be treated. The dog responded very quickly to the treatments and medication. Never once did it show any aggression while its wounds were being treated and didn't show aggression to any of the other dogs being boarded at the veterinary office.

During its two week stay at the vet's office, the dog was neutered and named "Ribbon," for the ribbons of skin that previously hung down from what was left of his ears. Employees at the vet's office said that Ribbon's favorite pastime was to climb up on someone's lap and be petted. "I sensed that Ribbon knew that he was in good hands now from the way he would look at me with his big loving eyes," said Krystal.

"It was quite obvious that the dog had been used as a fighting dog of some sort," said Veterinarian Damon Eastwood. He went on to say that the injuries and puncture wounds were consistent with 'dog fighting' wounds. It's possible that the dog was used as a bait dog for other more aggressive dogs. Since it never once showed aggression towards any other dog when it was in our care, it's possible that it was used to let more aggressive fighting dogs "practice" on it, he added. "Since there were no visible wounds on the rear of the dog, it's logical to believe that the dog was paired off in a one-on-one or face-to-face fight with another dog rather than possibly being attacked by coyotes or a pack of dogs. The fact that many of the wounds were old

and already healed supports the theory that the dog was fought on more than one occasion,” said Eastwood.

Dr. Eastwood believes that Ribbon may experience some hearing loss due to scar tissue growing around the ear canal, and may develop periodic ear infections. He said that the dog will most likely have greater difficulty determining what direction sounds are coming from because of the loss of its ears. Other than that the dog seemed to be healthy.

Now if you’re thinking that Ribbon was a very lucky dog to have fallen asleep at an animal lover’s house, and have people from the humane society provide care for a dog that they would have great difficulty finding a home for, then wait until you read about what happened next.

When it became clear that Ribbon was going to recover, Kathy Hodge, Executive Director of the Humane Society of Calloway County, began trying to find a rescue group that would accept him. “Pit bulls are a tough breed to find homes for due to their numbers and reputation,” said Hodge. She went on to say that there are so many pit bulls that most pit bull rescue groups stay full. With all the negative press that this breed receives, it makes finding a home for them very difficult. Taking a pit bull to an animal shelter is usually a certain death sentence for them, and that’s really unfair because they can be such a good family dog, she added.

She wasn’t having any luck finding an area rescue group or home for Ribbon until one day when her phone rang. The person on the other end of the line was calling from Long Beach, New York. The caller said that she read an email about the dog and thought that her organization might be able to help out. Kathy wondered how someone in New York State could have known about the dog because she had only sent the email to area rescues that she knew were reputable.

The caller said that she was with a group called Rescue Ink and that their specialty was to rescue animals that were victims of animal abuse. The organization also had an animal abuse investigations unit. Learn more about Rescue Ink at www.RescueInk.org.

Kathy was elated to know that the dog would possibly have a place to go but she knew that a good deal of research would have to be done before the Humane Society of Calloway County would adopt a dog in its care to just anyone. Over the course of a few days she traded emails back and forth with Rescue Ink about possible ways of transporting the dog if the adoption was approved. “Many of our dogs are transported to other parts of the country by professional animal transporters,” Hodge said. Some dogs and cats get relayed by car from one volunteer to another until it gets to where it’s going, she added.

Rescue Ink suggested that Ribbon be flown to their facility and that they would take care of the arrangements for his flight. Kathy was very surprised to hear that someone would come from New York to Murray, Kentucky to pick up a dog. But there was more to the story.

When Rescue Ink offered to send an airplane to pick up Ribbon, they also said that a film crew from the National Geographic Network would be accompanying the rescue volunteers. Kathy said, “I almost fell out of my chair when I heard that! Not only was Ribbon being rescued from a life of dog fighting, his adoption was going to be filmed by the National Geographic Network.”

If being filmed by National Geographic wasn’t enough, it had already been decided that Ribbon was going to become the official mascot of Rescue Ink. Their staff had talked it over and

decided that Ribbon would make a perfect mascot for their rescue organization. The old saying, 'you lucky dog' fit Ribbon to a tee.

On Sunday, February 15th, the airplane arrived at Kyle Oakley Field, in Calloway County, Kentucky to take Ribbon to his new home. On board were two volunteers from Rescue Ink - Joe Panz and "G", (aliases as they are two of the cruelty investigators for Rescue Ink), Peter Hutchens - cameraman for the National Geographic Network, and Ted Dupuis who owned the airplane and is a volunteer pilot for A.R.F – Animal Rescue Flights, a non-profit organization that transports animals to their new homes.

Sara and humane society volunteers met the group from New York at the airport and drove them to the vet's office to meet Ribbon. The introduction of Ribbon to Joe Panz and "G" went as expected; Lots of tail wagging, face licking, and joy for all who were in the room. It was obvious that Ribbon loved people.

The match couldn't have been better for anyone watching the adoption. Two big, tattooed, tough looking guys with thick New York accents (and biceps), here to adopt a weathered and scarred Pitt Bull named Ribbon. But their appearances were truly deceptive. Two nicer guys you couldn't meet. One is an industrial firefighter with a landscaping company on the side, and the other a mortgage broker. Both are animal lovers who have a hatred for anyone who would abuse an animal. Learn more about the other investigators at Rescue Ink's website.

When asked exactly what Rescue Ink does, Joe Panz said, "We do what most other animal rescue organizations do except that we have an animal abuse investigation unit. One of our volunteers is a retired police detective who reviews abuse cases when they come in. If it's something that

the animal control people cannot do anything with and it's beyond what law enforcement can do, then we get involved." He then grinned real big and nothing more was said. Everyone in the room seemed to know what he meant.

He explained further, "We go to the places that other rescue groups and agencies are afraid to go to. That's the way that Rescue Ink operates. We take an 'in your face' approach to animal rescue." He added that a half-dozen menacing-looking bikers can be a very powerful persuasion tool. Most of the group, members and volunteers alike, are big, tattooed bikers, hence the "Ink" in the organization's name. Rescue Ink volunteers frequently do programs in schools and at public events. They teach children and others the proper and humane way to treat animals and raise awareness about animal cruelty, overpopulation, and animal adoption.

The pilot, Ted Dupuis, who flew the airplane from Pennsylvania to Murray, is a mechanical engineer who works for a company that makes airplane engines. He said that he had a love of animals all of his life and after becoming a pilot, purchased an airplane that was roomy enough to do animal rescue flights. A.R.F. is a non-profit organization of approximately 300 volunteer pilots who donate their time and airplanes to transport animals from one airport to another to facilitate adoptions. He said that A.R.F. tries to limit the flights to a 200 mile radius for each leg of the flight. Because of the unusual circumstances of this flight, he decided that he would do a 600 mile leg with 1200 miles round trip. Learn more about A.R.F. at www.AnimalRescueFlights.org.

Pamela Rogers, Kentucky State Director for the Humane Society of the United States said that a \$2500.00 reward is offered for information on animal cruelty and a \$5000.00 reward for dog fighting if it leads to an arrest and conviction. Anyone having information regarding Ribbon or

any other animal cruelty case should contact their local police agency. In Calloway County contact the Calloway County Sheriff's Department at 270-753-3151. The phone number for the Kentucky Chapter of the Humane Society of the United States is 502-893-9796.

The story of Ribbon is a testament to those who dedicate themselves to the protection, care, and love of animals. Without the help of animal lovers and the humane society's Good Samaritan program, Ribbon's story might have had a very different outcome. The Humane Society of Calloway County and its Good Samaritan program are funded totally by donations, fund raisers, and membership dues. Any donation to the humane society, monetary or otherwise, is tax-deductable and a family membership costs as little as 48 cents per week. Donations can be made from the homepage of the humane society's website.

The Humane Society of Calloway County is a United Way agency and can be contacted at 270-759-1884 or by email at HumaneSociety@murray-ky.net. Correspondence can be sent to: Humane Society of Calloway County, 607 Poplar St. Suite A-1, P.O. Box 764, Murray, KY, 42071. To view photographs of Ribbon and his adoption, visit the humane society's website, www.ForThePets.org, and click on the PHOTO GALLERY tab from the homepage. Once inside the photo gallery, click on the first folder titled, RIBBON. WARNING – Some viewers may find the photographs disturbing due to the graphic nature of Ribbon's injuries.

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